

If your baby does not survive

Bereavement

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Bereavement

Watching your baby fight for life can be very traumatic and all parents worry that their baby may not win the battle. The thought of any baby dying is worrying and sad, and it seems particularly cruel when the baby is so young.

Caring from the start

Many parents who have been through this experience have talked about not wanting to get too attached to their baby because they are afraid that their baby will not survive. Research has shown that those who did get involved in their baby's care and lost their baby say that knowing they had done all they could while their baby was alive helped them to come to terms with the loss of their baby later.

For most people, getting involved is not an option – it occurs without trying. Even seeing your baby on the ultrasound scan may have stimulated thoughts of him or her being part of your family.

Being attached to your baby is very normal. In the long term, it is beneficial to know that you did all you could to show your baby your love and care. In thinking of this, you may reduce any feelings of guilt that may crop up in the future.



Withdrawing care

Making the decision to withdraw intensive care from your baby is devastating and no parent is emotionally prepared to deal with this. You may disagree with your partner about it. Talk to the nurses and doctors around you; with their experience and knowledge in these matters, the support they offer can sometimes be worth more than family and friends.

In the weeks that follow, you may doubt the steps that you had to take. At this very difficult time, try to talk to your GP or a bereavement counsellor .

If your baby dies

The neonatal unit will have a room where you can be alone with your baby if your baby dies. Staff may ask you if you would like to wash and dress your baby.

Parents choose to keep reminders of their baby's life in different ways. Most units will take a photo of the baby with the parents' permission, for parents to bring home with them or take away at a later date. Parents may also be given a memento card with a foot or hand print and a lock of hair. Some parents keep the baby's name tag and bonnet in recognition of the fact that, for a very important time, this baby was part of the family and always will be.

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Making arrangements

Each hospital is different, but in most you should be able to stay with your baby for as long as you like and you can take your baby home with you. Many have multi-faith prayer rooms or chaplaincies with people who are there to offer their support if or when you need it.

Staff in the hospital can give you any guidance you need, or put you in touch with members of any local faith community should you wish to involve them in preparing a funeral. The hospital will also help you with the funeral.

If you would like, the staff on the unit should also be able to put you in touch with local counsellors or support organisations that can help you during and after this understandably difficult time.

For information about bereavement support organisations, look under *Bereavement* in Section 10 of this guide.