



# How can professionals be helpful?

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

As a health professional or funeral director, you're in a very unique and powerful position when a baby dies. How you respond and the options you offer parents can make all the difference in their experience of their baby's death, the memories they make around the death, and the tone that is set for their grief journey. The following tips will help to ensure that your impact is a positive one for the bereaved families you work with.

## **Educate yourself about the options for bereaved parents.**

As a professional concerned with providing physical and emotional care to bereaved parents and their families, it's important that you are aware of all of the options available to bereaved parents, including the legislation in your country or state, and any policies in your organization. You can also help your organization to become involved in shaping organizational policies that are anti-oppressive.

## **Don't decide what's best for the parents. Let them decide.**

Let the parents know that seeing and/or holding and/or bringing their baby home and/or preparing a home funeral are all options available to them. Let them know that there's no "right way" to respond to the death of their child, and there is no conclusive research saying that any way is better. What matters is that they make the decisions that feel right for them. Often it's the simple act of beginning to exercise agency that can be helpful to bereaved parents in setting the tone for their grieving journey. The decisions they make may be less important.

## **Don't rush families.**

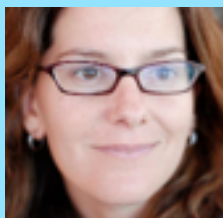
Give parents a few opportunities and some time to consider their options and make their decisions. Offer to take photos for the parents to keep so that they can choose whether to look at them at a later stage, or to let them look at photos of their baby before deciding whether they wish to see, hold or bring their baby home. Be as flexible as you can in the different options you offer.

## **Let parents know that they can change their minds.**

Until their baby is buried or cremated, there is usually the opportunity for parents to be able to change their minds. Let parents know that it's okay if they first say they don't want to see or hold their baby and then later change their minds and wish to see, hold or bring home their baby.

## **Have a non-anxious presence.**

Parents are sometimes very afraid of seeing and holding their baby, because they don't know what their baby will look like, they've may have never seen a baby of that gestation age, their baby may have fetal anomalies which will make their baby look different, and they're often shocked and fearful in general in their early grief. How you relate to the baby will often set the tone for the parents. Be calm, confident and natural in the way you speak about or handle their baby, even if the way their baby looks is unusual or a little upsetting to you. If you seem anxious, scared, uncomfortable or judgmental about them seeing and/ or holding their baby, they may pick up on that and feel anxious, afraid, self-conscious or ashamed of seeing and/ or holding their baby.



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For more answers to your questions about bringing stillborn and deceased babies home, go to <http://whenyourbabydies.com/q/>