



## Family Support Guide After Infant Loss



# Dear Family,

The loss of a pregnancy or infant is painful. At Ochsner, we provide comfort, healing, and information for parents during this difficult time.

Although nothing can erase the pain caused by the loss of a child, we can help guide you towards healing and the next steps to take.

This guide is dedicated to all families who have suffered the loss of an infant.

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Making Arrangements .....    | 1 |
| Grieving and Healing .....   | 2 |
| Book Recommendations.....    | 4 |
| Online Resources .....       | 5 |
| Prayers and Reflections..... | 6 |
| Ochsner Support.....         | 7 |

The butterfly artwork in this booklet was created by the Nicholls State University Art Department as a service learning project for the Ochsner Health System NICU Palliative Care Program.





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# Making Arrangements

As difficult as it may seem, you must determine appropriate interment for your baby.

There are burial and cremation options that are affordable. You or a member of your family must make the actual arrangement, but your chaplain, palliative care nurse or social worker are available to answer your questions, and assist you in making these decisions.

- **Cremation** is a respectful option that is often inexpensive and may allow you to keep an urn of your infant's ashes. This service is offered by several local funeral homes.
- Several local cemeteries offer small **burial sites** specifically for babies. If your family owns a crypt or cemetery plot, this may be an affordable and loving option for interment. Cemeteries usually charge a modest fee to access a crypt or site and allow you to bury your baby with a deceased loved one.
- For **out-of-state burial**, contact the funeral home of your choice and they will make arrangements for transport and burial of your baby. The hospital staff will work with the funeral home in making these arrangements.



“Fetal demise” is the loss of your expected baby under 20 weeks gestation or less than 350 grams in weight. A death certificate is not required for this age or size, nor is interment. However, you may still choose to arrange for burial or cremation.

**Please discuss these options with your chaplain, nurse or social worker to ensure you are fully informed and have completed the appropriate documentation to carry out your wishes.**

There is a fee to transport the baby from the hospital to the funeral home. This is arranged through the funeral home. Your funeral home may also discuss affordable options for the purchase of a casket. St. Joseph's Abby (985-867-2299) donates handmade caskets to families who have lost an infant, and they may be able to offer delivery to you or your funeral home.

## Funeral Homes, Cemeteries and Florists

To help you start making arrangements, we offer a Resources sheet featuring listings of local funeral homes, cemeteries and florists. If you would like to purchase flowers from a florist, most offer a discount for an infant burial. Flowers from your own garden or that of a neighbor or friend are also a beautiful and loving touch.

## Financial Assistance

If you need financial assistance to ensure a respectful interment for your infant, the organizations listed on our Resources sheet donate funds directly to funeral homes for simple burials, or may offer reimbursement of expenses. Consult with your hospital's social worker about financial arrangements.

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# Grieving and Healing

You may feel like you are not sure how you are going to go on after this loss. You feel that your life is forever changed. You may wonder if you will always feel this sad and if it will always hurt this much. If you allow yourself, in time you will heal. The pain will ease and you will find joy in life again.

It is a natural and protective instinct to not want to feel the pain you are experiencing and attempt to push it away. You may find yourself feeling numb, and this numbing serves a purpose. It may be what gets you through the first few weeks after your loss. To truly heal though, you must accept the loss, feel the pain, and allow yourself to come through the other side of loss, with the pain and loss a part of you, but not overtaking you.



## Participate in Ritual

The use of ritual is one way to dedicate time and place for your heart to heal. Beginning with a reflection or prayer said at the grave site or gathered with others (it does not have to be at a cemetery), ritual allows you to feel your feelings, cry and express sadness and regret. It functions as a container for your sadness because when the ritual is complete, you dry your eyes, feel some comfort and relief, and then move forward in life, just a little bit.



## Create Mementos

In honor of your baby, you might create a memory book, a commemorative wreath for your door, hang a holiday ornament or plant a tree or flower. These small mementos allow you to heal one step at a time, spending time in reflection, feeling your feelings, and then taking a deep breath as you return to your life and your family.



## Plan for Joy

While it is important to feel and express your sadness, it is just as important to not allow yourself to remain in a sad state. Sometimes people think that because they are sad after a loss, that they should be sad every minute. Actually it is healthier to allow yourself to do something that brings you joy, like watch a funny movie or laugh and talk with friends. When you are ready, it is healthy to plan events to ensure that you do not get lost in sorrow, but slowly return to doing the things that you enjoy.

## Come Together

Tragedies such as the loss you have suffered often serve to bring couples and families closer together as they lean on one another. They can also tear families apart if one or more members become withdrawn or remain angry for an extended period of time. Recognize this, talk to one another and make the conscious choice that you will continue to support one another at this sad time.

Men grieve just as much as women, but they grieve differently. Men generally feel their sadness with great intensity, and so often heal more quickly than women. Women feel their sadness over time and in smaller increments and so usually take longer to heal from loss.

Be aware that other children in the family and grandparents also feel great loss when an infant dies. Ask your chaplain, social worker, or palliative care team for information about how to talk to children after loss and how to help them through the grieving process.

## Grief Counseling

**If you find your relationships or family over-burdened in the effort to handle the grief you are all experiencing, please seek help.** Do not allow this terrible tragedy to cause another trauma in your relationships. It may feel like nothing will help, but if you are willing to attempt recovery and to heal, help is available. Trained counselors are available to offer guidance at this difficult time. Please refer to our Resources sheet for a listing of grief counseling centers providing individual, family, and group support.



**If your grief has reached a level of crisis, dial 988 to reach the National Crisis Lifeline. The call is free and confidential. If you feel you may harm yourself or someone else, call 911 right away.**

## Holistic Healing

As painful as grief is emotionally, it can be physically painful too. Unexpressed grief and sadness can be stored in the body, causing body aches and physical pain. Working through your grief, especially when supported by a mental health professional, is helpful. Moving the energy of your grief and sadness through your body is also helpful, and continuing your regular exercise routine, or light walking or swimming (with the approval of your physician) will support you as you heal your body and spirit.

Holistic therapies like massage may also aid this process. Consult our Resources sheet for a listing of professionals that offer holistic and integrative healing services.

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## Book Recommendations

These suggested books may provide some support for you and your adult family members.

- ***An Empty Cradle, a Full Heart: Reflections for Mothers and Fathers After Miscarriage, Stillbirth or Infant Death*** by Christine O’Keefe Lafser and Phyllis Tickle
- ***Empty Arms*** by Sherokee Ilse (also available in Spanish)
- ***Good Grief Rituals: Tools for Healing*** by Elaine Childs-Gowell
- ***I Wasn’t Ready to Say Goodbye*** by Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair
- ***On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*** by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler
- ***Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss*** by Pat Schwiebert
- ***Grieving the Child I Never Knew*** by Kate Wunnenberg
- ***I Had a Miscarriage*** by Jessica Zucker
- ***The Bereaved Parent*** by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff
- ***How to Survive the Loss of a Child*** by Catherine M. Sanders

These suggested books deal with the feelings of anger and sadness experienced after the death of a loved one, and teach about grieving and how to go on living after loss.

- ***Losing Someone You Love: When a Brother or Sister Dies*** by Elizabeth Richter
- ***I’ll Always Love You*** by Hans Wilhelm
- ***We Were Gonna Have a Baby, But We Had an Angel Instead*** by Pat Schwiebert
- ***Something Happened*** by Cathy Blanford
- ***Someone Came Before You*** by Pat Schwiebert
- ***My Sibling Still*** by Megan Lacourrege



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## Online Resources

These websites contain information on healing from the loss of a child and the opportunity to connect with others for support.

- **The Compassionate Friends** ..... [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)  
*A large national organization offering resources and support to all members of a grieving family*
- **Glow in the Woods** ..... [www.glowinthewoods.com](http://www.glowinthewoods.com)  
*Features regular contributors, both moms and dads, as well as a discussion board to connect with other parents*
- **Mommies Enduring Neonatal Death (M.E.N.D.)** ..... [www.mend.org](http://www.mend.org)  
*A national Christian organization offering support to families who have suffered the loss of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death*
- **Center for Loss in Multiple Birth (CLIMB)** ..... [www.climb-support.org](http://www.climb-support.org)  
*Offers support to parents who have experienced the death of one or more, both or all of their twins or higher multiples at any time from conception through birth, infancy and childhood*
- **Threads of Love Foundation** ..... [www.threadsoflove.org](http://www.threadsoflove.org)  
*Offers a packet containing a bonnet, dress, blanket and a prayer for healing of a broken heart to parents faced with the death of a baby through miscarriage, infant death or stillbirth*
- **MISS Foundation (Mothers In Support and Sympathy)** ..... [www.missfoundation.org](http://www.missfoundation.org)  
*Dedicated to supporting parents one-on-one after the death of an infant*
- **The Center for Mind-Body Medicine** ..... [www.cmbm.org/self-care](http://www.cmbm.org/self-care)  
*Offers free self-care resources and techniques for those who have experienced trauma*



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## Prayers and Reflections

*“What we have once enjoyed and deeply loved we can never lose,  
for all that we love deeply becomes a part of us.” ~ Helen Keller*

### A Poem

I thought of you with love today, but that is nothing new.  
I thought about you yesterday and the day before that too.  
I think of you in silence. I often say your name.  
But all I have are memories and your picture in a frame.  
Your memory is my keepsake, with which I'll never part.  
God has you in His keeping. I have you in my heart.  
I shed tears for what might have been. A million times I've cried.  
If love alone could have saved you, you never would have died.  
In life I loved you dearly. In death I love you still.  
In my heart you hold a place no one can ever fill.  
It broke my heart to lose you but you didn't go alone,  
For part of me went with you the day God took you home.

*~ Anonymous*

### To the Child of My Heart

O precious, tiny sweet little one, you will always be to me so perfect,  
Pure and innocent just as you were meant to be.  
We dreamed of you and of your life and all that it would be,  
We waited and longed for you to come and join our family.  
We never had the chance to play, to laugh, to rock, to wiggle,  
We long to hold you, touch you and listen to you giggle.  
But now you're gone... but yet you're here.  
You are our sorrow and our joy, there's love in every tear.  
Just know our love goes deep and strong. We'll forget you never.  
The child we had, but never had, and yet will have forever.

*~ A prayer for Addison Lynn, born sleeping*

## Ochsner Support

Clinical Administrator \_\_\_\_\_

Nurse \_\_\_\_\_

Social Worker \_\_\_\_\_

Chaplain \_\_\_\_\_

*“Someday we hope to meet again, someday we know not when,  
To clasp our hands in a better land, never to part again.” ~ Anonymous*





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