



A Loving Goodbye *A Guide to Arranging the* *Funeral for Your Baby*



CALIFORNIA
SIDS
PROGRAM
SUDDEN INFANT
DEATH SYNDROME

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT
OF PUBLIC HEALTH MCAH

Sudden Infant
Death Syndrome



The impossible has happened.

Your baby has died suddenly, with no warning. No one can tell you why. You're in a daze. You may be angry and confused. You can't believe it's true. You are feeling a deeper pain than you have ever known.

This booklet is for you and for those who will support you through these first difficult days and weeks. If it's hard to read this now, give it to a friend or family member who can help.

Over the next few days, you will be making important decisions about your baby's funeral or memorial service. This will be your special way of honoring your baby. This will be one way of giving your baby **a loving good-bye.**

"I felt really lonely and sick – like I wanted to die. I had this sick feeling in my stomach – a weird feeling of emptiness. I didn't know what to do without her. My arms ached to hold her."



Where do you begin?

You may wonder where to begin or who to ask about making funeral arrangements for your baby. Friends, family and clergy will want to help in any way they can. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind.

- **Ask a family member or friend to help you figure out what's best for you.**

Together you can look over this booklet and talk about what you want to do. With this in mind, your friend can call several funeral homes in your area. He or she can also get in touch with the local SIDS group for support.

You may want to talk with a pastor, rabbi, priest, or other spiritual leader.

Once you know what is in your area, it would be good to sit down and talk about it. It helps to have a friend say, "These are some of the things you can do. What seems best for you?"

"We sat and talked with our family before we went to the funeral parlor. We wrote down what we wanted. If it got hard, we could just give him the paper."



- **Take the time you need.**

Making these final decisions about your baby may take some time. Usually there is no rush. If you need more time to think, take the time.

- **Do what is right for you.**

There is no right or wrong way to have a funeral. Saying good-bye to your baby is a very personal and private thing. Ask for what you need, even if you think it won't make sense to others.

- **Choose a funeral director you feel comfortable with.**

You don't have to pick the first person you call. Find someone you feel will support your needs and choices. Ask about costs and the special things you want done.

- **Be patient with yourself and each other.**

No one can be protected from the pain of losing someone so very loved. Everyone goes through this pain in their own way and at their own pace.

“Being together made our hearts stronger for each other. We knew there wasn't anything we could have done.”



It's a good idea to choose a funeral home while your baby is at the coroner's office.

Because your baby has died suddenly, an autopsy must be done by the coroner. The autopsy will show if your baby died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

The autopsy itself takes only a few hours. But there are many tests that need to be done. It may take a long time to hear for sure that it was SIDS. You may need to ask the coroner for your baby's final death certificate, later on.

In the meantime, remember:

- **You didn't do anything wrong.**
- **There was nothing you could have done.**

Your baby may have to stay at the coroner's office for several days. Then your baby can be taken to the funeral home. What are your choices?

“My mother told me over and over – ‘SIDS isn't anyone's fault. You did nothing wrong. Don't blame yourself.’ ”

What are your choices?

Here are some of the choices you can make. In most cases, you can choose any of these. You can combine them any way you want. If there is something special you want done, ask your funeral director. He or she wants to help.

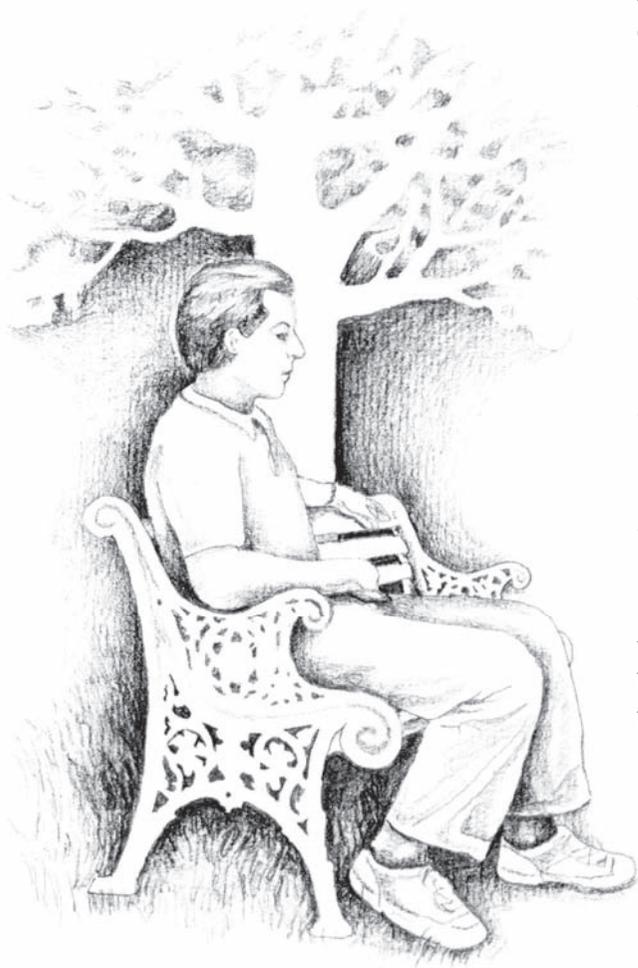
- **Do you want cremation or burial?**
- **If you want a service, do you want**
 - a funeral service?
 - a memorial service?
 - a graveside service?
- **Do you want the service to be held**
 - in your home?
 - at your place of worship?
 - at the funeral home chapel?
- **If there is a casket, do you want it**
 - open or closed?
- **If you want a viewing, do you want it**
 - private or public?

These choices will be described in more detail on the next pages. You don't have to find out every detail yourself. You don't have to make every decision alone.

*“We had a really supportive friend who just walked us through it. She helped us with the things we wanted done but just couldn't do ourselves. And our funeral director was great. He explained our choices and said, ‘You tell us what **you** want.’”*



“I wish we had buried our baby’s ashes. We didn’t tell the funeral home where we wanted them scattered, so we never really knew. I found I needed a place to go. So we had a bench put in the cemetery in her memory.”



Do you want cremation or burial?

This is a very personal choice. If you have strong personal or religious feelings about either choice, don’t ignore those feelings.

When thinking about cremation. . .

If you choose cremation, you can decide what you want to do with your baby’s ashes. But you don’t have to decide right away. You can wait and do what is best for you.

- The ashes can be buried in a small cemetery plot or put in a cemetery niche. You will need to talk with a cemetery about this.
- You can tell your funeral director to scatter the ashes on the ocean.
- You can take the ashes home to scatter later.
- You can keep them at home.

Some parents find that they want a place to visit later on. You might want to have a park bench put in or have a tree planted in your baby’s memory.

When thinking about burial. . .

If you choose burial, a cemetery plot is needed. In many places, the cemetery is not a part of the funeral home. A family member or friend could make these calls, too.

You can buy a family plot or you can buy a small plot just for your baby. Some cemeteries have a special section for babies.

Some parents worry about the costs of burial, knowing that cremation costs less. If this worries you, tell your funeral director. He or she may be able to help in some way. And most cemeteries can help you make a payment plan. Family and friends may also be able to help with such expenses.

Some parents wonder about headstones. You can wait and decide about this later. When your baby is buried, a marker with your baby's name is placed on the grave. A headstone may be put on any time later. Then you will have time to think about what you want on the headstone.

*“I wanted a burial for my baby.
But I worried that I couldn't afford it.
I worked it all out with the funeral
home. And there was a donation box at
the funeral. That really helped.”*

“We delayed our service so out-of-town people could come. It helped to wait. We could talk with our pastor about what we wanted in the service.”

“We didn’t want a formal service. My wife and I took our daughter’s ashes out on the ocean. As we scattered her ashes, a dolphin glided by. It felt like we were giving her back to life.”

What kind of service do you want?

A funeral service is held before the burial or cremation. A memorial service is usually held afterwards. The type of service you choose depends on your family’s needs and beliefs. Some families have both.

Some parents prefer to have a private service as soon as possible. Others would rather wait for a while.

Where do you want the service held?

The memorial or funeral service can be held at the funeral parlor, at your own church or synagogue, at your home or at the gravesite. Some parents are comforted by being in their place of worship. Other parents would rather use the funeral home chapel. Some parents choose a garden or park.

Think about the place that would be best for you.



Do you want an open or closed casket?

Many parents wonder about having a special viewing of the baby and about having an open or closed casket. This, again, is a personal choice.

For many people, seeing the baby seems to be a needed part of saying good-bye. This can be done in many ways.

There could be:

- a public viewing for family and friends a day or so before the funeral.
- a private viewing for you and close friends and family just before the funeral.
- an open casket at the funeral.

Some parents worry about how the baby will look. They think about the autopsy or how the baby looked when he or she was found. You can't tell an autopsy has been done when the baby's clothes and hat are on. And after embalming, the baby does not look like he or she did when found.

Seeing the baby at the funeral can be a real comfort for some parents. For others, seeing and holding the baby at home or in the hospital is enough.

As always, do what is best for you.

“I had a chance to say good-bye and hold our baby at the hospital. My husband had been out of town, so he was able to hold him and be with him at the funeral home. But we didn't want an open casket at the funeral. That would have been too hard on us.”

“I was looking at her, touching her. I couldn't leave her. She looked really beautiful in the coffin. It helped people having it open. It helped them understand that nothing had been wrong with her.”

“I went back to the funeral parlor six months after her death to ask what they dressed my baby in. I didn’t know I had the option to dress her at the time and I was tormented.”

“My aunt read a beautiful poem at the service. It meant so much to us.”

Making your good-bye your own.

There are so many ways you can make your baby’s funeral special. Here are some things other parents have done or wish they could have done.

- Bringing flowers from your garden.
- Arranging for a spray of flowers for your baby’s casket.
- Choosing a special outfit for your baby.
- Dressing your baby yourself or having a friend dress your baby for you.
- Tying your baby’s bonnet or putting on the shoes.
- Having pictures taken at the funeral by a friend or the funeral home.



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- Keeping a lock of your baby’s hair.
 - Making a footprint or handprint.
 - Choosing a special verse, prayer, song, or lullaby for the service.
 - Placing a toy, a blanket, or something special to you in the casket with your baby.
 - Bringing your baby book or photographs of the baby with you to the service.

“We have no pictures of him. I would have liked to have had pictures taken. Even at the funeral, that would have been good.”

“I was afraid to ask for what I wanted. I was afraid someone would think I was crazy.”

You may want to hold your baby one more time before the funeral. This might be important if you haven’t been able to hold your baby since he or she died. Ask the funeral director about this if it is important to you.

Remember, nobody has ever gone through your grief. Do what you need to do, even if others might think it strange.



“After my baby was cremated, I put a small amount of his ashes in a special leather pouch. I wear it around my neck, next to my heart. It is to help the grieving through the rough days ahead.”

A word about tradition...

Your family’s traditions may be very important to you. Tell your funeral director about them.

For example, because of your tradition, you may not want your baby’s body embalmed. Embalming does not have to be done. If you do not want it to be done, tell your funeral director.

Some families may want to take the baby home for a special time of family prayer. Talk to your funeral director about how this can be done, if it is important to you.

There may be other things important to you and your family. Talk to your funeral director about what you want. Most of the time, your traditions can be honored.

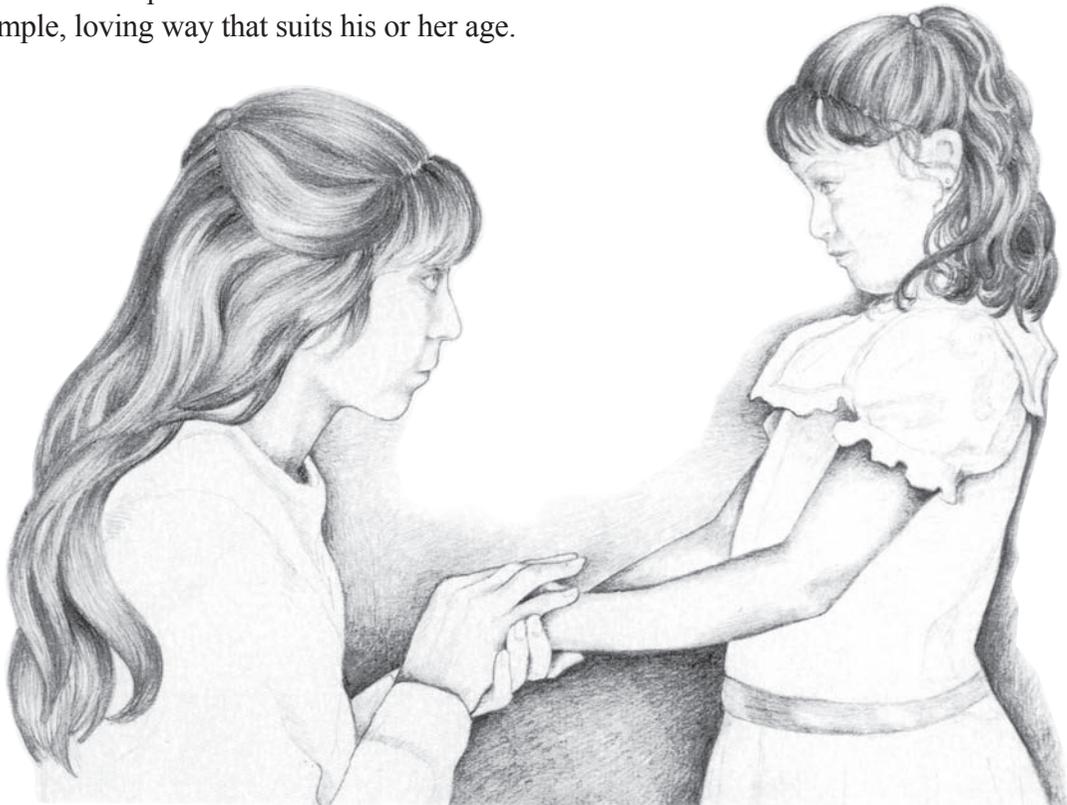
What about our other children going to the funeral?

We would all like to protect our children from the pain of death and sorrow. But it can be good for children to go to the funeral, if they want to. The funeral gives children a way to say good-bye and show their love for their baby brother or sister. Some children feel better if they can give some small gift – a drawing, flower or small toy – to the baby.

Ask a family member or friend to be with your child and explain what is going on. Your child's questions can be answered in a simple, loving way that suits his or her age.

Going to the funeral may help your child feel more secure and part of the family. But you know your child best. Going to the funeral is one way for your child to say good-bye. There are other ways you can help your child show these feelings.

“We both wanted our girls to be there. They were always by his coffin during the funeral. It really helped them, I think.”



“Different funeral homes may have different charges for the funeral of a baby. You need to talk to more than one. It’s OK to shop around. It’s OK to change your mind.”

How do we deal with the costs of the funeral?

For many families, any unplanned expense presents real problems. Dealing with your baby’s death is hard enough without having to cope with money worries. But there are ways to have a lovely service without spending beyond your family’s means.

- **Ask your local SIDS group or Health Department for advice.**

In some counties, social services have some funding to help parents with funeral costs.

- **Let your funeral director know what your situation is.**

Your funeral director can suggest ways to have a beautiful service at a low cost. Payments can often be made over time, if needed.

- **There are services the funeral home provides that your family can do instead.**

Ask your funeral director what those services are. Some may be things your family would like to do.

Here are the basic steps for getting help.

- Talk with your trusted friends, family members or clergy about what you want. You don't have to deal with every detail. Ask for help.
- Ask a friend or family member to help make the needed calls.
- Call the local SIDS group or Public Health Nursing Department for support.
- Call several funeral homes. Find out what can be done and how much it costs. If you plan to bury your baby or your baby's ashes, you may need to call cemeteries.

You can write your family's plans here.

Do you want cremation or burial? _____

What kind of service do you want? _____

Where and when do you want the service(s) held? _____

What details are important to your family? _____

Remember, this funeral is to help **you** through the most difficult loss of your life.

- **You can do what you need to do.**
- **You can take your time.**
- **You can follow the wisdom of your tradition and heritage.**
- **You can go your own way if you need to.**

Ask friends, family, clergy, and your funeral director for help in getting what you need to make this **a loving good-bye.**

*Do you have any questions?
Want to know where to get help?*

Here are some people you can call:

California Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Program
800-369-SIDS (7437) – within California or
415-502-2825 outside of California

Your local SIDS Parent Support Group:

Your local Public Health Nursing Department SIDS Program:

Thanks to the many sharing parents and caring professionals who gave such great love and insight towards the creation of this booklet.

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