

FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS HOW YOU CAN HELP



SHROPSHIRE

Supporting anyone
affected by the death of a
baby

Helpline No: 07772 217439

www.shropshiresands.co.uk

Charity Registration No: 299679

DEATH HAS NO PLACE AT BIRTH

When a baby dies either before birth, (a termination, miscarriage or stillbirth) or shortly after (a neonatal death), everyone will be stunned by the event. The parents return from hospital with empty arms, facing the pain and stress of bereavement.

You may not have known the baby but to the parents their child was a real person, one they have come to know and love during the months of pregnancy. Although you can not see a gap in the family there is a real loss. "We are a family", said one mother, "that will never be complete". The sense of bereavement is as strong as with the death of an adult or older child, and more unexpected because death has no place birth.

THE PARENTS' FEELINGS

Both parents will have a mixture of feelings, which are a normal response to loss. These may include

SHOCK - because they expected birth and life but got death.

DISBELIEF - they may not be able to accept what has happened.

GUILT - either parent may feel that their baby died because of something they did, or did not do - especially if no medical cause is found.

ISOLATION - because no one seems to understand their situation.

JEALOUSY and BITTERNESS - because everyone else seems to be pregnant or wheeling a pram.

ANGER - against their partner, the GP, the hospital staff or God.

HOW CAN YOU HELP

* **DO** get in touch - don't assume that they would rather be alone.

* **DON'T** avoid the parents - don't avoid the situation

If you are a close friend or family member you may find some of the other Sands leaflets helpful.

You can get in touch by letter or phone to show your concern. Parents often keep sympathy cards with other reminders of their baby such as photographs and cot tags together in the 'Precious Memories' packs which Shropshire Sands provide.

If you are pregnant yourself, or have a small baby you may feel the bereaved parents would rather you didn't visit. Ring up and ask. They may not be ready to face you or your child, or they may be glad to see live healthy babies and be hurt if you keep you child from them.

Visit in person, let yourself be guided about what to do. Give both parents a chance to talk about their experience. They will usually not need much encouragement and it does help them.

Find out the baby's name and use it. It makes the baby seem more of a real person. If the parents have not given the baby a name, encourage them to do so.

Ask if they have a photograph of their baby. Don't be afraid to look at it - most of these babies look perfectly normal. If they have no photograph suggest they ask if the hospital has one. Most hospitals take a photograph of all stillborn babies and keep them till the parents want them.

Don't be embarrassed or feel guilty if they cry. You did not cause the tears, they were waiting to be shed. Don't be afraid to cry yourself, you are showing that you care.

Remember that both the mother and the father have lost a child. Encourage others to get in touch, and keep in touch yourself.

WHAT TO SAY

* Don't worry about saying the 'right' thing. One bereaved mother said "I found it easier to accept and forgive those who blundered than those who seemed not to care".

DO say that you are sorry.

DO be willing to talk about the baby.

DO remember that bereaved parents can be very sensitive to whatever you may say.

DO be willing to sit and listen.

DON'T say "you are lucky you have other children" or "You'll have another baby" as this can be hurtful. The parents are grieving for the baby that has died. Other children will not be a replacement.

DON'T try to blame anyone for the baby's death. Even if the parents do so.

DON'T say "I know how you feel" unless you have also lost a baby.

DON'T give advice about what they "should" do.

GRIEF GOES ON

Recovery from the death of a baby takes many months, even years. Parents should not be expected to 'get over it' in a few weeks, but friends and family may feel that there is little more they can do to help. Suggest that the parents get in touch with Shropshire Sands, so they can meet others whose baby has died.

Sands members can understand their needs and offer long term support and friendship. You can find the number at the end of this leaflet.

You should be ready to help parents when they need it for a long time to come. The next pregnancy can be a very nervous time, and a new baby will not put everything right - it may bring back a lot of sad memories. One mother said "Everyone is supportive and caring. They expect me still to be sad sometimes, which helps, because the pain doesn't go away just because you have another baby".

The parents may need extra sympathy and understanding on anniversaries and birthdays, at Christmas or other special occasions. They will never forget the child that died, but the sadness will grow less with time.

We would like to thank the many bereaved parents who helped to write this leaflet.