

# MAINLY FOR FATHERS



## SHROPSHIRE

Supporting anyone affected by the death of a baby

Helpline No: 07772 217439

[www.shropshiresands.co.uk](http://www.shropshiresands.co.uk)

Charity Registration No: 299679

When a baby dies, it often seems as if the attention is focused on the mother, and the father's loss can be overlooked. But you, as a bereaved father, have also lost a child, while at the same time you may be expected to hide the grief and be 'strong'.

### IMMEDIATE POINTS

When your baby has died, you may be the one who is expected to pass on the news. If a close friend or relative is willing to help with this, it may make things a bit easier for you.

"For me", said one father "one of the loneliest times was that first evening at home contacting relatives and friends to break the news".

The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital now make it possible for the father to stay with his partner in the 'family room' provided by Shropshire Sands when a baby has died. Most couples find it very helpful and comforting to be together at this time.

You may be asked to make decisions that are difficult - whether to allow a post-mortem on your baby, or if you want the hospital to arrange the funeral. These sorts of important decisions are best made together with your partner, and you will need time to think about them and discuss things. It can be very hard to think clearly in these circumstances and to be decisive about choices you never expected to make.

You may have to register the stillbirth, or birth and death (although if you are not married to the baby's mother there are complications). Perhaps someone - a friend or relative - will be willing to go with you, if you ask them.

Some other things that you may be expected to do - such as canceling an order for a pram - someone else could do for you.

### EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS

'After our baby was stillborn, friends and family would take me aside and ask how my wife was, never thinking to ask how I was'. Some people may not think that you have also 'lost a baby', others may be shy of asking a man about his feelings. You can always say "We're both very upset".

Back at work, the people you work with will probably not want to mention your baby's death and hope that you will carry on as normal. You may find this reassuring or you may find it hurtful that they seem not to care.

It may be a good idea to see if you can have a week or so off work, either compassionate leave or ask your G.P. to 'sign you off'. You may well not be in a fit state, like the father who said, "I drive a lot with my work, and often cry in the car - it's rather frightening.

Sadly, the loss of a baby puts an immense strain on a couple. When two people are grieving in different ways it can be very hard to help each other. It is very common to have problems in communicating, and then other problems quite often follow.

A common difficulty is that the husband or partner tries to be 'strong' to support his partner, or tries to be cheerful to help her, and she interprets this to mean that he doesn't care about the baby. If you don't usually talk about your feelings, perhaps it is difficult to start now, but you could say "I do mind about the baby dying but I just can't talk about it".

Another problem can happen when the father feels that his wife or girlfriend is asking too much of him. You may feel that she is asking you to be strong, reassuring and patient when you need help and comfort yourself. One woman admitted, looking back "He had to constantly reassure me of this continuing love, and hold me, and fetch me out of the depths of despair when it seemed like I was drowning".

It is very common for sexual difficulties to follow the death of a baby. Many men feel, like this father, that making love "was the most meaningful way, I could tell my wife how much I loved her", while their partner does not feel ready. It may be the other way around, and that the man does not want to make love and his partner does.

At a time of sorrow anyone may feel that it is 'not right' to be feeling pleasure. After any birth there may be nervousness about making love because of soreness and stitches. When a baby dies at birth either partner may have an extra mix of feelings, like feeling that the woman's body still 'belongs' to the baby, or that the act of intercourse was the start of the tragedy. If you seem to be having sexual problems, try talking together a bit about your feelings - the difficulties may come from normal grieving.

After your baby's death you may find yourself with lots of emotions and feelings. Perhaps you are someone who finds it hard to have a 'good cry' and feel that there is no 'acceptable' outlet for these feelings.

Your local Sands group or befriender can be a great help in supporting you. In the group support meetings you will be able to talk to another father who understands the stresses you are under and your reactions; this will be a help when you again meet your work-mates, friends and family who don't understand your loss.