

The death of a baby or infant is a devastating and life-changing experience. It can bring intense grief, shock and trauma, affecting emotional, physical, social, cultural, spiritual and mental wellbeing. Some days may feel numb, heavy, confusing or impossible.

Baby and infant loss can happen in different ways and at different times. This may include neonatal death, when a baby dies within the first 28 days after birth; infant death, when a baby dies later in the first year of life; Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI), when a baby dies suddenly and unexpectedly and the cause is not immediately clear; or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), when a baby's death remains unexplained after thorough investigation.

Some babies die soon after birth, while others may spend time in hospital, in care, or at home before their death. Some parents receive answers about why their baby died, while others may never have a clear explanation. Not knowing can feel especially painful and may bring additional distress, confusion or self-blame. However and whenever your baby died, your baby matters, your loss matters, and you deserve care, compassion and support.

Understanding Baby and Infant Loss

Losing a baby is deeply distressing for parents, siblings, families and support networks. Grief may include sadness for your baby, as well as for the moments, milestones and future you expected to share together.

Some parents receive answers about why their baby died, while others may never have a clear explanation. Not knowing can feel especially painful. If investigations or medical reviews are offered, your healthcare team can explain what they may involve and what information they may be able to provide.

Your baby's death was not your fault. Self-blame can be common after grief and trauma, even when nothing could have prevented the loss. If these thoughts feel distressing or repetitive, a trusted health professional can help.

Emotional and Mental Health Impact

Grief after baby or infant loss is not linear. It can come in waves, change over time, and re-emerge around anniversaries, birthdays, due dates, medical appointments, family events or other reminders. There is no right or wrong way to feel. You may experience:

- Shock, disbelief, numbness or feeling detached from what has happened
- Deep sadness, longing, emptiness or yearning for your baby
- Anger, guilt, self-blame, confusion or a sense of unfairness
- Anxiety, panic, intrusive thoughts or fear that something bad will happen again
- Sleep or appetite changes, exhaustion, difficulty concentrating, headaches, body aches, chest tightness or stomach discomfort
- Feeling isolated, especially if others do not know what to say or avoid talking about your baby
- Mixed emotions, including moments of calm, distraction or relief alongside grief

If symptoms feel unmanageable, intensify, or affect your ability to function or feel safe, it is important to seek support. This is a way of caring for yourself during an extremely painful time.

Relationships

Grief can affect relationships and support networks in different ways. Parents and partners may grieve differently, and one person may want to talk while another needs quiet, distraction or practical tasks. These differences can feel hurtful, but they do not mean one person loved the baby more or less, or is coping better.

If you have other children, they may need age-appropriate explanations and reassurance. They may ask repeated questions, move in and out of grief quickly, or show changes in behaviour, sleep or emotions. A child psychologist or specialised support service can help you speak with them gently and honestly.

Support From Others

After a loss, support may be needed in both emotional and practical ways, including during funeral or memorial planning and the transition home without your baby. Letting trusted people know what you need, and what you do not, can reduce pressure and help you feel less alone.

- Lean on your trusted family, friends, community, cultural or spiritual supports, and health professionals

- Ask a trusted person to update family and friends so you do not need to repeat painful details.
- Let others know what feels supportive, such as sitting quietly with you or offering practical help
- Let people know whether it feels helpful for them to say your baby's name or ask about your baby
- Accept practical help with meals, transport, groceries, childcare, paperwork, funeral tasks or household jobs
- Set boundaries around visits, photos, questions, social media or baby and children related events
- Prepare simple phrases, such as "I am not ready to talk about this today" or "Please keep checking in, even if I do not reply"

Decisions After A Loss

In the early days after your baby's death, there may be practical decisions to make. These can feel overwhelming, especially while you are grieving, in shock or recovering physically. You do not have to manage everything at once, and you do not have to do it alone.

Your healthcare team, social worker, funeral director or a trusted support person can help guide you through what needs to happen next. This may include:

- Understanding birth and/or death registration processes
- Making funeral, cremation, burial or memorial arrangements, when you feel ready
- Learning about medical reviews, investigations, autopsy options or coronial processes, if relevant
- Asking about physical recovery, follow-up appointments and what symptoms to look out for
- Seeking support with leave, financial matters, Centrelink, work or study commitments
- Consider choosing one trusted person to help share updates or coordinate practical support

There is no right way to make these decisions. Some parents may want time, privacy and quiet; others may find comfort in planning, rituals or involving family and community. Try to take things one step at a time, and accept support where you can.

Meaningful Ways to Honour Your Baby

Some parents find comfort in memories or rituals, while others may not feel ready or may choose not to. There is no right or wrong way to honour your baby. Only choose what feels meaningful for you and your family.

- Keep special items, such as photos, handprints, footprints, clothing, hospital bands, a blanket, toy or memory box
- Name your baby, write them a letter, or speak their name if that feels right
- Mark significant dates with a candle, flowers, a quiet walk, a family ritual or time for reflection
- Create something in their memory, such as artwork, jewellery, a keepsake, planting a tree, or making a donation in their honour
- Include cultural, spiritual or religious practices that are important to you

Looking After Yourself

After a baby or infant loss, even small decisions can feel overwhelming. Looking after yourself may simply mean meeting basic needs, accepting help and reducing pressure where you can.

- Write down questions you have for your GP, midwife, obstetrician or hospital team before appointments
- Ask what physical symptoms to expect and when to seek medical advice, especially if you have recently given birth
- Eat and drink when you can, even if it's small or simple
- Keep meals, water, medication and comfort items within easy reach
- Rest when possible, and seek medical advice if sleep becomes very difficult
- Limit or pause social media if pregnancy announcements, baby content or messages feel too painful
- Tell work, study or other commitments only what you feel comfortable sharing, and ask about leave or flexibility if needed

- Allow moments of distraction, quiet, anger, numbness, sadness or connection without judging yourself

When To Get Extra Support

There is no timeframe for grief, but extra support may be helpful if grief, trauma or anxiety affects your ability to feel safe or able to get through the day. You may need extra support if you:

- Feel unable to get through daily tasks for an extended period
- Feel persistently numb, hopeless, panicked or overwhelmed
- Have intrusive memories, nightmares or distressing images related to your baby's death or medical care
- Avoid reminders to the point that it affects daily life
- Feel disconnected from yourself, your partner, your family or your community
- Use alcohol, medication or other substances to cope
- Have thoughts of harming yourself or feel that you cannot stay safe

Support Services

You do not have to go through this alone. Talking with someone who understands grief, trauma and perinatal loss can help you feel less alone as you navigate the days ahead.

- **Family & Friends:** Practical help can make a big difference. You may like to ask for meals, groceries, transport, childcare, household tasks, appointment support or gentle check-ins
- **GP, Obstetrician or Midwife:** They can support physical recovery, answer questions, and refer you for extra support
- **Gidget Foundation Australia:** Individual psychological therapy for parents affected by baby and infant loss with a perinatal mental health clinician. Support is available to birthing and non-birthing parents, and can help with grief, trauma, anxiety or overwhelm

- **Additional Support & Resources:** The following organisations may also offer helpful information and support

- **Bear Cottage:** Bear Cottage is the only dedicated children's hospice in NSW and provides supports and events for bereaved families
- **Bears of Hope:** Provides grief support and resources for families who have experienced pregnancy, baby or infant loss
- **Hearfelt Australia & New Zealand:** Provides volunteer photographic services to families experiencing stillbirth, premature birth, serious illness, or infant/child loss
- **PANDA:** Provides national support for mental health and wellbeing during pregnancy and the first year of parenthood, including phone and online support
- **Red Nose Grief and Loss Support:** Provides bereavement support, counselling and information for families following the death of a baby or child

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 000. If urgent mental health support is needed, call **Lifeline** on 13 11 14 or **Beyond Blue** on 1300 22 4636. 🌸



Gidget Foundation Australia

Specialised Perinatal Mental Health Support