PRACTICAL RESOURCES

Making Memories

A practical guide to creating memories during and after baby loss.



FELIX'S FLAME CIC

A NOTE BEFORE WE BEGIN

There is no perfect way to remember your baby. Some parents want every photograph, every tiny detail and every keepsake they can possibly have. Some aren't ready to look at photographs for months. Some want to hold their baby; others don't feel able to. Some families have a memory box overflowing with things. Others have one photograph, a scan, a hospital bracelet, or simply the memories they carry inside them.

None of these is more or less loving.

You don't have to make every memory. But you deserve to know what is possible, so that you can make the choices that feel right for you. This is what I hope this guide will help with.

TIME WITH YOUR BABY

If you have time with your baby
There is no script for the time you spend together. You don't have to know what to say or what to do.
You might hold your baby. Talk to them. Tell them their name. Kiss them. Sing to them. Read to them. Dress them. Wrap them in a blanket. Sit beside them. Introduce them to someone they would have known.

Or you might simply be there. Doing nothing at all can still be time together.

You might want to ask about:

- Holding your baby or having skin to skin contact, where appropriate.
- Washing or bathing your baby.
- Dressing your baby and choosing what they wear.
- Spending uninterrupted time together.
- Having your partner spend time with your baby.
- Introducing your baby to grandparents, siblings or other important people.
- A naming, blessing or other ceremony.
- Reading, singing or playing music.
- Having a special object, photograph or letter with your baby.

Things you may not know you can ask to keep

In the shock of losing a baby, it can be almost impossible to think of questions. Some families only discover later that certain small things could have been kept.

What is possible varies depending on your circumstances and the service caring for you, so ask rather than assuming.

- Handprints and footprints.
- Clay or 3D impressions of hands or feet, where available.
- A lock of hair, where possible.
- Your baby's name band or identification band.
- Their cot card or name card.
- The cord clamp, where appropriate.
- A record of your baby's measurements, such as weight and length.
- Your baby's clothing, hat or blanket.
- A teddy or other item that was with your baby.
- A letter, card, photograph or drawing to keep or leave with your baby.
- Any special keepsake made by the hospital or bereavement service.

If you aren't ready to take things home:
You may not know what you will want in the future. If you cannot face taking photographs or keepsakes home, ask whether they can be stored safely for you and how you can access them later.

Photographs: not just a photograph of your baby:
Photographs can feel complicated. You may desperately want them, or the thought of seeing them may feel unbearable.
If you're unsure, you do not necessarily have to make an all or nothing decision. You could ask someone you trust to take photographs and keep them safely for you. You can decide later whether you want to see them.

- You might want photographs of:
- Your baby's whole body.
- Their face and tiny details such as hands, feet, fingers, toes or hair.
- Your baby's name alongside them.
- Your baby wrapped in their blanket.
- You holding your baby.
- Your partner holding your baby.
- Skin to skin contact.
- You dressing or caring for your baby.
- Grandparents or other family members with your baby.
- Siblings with their brother or sister.
- Two babies together if you have experienced the loss of a twin or multiple.
- A hand or foot resting in yours.
- The cot, room, blanket or other details surrounding your time together.
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You can also ask whether professional remembrance photography is available. Remember My Baby provides remembrance photography through trained volunteer photographers in the UK, subject to their service arrangements.

Don’t forget the senses:
Memories aren't only photographs and objects. Sometimes it is a smell, a song, the feel of a blanket, the sound of a voice or a tiny physical detail that stays with you. Here’s some other ideas you could try:

- Notice your baby's scent if you feel able to.
- Choose a song to play or sing to your baby.
- Read a favourite children's book or story.
- Talk to your baby and tell them about themselves and their family.
- Record your voice reading, singing or talking if that feels meaningful.
- Keep a scent that reminds you of this time or of home, if you want to.
- Ask whether gentle aromatherapy or a familiar scent can be incorporated into your care if this is offered by the service.

Aromatherapy is not being suggested as a medical treatment. Essential oils should not be applied directly to a baby's skin or used around a baby without appropriate professional guidance. The idea is simply that scent can become part of a memory.

The little things can become the big things:

When everything feels enormous, it can be the smallest things that become precious later. Keep anything that may seem insignificant to some but huge to you. Those are the memories you will cherish.

- A tiny hat.
- A name band.
- A blanket.
- A lock of hair.
- A footprint.
- A photograph you almost didn't take.
- The clothes you chose.
- A card someone wrote.
- A note about something a midwife, nurse, doctor or loved one said about your baby.
- A drawing made by a sibling.

Give yourself permission to make memories your own way:

Memorymaking doesn't have to happen in hospital. You can make memories for your baby days, weeks, months and even years after if that feels right for you. You could try some of these ideas:

- Write your baby a letter.
- Keep a journal or write down everything you remember about meeting them.
- Make a playlist.
- Create a scrapbook or photo album.
- Have a piece of jewellery made.
- Create artwork from a photograph or another meaningful image.
- Press flowers from a significant day.
- Keep flowers from the funeral or remembrance service.
- Plant a tree, flower or bulb.
- Create a birthday or anniversary ritual.
- Light a particular candle each year.
- Visit somewhere meaningful.
- Make or keep something that represents your baby's place in your family.
- Create a memory box that you can continue adding to over the years.

Your baby's funeral can become part of their story:

If a funeral feels right for you and your family then the funeral or remembrance ceremony may become one of the places where memories are made too:

- Order of service.
- Readings, poems or letters.
- Cards and messages.
- Photographs.
- A guest book.
- A flower or pressed flower.
- A piece of music that was played.
- A candle or other symbolic item.

Siblings and family

Children can have their own ways of understanding and remembering a baby. There is no single right way to involve them.

Depending on their age and what feels appropriate, a sibling might:

- Choose a blanket, teddy, flower or other item.
- Make a drawing or card.
- Write or dictate a message.
- Choose a song.
- Have a photograph with their baby brother or sister.
- Help create a memory box.
- Take part in a remembrance ritual later.

You can ask someone else to remember for you:

You may be too shocked, exhausted, physically unwell or heartbroken to think about any of this. That does not mean you will never want the memories so it might feel useful to ask someone else to do that for you until you feel able to look back on them.

If you trust someone to help, you could ask them to:

- Take photographs.
- Write down details you may not be able to remember later.
- Collect cards and keepsakes.
- Keep photographs and digital files safely backed up.
- Bring a memory box together.
- Remember what was said or offered to you.

You don't have to be the person doing the memory making for those memories to belong to you.

You can change your mind:

You might say no because something feels too painful.

You might say yes and later wish you had said no.

You might not want photographs today and desperately want them six months from now.

Where possible, ask what choices can be revisited. Grief doesn't follow a timetable, and neither do your feelings about your memories.

If you feel like you missed your chance:

You haven't failed your baby.

Maybe nobody told you what was possible. Maybe you were frightened. Maybe you couldn't look. Maybe you were recovering from birth. Maybe everything happened too quickly. Maybe you were separated from your baby. Maybe you have one photograph and wish you had twenty. Maybe you have twenty photographs and can't bear to open them.

None of those things are evidence of how much you loved your baby.

You were surviving something no parent should have to survive. Your baby's life is not measured by the number of keepsakes you brought home, and your love does not need photographs, footprints or a memory box to make it real.

If you are still in hospital:

A gentle list of questions - you don't need to ask all of these. You can show this list to your partner, family member or member of staff if speaking feels too difficult:

- Can I spend more time with my baby?
- Can my partner spend time with the baby?
- Can my family or baby's siblings meet them?
- Can I take photographs, or can someone take them for me?
- Can I have handprints or footprints?
- Are casts or other impressions available?
- Can I have a lock of hair?
- Can I keep the name band or cot card?
- Can I keep the blanket or clothing?
- Can I keep the cord clamp, if appropriate?
- Can I have a record of my baby's measurements?
- Can I leave something with my baby?
- Can I have a naming, blessing or other ceremony?
- Can I read, sing or play music to my baby?
- If I don't want photographs or keepsakes now, can they be kept safely for me?
- Who can I contact if I want to ask questions later?

A memory box that grows with you:

A memory box does not have to be finished in one day. You can add to it whenever you want.
You might keep photographs, scans, letters, cards, funeral materials, hospital keepsakes, clothing, artwork, jewellery, birthday cards, flowers or other things that help you feel connected to your baby.
There may be years when you don't add anything. That's okay too.

If you don't know what you need right now:

You don't have to make memories today.
You don't have to make decisions today.
You don't have to turn your grief into a project.
Maybe today you only need to get through today.
Come back when you are ready.

Further support:

Felix's Flame can signpost you to organisations offering specialist baby-loss and bereavement support. Visit the Felix's Flame Baby Loss Support page for current organisations and specialist services.

For professional remembrance photography, Remember My Baby offers a UK remembrance photography service through trained volunteer photographers.

For bereavement support and information about memory boxes and remembering your baby, Tommy's provides specialist support for families affected by stillbirth and neonatal death.

For information about making memories with a baby who has died following neonatal care or premature birth, Bliss also provides specialist guidance.

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for families, for remembrance, for change