



Do people bring their deceased babies home?

Information and resources for bereaved parents about the option to bring your stillborn or deceased baby home.

Yes, bringing our stillborn or deceased babies home is not a new practice at all. Different cultures and ethnicities around the world have taken care of their dead loved ones for centuries and have predominantly provided that care in their homes or in a specially designated place within their living environment (a special house or area).

Many third world countries continue to take care of the deceased loved ones because it is all they have ever done and for some there may be no alternative. In countries like the Philippines, it is usual for people (predominantly in rural areas) to have their loved ones at home, as well as in China, India, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Tibet.

In first world countries we also bring our deceased loved ones home but it is not as common. Families in Ireland, England, the United States, Canada, and Australia have cared for their deceased babies and children at home for decades but it is only a minority of people who choose to undertake the practice. Those who choose to bring their deceased home make that choice largely because of religious or ethnic traditions and rituals.

One country in which it is very common for bereaved families to bring their babies home is New Zealand. In New Zealand it is common to bring our deceased loved ones home from the hospital for a day or two prior to the funeral. This is due to the impact of the indigenous people of New Zealand, the Māori, on our mainstream culture. New Zealand was colonized by the British in the 1800's but the one element of the Māori culture that has remained the same over the decades is the Tangihanga or death ritual.

Maori death rituals ensure that the deceased person is never left alone and is cared for by the extended family. Family and mourners stay with the deceased at a marae (a communal and/or sacred place that serves social and religious purposes), usually for three days with burial on the third day. New Zealand's mainstream culture has adopted aspects of Māori death practices, with many families of all ethnicities bringing their deceased loved ones home for a short time prior to a service or funeral.

In New Zealand, parents are routinely asked in hospital whether they wish to take their deceased baby home and whilst there are no statistics collected on the practice, anecdotal evidence suggests over 50% of bereaved families do bring their baby home. For some bereaved families in New Zealand, the concept is still a foreign one and they may choose not to bring baby home. The most important thing is that they are told they can and they choose whether or not they will do so as parents of their baby - the choice is not made for them.



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