



After pregnancy interruption for medical reasons

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

Between two and four percent of pregnant women will receive a prenatal diagnosis that requires them to make a decision about a potential termination because of a poor prognosis for the baby's health or the mother's health. Women who find out that their unborn child may have a serious or life-threatening condition may experience intense shock. The decision-making stage can be excruciating and the grief heartbreaking. What should have been one of the happiest moments of a parents' life turns into a shattered dream. Women in who choose to interrupt their pregnancy describe feelings of guilt and shame. They say that they often feel misunderstood about how much they wanted and loved their child.

"Because we terminated the pregnancy, not many people asked us how we coped. They assumed that terminating our baby was a 'choice' and assumed we would feel relieved rather than bereaved for our lost child. We lost many friends."

(Jane, prenatal diagnosis of Anencephaly)

The birth of a child is an intense experience and whether a baby lives for an hour, a day, or a lifetime, parents expect the birth of their child to be unique and special. Unfortunately, the birth of a child following an adverse prenatal diagnosis is complex, but bringing your baby home can still be an option. Bringing a baby home, with the support of health professionals, friends and relatives, can provide families with the celebration and comfort they wish for.

What would need to be considered in making the decision to take a baby home after an interruption of pregnancy?

Bringing deceased babies home is not a way to 'pretend' that the baby is alive. Instead it can be a way to prepare families for saying their goodbyes. A timeframe should be discussed and organised before going home. The decision to take a deceased baby home can sound frightening or on the other hand might really appeal to the bereaved parents. Families' reactions can vary widely.

Some of the questions to consider might be:

1. How many weeks gestation is the mother? Babies who are born early may be more fragile, look different from a full term baby or not be considered a baby by the family members.
2. What are the legal requirements in the country or state the family resides in? In order to bring a baby home, the parent/s would need to enquire about the legal aspects of interruptions of pregnancy and the release of bodies.
3. What is the mother's mental and physical health like? In order to have a positive experience of bringing a baby home at any gestational age, a mother needs to be in a healthy state both physically and emotionally following an interruption of pregnancy.
4. What are the family's support networks? Bringing a baby home requires good support systems in place and advance planning. Parents would need to contact their hospital social worker or counsellor and a funeral director and they would probably have to complete some legal paperwork before they could bring their deceased baby home.

Why would a parent want to bring a deceased baby home following an interruption of pregnancy?

Bereaved parents talk about the need to recognise the birth of their baby as a birth rather than a termination. Additionally, bringing a baby home allows a family to celebrate the birth of a wanted child, create memories, and allow siblings the time to process the birth and loss of the baby. Bringing the deceased baby home can assist with the alleviation of some of the feelings of guilt and shame which may come from not acknowledging their baby as a loved part of the family.

For many parents of young children, the option of bringing their deceased baby home is appealing. Indeed, children are not able to stay at a hospital for a long time. At home the family can enjoy this time as a family in a safe and private environment in a way that can rarely be done in the clinical environment of a hospital setting. At home, children may be allowed to interact with the baby and feel more at ease to ask questions.

Many things can be done more comfortably in the privacy and love of a home, such as skin-to-skin contact, dancing, photos and story telling. Some parents explained that they didn't feel they had the 'right' to all those things following an induction. While the culture and care of women following a pregnancy loss has greatly evolved in the last decades, many women continue to feel 'cheated' from many of the memory creation options available to them compared to those available to full term babies. Bringing a baby home can allow for parents to be creative in the creation of their precious memories.

Some of the trauma experienced by parents who interrupt their pregnancies because of medical reasons is around the lack of acknowledgement of the value of a baby born following an interruption of pregnancy for medical reasons. The opportunity to bring a baby home permits families to publicly recognise their baby as a human being, as their child, and as a celebration of life. Bringing their baby home can serve to challenge the assumption that a baby born following an interruption of pregnancy was unwanted. This may provide mothers and their families with positive and comforting experience following the heartbreaking choice of interrupting a pregnancy because of poor prenatal diagnosis.

There are many reasons why a mother and her family may choose to bring a baby home. They may include practical, emotional and spiritual reasons. But there are also parents who may not wish to see, hold or bring their baby home after an interruption of pregnancy following a prenatal diagnosis. There is no right or wrong choice and parents should feel that, no matter their choice, their baby was wanted and loved.

www.PDSAustralia.org offers support to parents who have received an adverse prenatal diagnosis.



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