

parents can at the same pace. It might also appear that the parents are getting on with their lives but they will certainly appreciate you remembering their baby and what happened. Remember this when parents return to the work environment.

Offer to accompany them to a Support Meeting or Service of Remembrance. Especially if it is a single parent. They might appreciate company when attending “couples” gatherings, visiting the baby’s grave, etc.

If you are pregnant yourself, or have a young baby, you might feel awkward and may not know what to do. Parents differ in their reactions to pregnancy and new babies. Maybe consider sending a card to say you are thinking of them but understand that it may be difficult for them to see you at the moment. They will appreciate your compassion and in time will be able to make contact again. This can be particularly difficult within families and the best way is to give some space and not put pressure on anyone either side of this situation.

Special occasions Christmas, Mother’s and Father’s day, Birthdays and Anniversaries. (see ISANDS Memory Collection for appropriate cards and booklets) are particularly hard. Send a note, or call with some flowers, just to say you’re thinking of them and remembering their son or daughter. It can mean a lot to parents if other family members or close friends visit the baby’s grave occasionally too.

- Post a patch on ISANDS Virtual Quilt in memory of their baby (see website).

All family gatherings, especially christenings, weddings, parties etc. will reinforce the ‘feelings of loss’ for parents. Be sensitive to this and always remember to ‘count’ the baby that died along with other family members (grandchildren etc.)

Support from family and friends can have a great influence on how parents cope with their bereavement. It is appreciated and remembered. Your understanding and warmth is important –even if you feel of little use.

### **They need you now-more than ever.**



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### *Memory Collection*



*Words tossed around to make a difference  
Hoping to choose the right combination  
The moment you knew of wonder  
The moment we knew of your wonder  
The moment we knew of your heartache  
His tiny feet, her sleeping face  
Their personality shaped in your dreams  
Pictures of what was or what might have been  
Days of remembering  
A Life- short  
A love -endless  
Mothers, Fathers, Sisters, Brothers  
Days of Birthdays and Heavens Days  
Of your friends and families  
Who came and shared - your love - our loss  
Thoughts captured  
In our willingness to follow your heart  
And wanting to share your pain  
Out of our meagre insight  
Our thoughts for your memories  
With love*

*Ron Smith-Murphy*



WHAT FAMILY & FRIENDS CAN DO



Birth and death so close together brings unimaginable sadness and pain. The great joy and expectation of the new arrival has turned into sadness and despair.

The death of a baby is one of the most painful experiences that any parent can have. They will need time to absorb what has happened.

Everyone is affected by this baby's death and our first instinct is to feel unsure of what to do or say. We would rather not think or talk about death. The worst thing you can do is to ignore the fact that a baby has died. Being unsupported by family and friends only further isolates parents in their grief. They might mistake your silence for insensitivity or disinterest. They feel very let down. This baby mattered to them and it helps to know he or she mattered to others as well.

Be honest with your own feelings- say how upset you are at the baby's death and use the baby's name when talking. This will allow them to open up to you. You do not have to do much to help grieving people – just being there, listening or sharing tears, can mean a lot.

### **When a baby dies you can show you care by doing the following -**

- Offer your condolences -simple words like “I am very sorry to hear about your baby (if you know the baby's name-use it).” It is such a sad time for you.”
- Use the baby's name.
- Send a card (see Memory Collection on [www.isands.ie](http://www.isands.ie))/flowers or a gift – mementos are important.
- Send a small posy or flowers for the baby's funeral.
- Send a donation to a charity in memory of their baby.
- Remember fathers grieve too and sometimes it is difficult for them to express their feelings.
- Allow children to share in the grief. Send them a card (see memory collection)
- Treat the death of a baby with the same respect and importance as the death of any close relative. This is the closest of relationships.
- Remember to acknowledge grandparents grief.
- Listen .....Their story will need to be told over and over again.
- Let parents express feelings like guilt and anger.

### **ON GOING SUPPORT**

Visit the hospital or home but check that this is okay first. Most parents need and want to talk about their baby. Ask parents what they called their son or daughter, if you don't know and use the baby's name. If you feel comfortable to see a photo of the baby, ask to see one. Parents may also want to be alone, please understand this but say you'll call again another time – and do!

Never minimise the loss of this baby even if the parents are young and are likely to have another child. This baby was special. No child can ever be replaced by another. They have lost a whole future of experiences with this baby – the first smile, first steps, starting school, teenage years, marriage. The parents pain will lessen but the sense of loss will last a lifetime.

Offer practical help – without interference. Provide a few hot meals or offer to baby-sit (if they have other children). Remember that mental and physical energy is severely reduced in the early stages of grief. Be sensitive when helping out – don't take over completely. Parents still need to feel in control of their lives. They might appreciate some help as it gives them a little time to themselves. Specific offers of help are much better than a vague “Let me know if I can do anything.”

Try to make time to ask them how they are coping and give them the opportunity to talk about their baby if they want to. Don't be surprised if parents repeat the story of their baby again and again, be patient and listen. Talking is therapeutic in helping them to work through their grief.

Allow the parents the freedom to handle their grief in their own way. Putting up photographs, making something special to remember the baby, wearing a locket etc. are normal ways of remembering. Do not pass judgement on the choices parents make in this regard – it was their baby.

The parents may have made preparations for the baby's arrival (e.g. clothes, Moses basket etc.). Sooner or later these may need to be put away. There is no right time to do this but it is important that the parents do it themselves in their own time.

Invite the parents out. It is amazing how many friends and relatives stop telephoning or including the bereaved parents in social occasions. If they do not feel like going out they will tell you, the choice is theirs. But do keep in touch.

### **AS TIME GOES BY**

There is no set time for how long grief lasts. Every individual is different. Be guided by parents. If they want to talk about the baby, listen. If they haven't said anything for some time, don't be afraid to ask them how they are.

One aspect of grief that is difficult for parents is that others move on more quickly than the parents can. This can sometimes suggest that everyone else appears to be forgetting what happened. This can be tough even though not intentional but maybe try to understand that because you can move on does not mean that the