



**Policy and Guidance for**

# **Baby and Infant Funerals**

**Formulated with the kind assistance of**

**Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity**



**Adapted from the ICCM Charter for the Bereaved  
Updated September 2015**

# Baby and Infant Funerals

## Introduction

This policy and guidance has been designed to assist bereaved parents with making decisions that are right for them and to further assist burial and cremation authorities in providing suitable and acceptable services. It was formulated with the kind assistance of Sands (the stillbirth and neonatal death charity) during the review of the ICCM Charter for the Bereaved with the intention of providing information to parents and burial authorities and ultimately raise the level of services provided.

## 1. INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

### A message to bereaved parents:

We are so sorry that your baby has died. We hope that the information in this policy will explain your options and help you to make decisions about your baby's funeral. Remember, it is your right to arrange a private funeral that meets with your requirements and wishes at the cemetery or crematorium of your choice. Alternatively, most hospitals will make arrangements for shared funeral services (that is, for more than one baby) at their local cemetery and/or crematorium.

The information below will help you make decisions about your preferred choice and the options available, however remember that further help is also available through your Charter member, funeral director and hospital patient affairs/bereavement officer<sup>1</sup>.

Remember, you do not have to make any rushed decisions and should take time to consider the options available.

Sands is a well known national organisation that provides help and support to bereaved parents via a network of local groups. Some local groups have assisted burial and cremation authorities with developing their services to bereaved parents. The Sands website (<http://www.uk-sands.org/>) contains a wealth of advice and information that might help you make decisions on the funeral that meets with your needs. The Sands Helpline on 020 7436 5881 is available if you would like to speak to someone or be put in touch with your nearest Sands group. Sands also has a booklet for parents *Deciding about a funeral for your baby* which can be ordered free from the Sands Shop or read online on the Sands website (from December 2014)

### Your Choices

Many NHS hospitals offer to organise and pay for a funeral for a baby who dies at any stage of pregnancy or shortly after birth. Parents can usually attend the funeral and can also usually make some decisions about the kind of service and how they will participate. Alternatively you can take full control and arrange a private funeral.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the person at the hospital may vary between hospitals.

## **Burial or Cremation**

It is your right to decide whether a burial or cremation service is provided for your baby.

### **(a) HOSPITAL ARRANGEMENTS**

The hospital authorities generally do not charge for making burial or cremation arrangements. They also pay any necessary cemetery or crematorium fees, although many local authorities offer their cemetery and/or crematorium service free of charge in these cases. Some hospitals offer burial as well as cremation whilst others offer cremation only. Where your preference is burial and the hospital only offers cremation, you will need to consider making a private arrangement as discussed below.

Some hospitals will arrange a burial or cremation where a number of babies are remembered at the funeral service. Some parents can draw comfort from knowing that their baby has been laid to rest with others.

If you prefer the hospital to make arrangements it is important that you speak to the appropriate officer at the hospital so that you are aware of the date and time of the funeral. In most places you can attend if you wish. You can also visit and speak to the manager of the cemetery or crematorium who will explain how and where shared burial takes place in the cemetery, or if a crematorium, the area of the garden of remembrance where cremation memorials can be provided. It is important that you are satisfied with what will happen to your baby prior to the funeral as your decision may not be reversible after the funeral.

The hospital should be able to inform you of what happens to the ashes resulting from a shared cremation, and that the location where they are buried or scattered is registered and can be identified by the crematorium after the cremation has taken place.

Most crematoria maximise the recovery of ashes from the cremations of babies. You might wish to contact the crematorium of your choice before the cremation takes place to enquire about their policy regarding the recovery of ashes. If you are not satisfied you can take control and choose an alternative crematorium.

Irrespective of who makes the arrangements the cemetery or crematorium will have options for remembrance and memorials if you wish to arrange a form of commemoration. An increasing number of cemeteries and crematoria are including children's burial sections and children's gardens of remembrance within their services where shared funerals are conducted in exactly the same manner as private funerals. Some bereaved parents gain comfort from knowing that their baby was laid to rest with others.

### **(b) PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS**

You can make your own funeral arrangements should you wish. You would then have full control of the arrangements, including where and when the funeral is to take place. You would be responsible for any costs associated with the funeral, but many funeral directors and cemeteries or crematoria make either no charge or a reduced charge for babies and children.

Whilst it might be a difficult task you are advised to speak to more than one funeral director before making decisions as where charges are made these can be high in some locations and especially in cities.

Should you wish to make arrangements yourself without using a funeral director the cemetery or crematorium manager will assist you by showing you the available options and giving practical help and advice regarding certificates and forms required. Your detailed requirements for the funeral service can also be made directly.

If you choose a cremation service it is important to ask the crematorium for their success in recovering ashes. If your local crematorium can give no guarantee that ashes will be recovered it is your right to choose one that does. Many crematoria can guarantee the recovery of ashes, even where the baby is of a very low term.

### **(c) Burial Options**

Charter members are encouraged to create a Children's section within their cemetery where either shared or private funerals can be arranged. The graves in this section are small and are only suitable for the burial of babies and children. When considering your options you may want to think about burying your baby in a larger plot in the main area of the cemetery. In this case you would be able to use the same grave for one or two adults at some time in the future, possibly for a grandparent or a parent, without disturbing the baby.

If burial in a private grave is your preferred choice, whether in the main section or the Children's section of the cemetery, a deed will be issued to you giving what is known as the exclusive right to the grave. This means that nothing can be done to the grave without the written permission of the owner of the exclusive right. The owner therefore has total control over the memorial that might be placed on the grave (subject to the cemetery's rules and regulations) and any other matter relating to the grave. You can visit the cemetery prior to the burial and be shown where the burial will take place. If you are not satisfied you can choose an alternative cemetery.

If you choose burial in a shared grave your baby will be buried with others in the same grave. Charter members are encouraged to locate these graves within the same Children's section where private graves are situated. You will not have any rights or control over the grave however some parents take comfort from knowing that their baby is with others. Should you choose this option it should be noted that it will not be possible to reverse your decision and request an exhumation and reburial in a private grave as the consent of all parents of babies buried there would be required but could not be obtained.

### **(d) Cremation Options**

Cremation can be either via a private funeral service, i.e. one you arrange yourselves for your baby, or a shared cremation service, i.e. one where several babies are remembered together in a service that can be attended by all the families.

If you choose a private cremation you should discuss your requirements for the service directly with your funeral director or with the crematorium.

You may of course, arrange the funeral directly with the crematorium and without using a funeral director. You should be informed of the policy of the crematorium regarding the recovery of ashes resulting from the cremation. Many crematoria can guarantee the return of ashes irrespective of the term of the baby however it is advised to check with your chosen crematorium on its policy. If you are not satisfied you can select an alternative crematorium.

Where ashes are recovered from a private cremation the crematorium will deal directly with the parent(s) regarding the scattering or burial of the ashes and memorial facilities.

Should you choose a shared cremation the ashes of each baby will not be individually identifiable. The ashes will however be scattered or buried in the garden of remembrance, the location recorded and the hospital and/or Funeral Director will also be informed. You can find out if ashes were recovered or not by contacting the hospital, funeral director or crematorium on the day following the funeral service.

Charter members are encouraged to create a children's garden of remembrance within their crematoria where individual memorials may be arranged by the parent(s).

## **2. Charter Rights**

### **CHARTER RIGHTS FOR PARENTS**

- (a) It is your right to decide whether the hospital makes funeral arrangements (if this is offered) or whether you take full control of the funeral for your baby or infant and decide whether a burial or cremation will take place.
- (b) It is your right to be offered a private grave for your baby or infant and be issued with a deed for the exclusive right to the grave. You also have the right to erect a memorial on a private grave that complies with the cemetery rules. These are subject to payment of any appropriate fees.
- (c) It is your right to be able to purchase an adult grave for the burial of your baby or infant, with sufficient depth remaining to allow adult burials, and be issued with a deed for the exclusive right to the grave. You also have the right to erect a memorial on a private grave. These are subject to payment of any appropriate fees.
- (d) It is your right to be able to choose a shared<sup>2</sup> grave for the burial of your baby. (Should you choose this option it should be noted that it will not be possible to reverse your decision and request an exhumation and reburial in a private grave, as the consent of all parents of babies buried there would be required but could not be obtained). You may not be able to erect a memorial on a shared grave due to space.
- (e) It is your right to be able to choose a private cremation for your baby.

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<sup>2</sup> Many bereaved parents find the terms communal grave, communal cremation etc distressing and offensive. For them the word 'communal' carries echoes of paupers' graves, mass graves etc. We would encourage Charter members to use the term 'shared' in all communications with parents and in all documents (as in this document).

- (f) It is your right to be able to choose a shared cremation for your baby where provided by the hospital.
- (g) It is your right to be able to receive accurate information about the cremation of your baby from the crematorium.
- (h) It is your right to expect the crematorium to have a technique in place designed to maximise the recovery of ashes.
- (i) It is your right to be given all of the ashes resulting from an individual cremation, or they can be buried or scattered with your written consent. All of the ashes is defined as ***‘everything that is left in the cremator at the end of the cremation process following the removal of any metal’***.
- (j) It is your right to decide what happens to any metal recovered from a private, individual cremation and the crematorium must inform you of the options available, which could include recycling for charitable purposes, burial within the grounds or return of metal to you. Metal will be that which was used in the construction of the coffin.
- (k) It is your right to be able to arrange a memorial for your baby at the crematorium
- (l) When arranging a private burial or cremation it is your right to decide on the type of coffin or container that your baby will be buried in e.g. traditional coffin, wicker, bamboo, biodegradable, shroud.

### 3. INFORMATION FOR CHARTER MEMBERS

This section of the Charter has been reviewed with the kind assistance of Sands therefore giving a greater insight into the type and level of services that bereaved parents would expect.

Charter members are advised to take note of the Information for Parents and the Charter Rights above when considering new facilities and/or services or making improvements.

The terms ‘ashes’ and ‘cremated remains’ are deemed to be one and the same and defined as ***‘everything that is left in the cremator at the end of the cremation process following the removal of any metal’***. Cremation authorities are strongly advised to formulate local policy and practice (technique) in respect of baby and infant cremations that will maximise the recovery of ashes.

Parents must be informed of what happens to any metal recovered from a private individual cremation and be informed of options available. Consent should be obtained to dispose of metal.

Charter members are also encouraged to accept and work toward providing the services and facilities contained in the Charter Targets below in order to improve their services to bereaved parents to way above a minimum level.

Where a local hospital does not provide the shared option to parents for burial and cremation Charter members will encourage them to do so via the use of the shared facilities provided at your cemetery and/or crematorium.

## **CHARTER TARGETS**

- (a) Children's burial sections should be developed to accommodate private individual graves on which a memorial can be erected. A deed of grant of the exclusive right must be provided to the parent(s).
- (b) Children's burial sections should be specifically designed to meet the needs of bereaved parents with input provided by the nearest local Sands group. The use of undesirable areas, such as old public graves and narrow verges should be avoided. Where space is limited the use of areas previously used for public burial could be suitably enhanced to accommodate a specifically designed Children's section.
- (c) Children's burial sections mentioned above should be developed to accommodate shared burials of babies (irrespective of gestation period) and infants, delivered by local midwifery and gynaecology services. These facilities may be free of charge to parents, allow for an individual grave and burial and the placing of a memorial.
- (d) Backfill a shared grave immediately after a burial and not leave the grave open pending a further burial. Where this might not be possible a secure lockable cover should be used. Parents have the right to know that their baby is secure in the care of the burial authority.
- (e) Crematoria should have a written local policy on baby and infant cremations that contains a commitment to a technique that will maximise the recovery of ashes.
- (f) A memorial facility should be provided within a children's section for parents that choose shared burial.
- (g) Old individual adult public graves for shared/hospital burials should not be used. These old graves are often in less well maintained areas that can appear bleak and unfriendly.
- (h) A specific Children's Garden of Remembrance area should be developed within the crematorium garden of remembrance where suitable memorial facilities should be provided.
- (i) Charter members often correspond with the parents during or after the burial when the parents are shocked and numbed. It is important that letters or printed materials are written with warmth and without any bureaucratic tone. The baby's name should be used wherever possible, rather than reference to the "body" and the "burial".
- (j) Charter members must ensure that informative literature on the above is readily available to parents. Such literature should be provided to all local hospitals in the area served by the burial and/or cremation authority.

- (k) Ashes recovered from shared cremations will be scattered or buried in the garden of remembrance, the location recorded and the hospital and/or Funeral Director will also be informed. Charter members are advised to also provide this information to local hospitals and funeral directors with the addition that should ashes be recovered the aforementioned, or the parents directly, will be informed.

## **APPENDIX**

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Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity**



### **Sands position statement Shared graves and lockable grave covers**

When a baby dies at any stage of pregnancy, during or shortly after birth, many Trusts and Health Boards offer to arrange and pay for a funeral service, burial or cremation.

Sands strongly believes that burial must continue to be an option for all parents. Some Trusts and Health Boards are able to offer individual or shared graves for parents who choose to bury their baby. For financial reasons, some Trusts and Health Boards may only be able to offer parents the option of a shared burial. Parents should always be told in advance whether an individual or shared grave is being offered. Some parents find the idea of a shared grave upsetting. Others find it comforting to know that their baby will not be alone. If parents choose to have their baby buried in a shared grave, they should be told how many babies will be in the grave and given an estimate of how long it is likely to be before the grave is closed and the ground properly re-constituted.

In all instances, parents should also be given full information about hospital arranged and private options for burial and cremation. Parents should receive clear and sensitive explanations of all their options. They should also be given written information about their available choices. Parents should also be informed in advance of any restrictions regarding any memorials that can be placed on individual or shared graves. If they are considering having their baby buried in a shared grave, they should also be told that they will not be able to open the grave later if they wish to move their baby's body to another location. All relevant information should be included in written information that is given to parents. Parents can then decide if they would like the hospital to make arrangements or if they would prefer to do this themselves.

Shared graves should always be backfilled immediately or protected by lockable grave covers to ensure that the grave cannot be disturbed until it is full and the ground can be re-constituted. A lockable grave cover consists of a metal frame bolted into the ground with a strong polypropylene cover that is padlocked to the frame.