

Funeral Options

Although we realize this a difficult time for you and your family, our staff will make every effort to help you. We will give you plenty of time to make choices about the care of your baby's body.

If Your Baby is Born PRIOR to 20 Weeks Gestation

If your baby is less than 20 weeks old, you have several choices to consider for the care of the baby.

- Some hospitals have a site dedicated for internment after cremation. Check with the hospital staff for further information.
- You may have your baby buried or cremated by a funeral home of your choice.
- If your baby is less than 20 weeks old, but born alive, the same guidelines must be followed as below for babies born after 20 weeks.

If your doctor ordered any tests for your baby, all the above options are available after tests are completed.

If Your Baby Was Born AFTER 20 Weeks Gestation

If your baby is 20 weeks or older at birth, New York State law requires that a funeral home be contacted and a burial or cremation be planned for your baby. Arranging for the funeral is often the beginning of saying goodbye. Be sure to make your own choices. If at all possible, both parents should be involved in planning the funeral and memorial services. Parents who were overlooked in the planning process often say they felt uncomfortable with the choices others made for their child's services. Well meaning relatives and friends may try to assume the burden to save the parents from the pain. While the process will certainly be difficult, it is also a critical step in the healing process.

If you need help contacting a funeral home, a bereavement counselor from the hospital or your own minister/priest can assist you. Be aware that each funeral home may have significant differences in the cost and type of service that they offer. See the following pages for a list of local funeral homes and their contact information.

We encourage you to spend as much time as you need with your baby as you make your decisions about the funeral. You may keep your baby with you in your hospital room. But, please remember that once you have contacted the funeral home and the funeral director has taken the baby, he or she will not be available for you to see again at the hospital.

All testing desired by you or your physician will be completed before the baby is released to the funeral home.

Selecting a Funeral Home

Base your selection on several factors. First, make some phone calls and speak with the funeral director. Be sure to tell him or her that you have just experienced the death of an infant. His or her attitude should be sensitive and gentle. If you feel a sense of over-professionalism or he seems to be austere, please try another funeral home. Assuring that the director will be sensitive to your needs as a bereaved parent is the most important factor in your choice.

If possible, arrange to make a visit to the funeral home before confirming the use of that home. Upon arrival, consider the options that they have available to you. Remember important issues such as location, flexibility of service options, coordination options with clergy and the cemetery you have chosen, and the payment arrangements. Be sure to make your memorial desires clear to

the director so they are able to coordinate the schedule and other arrangements according to your wishes. Feel free to ask questions about costs, arrangements, or anything else you might need. The decisions you make must feel comfortable to you and your family. You may feel some pressure to get things done in a hurry, which is a natural reaction to the discomfort and anxiety often brought on by this type of situation. Taking your time will let you be more at ease with your decision and choices. Please remember, hospital staff is always here to help guide you through this difficult time.

If it is too difficult for you to deal directly with the funeral director, find a family member or support group volunteer who can speak with and ask them to communicate and coordinate your requests for the memorial service on your behalf... but please make certain that family member does what YOU want, not what they want.

Cremation

If you are considering cremation, think about what you would like to do with your child's ashes before acting on your final decision. Most bereaved parents who cremate are very comfortable with their decision. If you do cremate, you may keep the ashes in an urn at your home, you may bury the ashes (interred) with a memorial headstone or you may scatter the ashes at a special location. If you choose to scatter the ashes, we strongly recommend that you save a small portion of the ashes to keep. There are special boxes, charm necklaces and mini-urns that are available to keep a small portion of ashes. If you decide to cremate, you may still have a memorial service for family and friends.

If you feel pressured into cremation either by a lack of funds, lack of time or sheer confusion surrounding the decision making process, please ask someone, like hospital staff, social worker or clergy, to assist you so that you do not have regrets later. Some parents express that they feel cheated that they do not have a special place to go and care for their child's body. An occasional visit to the cemetery where your child is buried or the ashes are placed can have a special healing effect. It is an individual decision, however, either way we recommend much consideration be given to this subject.

Funerals and Services

There are numerous types of funerals and services to say your final goodbyes to your baby. Discussing all of your options with a kind and sympathetic funeral director can help you make certain that you are not making decisions that you will regret later. Express all of your concerns and questions.

During the healing process, it is often beneficial to have a memorial service of some kind whether you have buried or cremated your baby. Do not feel rushed into having a service for your baby: it is never too late to memorialize him/her. The memorial service can be directed by your clergyman, a staff member from the funeral home or even a friend or family member.

Please include siblings in the funeral or memorial service. Encourage siblings to draw a picture or to write a letter and allow them to have it buried with their sibling. Or offer them an opportunity to speak, or read a letter or a poem to their brother or sister at the memorial service. Older siblings may wish to act as a pall bearer for the funeral. By including siblings in the service, it will grant them the realization of the death of the baby and also give them special memories they will carry with them throughout their lifetime.