



Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management

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 June 2011



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 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 be able 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 choices and the options available, however remember that further help is also available through your Charter member, funeral director and hospital patient affairs officer.

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.

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.

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 hospital¹ so that you are aware of the date and time of the funeral. In most hospitals 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.

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.

¹ Titles may vary between hospitals. Bereavement Officer, Patient Affairs Officer may be in use.

(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).

(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.

If you choose cremation you should be informed that there might not be any ashes resulting from the cremation (whether this be a shared or private cremation). If you choose a shared cremation this information should be relayed to you by the patient affairs officer at the hospital or by your funeral director if you are arranging a private cremation.

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. Where ashes are recovered from a shared cremation these will 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. 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 shared² grave for the burial of your baby (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.
- (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 arrange a memorial for your baby at the crematorium
- (h) 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.

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.

² 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' all communications with parents and in all documents (as in this document).

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) A memorial facility should be provided within a children's section for parents that choose shared burial.
- (f) Cease to use old individual public graves for shared/hospital burials. These old graves are often in less well maintained areas that can appear bleak and unfriendly.
- (g) A specific Children's Garden of Remembrance area should be developed within the crematorium garden of remembrance where suitable memorial facilities should be provided.
- (h) 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".
- (i) 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.
- (j) Where ashes are recovered from a shared cremation these 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

Reproduced with the kind permission of Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity

Shared graves – Sands position statement May 2010

When a baby dies at any stage of pregnancy or shortly after birth, it is common practice for Trusts and Health Boards to offer to arrange a funeral service, followed by burial or cremation.

Some Trusts and Health Boards that offer burial, use shared graves. This is particularly likely in areas of the UK where burial ground is scarce and burial costs are high.

Sands strongly believes that burial must continue to be an option for all parents. Wherever possible each baby should be buried in a single grave. However, if the cost of single graves is prohibitive, then shared graves must remain an option so that Trusts and Health Boards can continue to offer burial.

Shared graves must always be 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, covered with a strong polypropylene cover that is padlocked to the frame.)

Parents whose baby has died are extremely shocked and grief-stricken. It is therefore essential that they receive clear and sensitive explanations of all their options. They should also be informed about what each option involves. In addition parents should be given written information about the choices they can make. They can then decide if they would like the hospital to organise their baby's funeral, or if they would prefer to arrange it themselves.

Some parents who want the hospital to arrange the funeral may, for religious, cultural or personal reasons choose burial. If the grave is to be shared with other babies, parents should always be told this in advance. 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 reinstated.

Parents should also be informed in advance of any restrictions there may be. For example, that they may not be allowed to place any kind of memorial on a shared grave and that they will not (in most cases) be able to move their baby's body to another location at a later date should they wish to. This information should also be included in writing for all parents.

Some parents find the idea of a shared grave upsetting. Others find it comforting to know that their baby will not be alone.

It is paramount that babies' bodies and remains are always handled with respect and that parents wishes are always respected.

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