

## The Unrecognised Mourners

People grieve differently. Partners, children, parents, family and friends may also be hurt. Each will experience grief in their own way. Some may wish to share their feelings and some may not.

Remember that grandparents can also grieve. They can grieve for the grandchildren they might have had. They may see and feel the pain that the death brings to their own children. They know that it is not usual for grandparents to outlive their grandchild. They may feel guilty and ask themselves "Why couldn't it have been me instead?"

Friends may feel embarrassed being unsure what to say or whether to mention the baby. Some may even avoid contact altogether for a time because they are concerned that their children act as a reminder of the loss and cause further distress.

Funerals allow people to share the grief and recognise the loss and the life that might have been. They help to create memories to share later.

## Australian Funeral Directors Association

When faced with having to make funeral arrangements, most people have no prior experience in organising such an event, and little knowledge of what to do.

Funeral directors can alleviate this burden for you by providing a range of services, allowing you to choose an appropriate funeral that will be conducted professionally, and with dignity.

For your own peace of mind, select a funeral director who is an accredited member of the Australian Funeral Directors Association which requires its members to honour a strict code of ethics and practice.

The AFDA publishes a range of information brochures for the bereaved. These brochures along with other help and advice is available through AFDA offices:

National Office: Telephone (03) 9859 9966

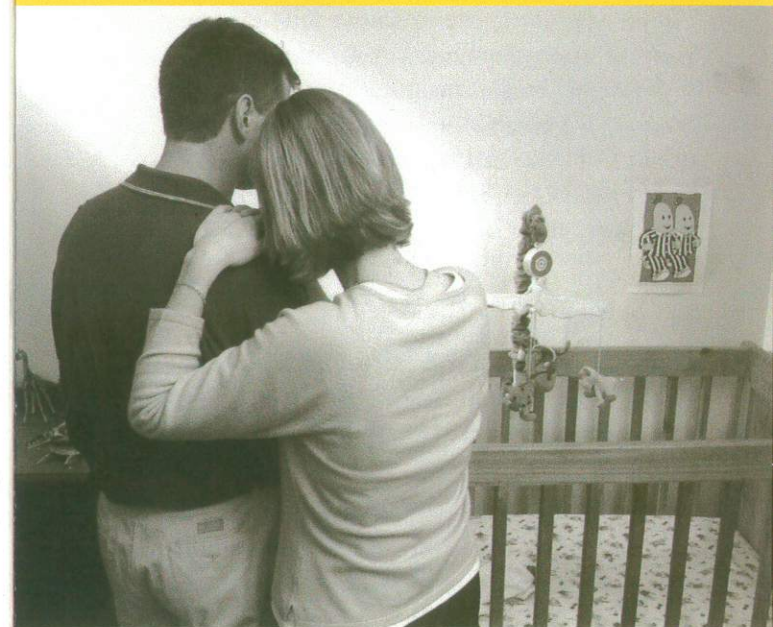
Or your nearest AFDA member.



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## *When a baby has died*

**A survival guide for the bereaved**



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## Creating Memories

When a baby dies it is natural to ask why. Why has a life been cut so short? Why our family? Why couldn't things be different? Why didn't we have a chance to have more time?

Naturally it is a time of confusion. Many other people may also be hurting because of the death. It can be difficult knowing what to do or what is right or wrong.

Partners, grandparents, brothers, sisters, family, friends and neighbours are all affected and may experience and show their anguish in many different ways. Sometimes families find greatest difficulty because they had too little time with the baby to create memories. Your funeral director can help you to create meaningful memories of the baby. It is important to take the time to think about how you might create some of these memories, to recognise what happened and the life that might have been.

## Naming

Family and friends will often find it easier to talk about what has happened if they are able to refer to the baby by name.

Just as the birth of the baby can be announced by name in the newspaper, so can the death. Your hospital or local funeral directors will sometimes present you with a naming certificate recording the baby's details. Some will create a naming ceremony for babies, regardless of the term of the pregnancy or the age at which they died.

Within Australia the Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages formally records the birth of all babies born after twenty weeks of pregnancy. Parents often take this opportunity to officially record the name of their baby. Later, an application can be made to the Registrar for a birth certificate.

## The Role of the Funeral

In the same way that naming helps to acknowledge the death, a funeral service provides the opportunity to share feelings to offer support, to mourn, to feel comfort being together to say goodbye. A funeral service publicly recognises the baby as a person.

Regardless of the age of the baby you may have a funeral service. Some hospitals will offer to arrange an unattended public burial on your behalf. Please take the time to think carefully. Decisions do not need to be made as soon as the death occurs. Talk with your partner and consider your needs and those of other people who are also experiencing the loss.

Consider all options carefully to help avoid later regrets. Sometimes well meaning family members can cause distress by making funeral arrangements without taking time to talk with the parents of the baby.

Whilst the life has been short you can recognise what has been. You can create some lasting memories.

## Creating the Funeral Service

By allowing some time between the death and the funeral, parents, family and friends are able to consider their own feelings and what they would like to do.

The funeral service can be held in the funeral directors chapel, in your own home, at a church or at the cemetery. The service itself need not be religious. Choose what best suits your needs.

The decision to have a burial or a cremation will have to be made. The costs and options will be explained by the funeral director:

AFDA members recognise that a baby's funeral is a very sensitive time for the families they serve and charge considerably less for their services.

Your funeral director will be able to take foot and handprints, as do some hospitals, issue a naming certificate and compile a memorial record of the service and those who attended. Quite often family members will provide clothing for the baby to be dressed in, a baby blanket and soft toys to accompany the baby.

More lasting memories can be created by taking the opportunity to spend time with the baby. Close family members will sometimes take this valuable opportunity prior to the funeral to bathe, dress, nurse or cuddle the baby and to take photographs. Flowers may be pressed, a lock of hair may be taken as a treasured keepsake.

Sensitive funeral directors are responsive to these needs and will arrange special viewing times.

The baby can be taken to the cemetery in a car accompanied by the parents rather than being placed in the hearse. You may make that decision at the time.

## What to Tell Other Children

Explain that the baby has died by telling them the truth in simple terms. Allow the opportunity to ask questions and answer them honestly.

Sometimes young children may imagine that somehow they have caused the death. Reassure children that they are in no way to blame for the death.

Encourage their participation in the funeral but be sure to explain what is going to happen. You may be pleasantly surprised that in helping your children you are also helping yourself to come to terms with what is happening.