



When a baby dies in Multiple Pregnancy through miscarriage, stillbirth, Neonatal death or other Reproductive losses

Parents can feel very special when they receive the news of a multiple pregnancy.

You may feel excited about the news and anxious about coping with the arrival of more than one baby. Multiple pregnancies can also carry higher risks of premature birth and other complications.

It can be devastating when one or more of your babies die. The feelings of excitement and joy can be replaced by a mixture of emotions – grief over the death, relief that one or more of your babies has survived, anxiety for the health of the surviving babies. Many parents find themselves torn by this mix of emotions, finding it difficult to cope with being happy and sad at the same time. There may be a sense of unreality about the whole situation.

Your recognition as parents of twins, triplets and quads quickly changes to being told how lucky you are – at least you have one or two baby/s. People sometimes do not seem to be understanding of each of your children's precious individuality.

If one or more of your babies survive, you may experience difficulty bonding with the surviving baby in case he/she/they die also.

In some cases one or more babies may die while still in the womb. Carrying a baby/s who have died can be devastating for some parents. Early induction may not be advisable if the other baby/s lives are put at risk.

Some parents use this time to start the memory creation process. Using video or taking photos, writing poems, keeping a journal, you may be able to help your surviving baby/s to get a sense of his/her sibling. They will want to know about their sibling/s who shared the womb with them. They may have many questions about their sibling/s and their questions and comments may change as they mature. You may find it appropriate to use this time to plan a funeral or a memorial service for your baby/s.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

Some of the decisions you may have to make regarding the welfare of your babies can be gut wrenching and unfair. If your babies are born prematurely you may have to make decisions on the extent of treatment or even to the turning off of life support systems.

Ensure you take time to gather all the information you need to make these decisions. Ask your health care professionals for information. Don't feel you need to hurry to make the decisions – you may be in shock. Gather your support network around you. Talking to other parents who have been through a similar situation may assist you in making these decisions. SANDS parents will be willing to share their experiences and you are encouraged to seek the support of SANDS.

You may need to decide about a funeral for your baby/s. If your surviving babies are very ill you may need to consider waiting until his/her condition is clearer.

Some parents have found that waiting to hold a funeral was beneficial for them. It allowed them time to come to terms with their loss and to be able to focus on the baby who has died. Other parents have expressed regret at the haste at which their baby/s funeral was held.

Placing all of you babies on the birth and death announcement acknowledges all of your children and gives them a place in your family.

Another decision you may have to make is regarding an autopsy. Most parents will be asked if they would like to have autopsy on their baby/s. SANDS has produced a separate brochure on this topic. Your health care professional may be able to give a copy to you or you can obtain one from the SANDS office.

IN THE COMING WEEKS

Congratulations and condolences, birth and death announcements, baptismal gowns and coffins may be part of your lives in the first few weeks. While trying to bond with your surviving baby/s you may be experiencing the need to grieve for your dead baby/s.

The care of a baby, especially a premature or sick baby can be exhausting and some parents find that they need extra help and support, as they are grieving as well. Grieving the loss of a baby is physically and emotionally draining and it can be difficult to grieve and to care for a baby. Some parents feel guilty at their inability to devote enough time and energy to the surviving baby/s.

You may feel that your surviving baby/s lives will be marked by the death of their sibling/s. Some parents worry that life will not be normal for them. You may find your surviving baby/s a daily reminder of the ones who have died. These thoughts and feelings are very normal.

Some parents may find that many people, including friends, family and medical staff prefer to focus on your living baby/s and ignore the fact that your other baby/s have died. We encourage you to talk openly about the baby/s that have died as this will give your support network the opportunity to express their feelings also. They may feel that they will be upsetting you by talking about the baby who has died.

If you have other children it is important to include them so they come to know their sibling/s and understand that they are all a part of the family. Even very young children if given the correct information manage their grief well. Allow children the opportunity to grieve, to be sad and also to be happy with the surviving sibling/s. There are many books available that will help you to explain death to your children.

THE FUTURE

Birthdays and anniversaries can be a bittersweet time for families who have experienced the death of a baby/s in a multiple pregnancy. Some parents will include all of their babies in the celebration as a way of honouring them.

The grief journey you are travelling can be difficult and no one can give you a time line on how long this journey will take. Each person grieves in his or her own way.

Parents comments...

"The hardest this we had to do was to leave one baby to be buried while we took his sister home."

James, Father of Patrick and Megan.

"People thought I was strange when I called our surviving baby a twin – she had a twin sister and was not a singleton."

Jackie, mother of Lily and Jacinta

Suggested Reading...

"Always a part of me." A Collinge, S Daniel, H. Grace Jones

"When the Dream is Shattered." J& M Murray

For further information please visit

www.sandsqld.org.au

or contact the state office
(07) 3254 3422



This information sheet was written in consultation between medical students of the Graduate Medical Course, University of Queensland and bereaved parents of the Stillbirth and Newborn Death Support group.