

PLANNING YOUR CHILD'S SERVICE

Dear Parents,

The child you love has died. As your dreams and hopes come tumbling down around you, please accept our deepest sympathy. As this may be the first memorial or funeral service you have ever planned, we wish to offer you this information, designed to offer gentle suggestions and a starting point to help you plan your precious child's good-bye.

While this information is published by a SIDS organization, we feel you will find many of the suggestions appropriate regardless of the age or cause of death of your child.

GENERAL THOUGHTS & IDEAS: *Please consider...*

- Taking your time, don't be rushed.
- Planning a service that meets your needs; don't be restricted by what others may "think."
- Taking an active part as a couple in the planning of the service.
- Ways to meet your needs without draining you financially.
- That if you need financial help, the funeral director should direct you to proper agencies who can help, such as the TEARS Foundation (Applications usually need to be completed before the final arrangements are made).
- Delaying the service until both the mother and father can be present.
- Having someone stay with the parent when circumstances prevent them from attending the service or conducting a private service in the hospital room.
- If the situation applies, delaying the service to facilitate having twins buried.
- Asking about the necessary permits, if you have the service and/or burial in another city and want to transport the child yourself.
- That even if you have said you do not wish to see and/or hold your child, you can change your mind.
- A simple private graveside service and a public service at a later date when you have had more time.
- That if the child's body is to be buried at sea, given for scientific study or cremated, a service is still appropriate.

GENTLE SUGGESTIONS: *Please consider...*

- Requesting a lock of hair
- Requesting a hand print or foot print
- Having someone take photos of the floral arrangements
- That if an autopsy has been done, you may wish to use a bonnet or hat.

- Finding out if there are visitation hours or limitations as to when you can be with your child prior to the service.
- Burying the child with family pictures, a favorite toy or in favorite clothing (some families keep a duplicate for themselves).
- Having photos taken of the child alone or with family members.
- If your child was stillborn or very small, doll clothes tend to fit better.
- Building the casket yourself.
- That your own religion may have specific services designed for children or young people.
- Letting each sibling select something of the child's to place in the casket.
- Bathing and dressing your child, combing the hair, or wrapping the child in a blanket.
- Holding and rocking your child, if possible.
- Placing half of a friendship necklace on the child and keeping the other half.
- Writing a note or letter to your child and including it in the casket.
- In lieu of flowers: donations to an organization specific to the reason the child died, buying books for a school, establishing a scholarship in the child's name.
- A baptism, you can use your rings to hold tiny drops of water.
- If you are not pleased with the positioning or appearance (makeup/hairstyle) of your child, do ask for changes.

PLANNING THE SERVICE: *Please consider...*

- That if you do not have a clergy, a family member or friend direct the service.
- Having the baby placed in a cradle or bassinet and held by you during the visitation and/or service, if possible.
- Lighting a special candle which can then be re-lit at family functions to include the child presence.
- Having literature displayed which explains the cause of death, donation envelopes, or suggestions on how friends and family members can be of greatest support.
- How you will have your child called (name, nickname) during the service.
- Having a photograph of the child framed in flowers, a collage of pictures, using balloons instead of flowers, placing stuffed animals or special toys around the casket.
- Using Biblical passages, poetry or music selections appropriate to the child's age.
- Having a young child or teenage singer.
- Asking the pastor to have any children attending come forward and speak directly to their concerns.
- That even if your child's other siblings wish to attend the service, it is a good idea to have someone they feel comfortable with available in case they choose to or need to leave during the service.
- Saving a flower from the service and placing it in the baby's book.

- Designing the memorial folder yourself (picture of infant, favorite verse or scripture) or ask the funeral
- Director to see a catalog of designs and verses.
- Video or audio taping your child's service.
- That services do not have to be at the funeral home; other options are churches, private homes, parks, etc.
- Holding the casket during the service.
- Transporting the casket to the cemetery in your own vehicle or holding the casket in the family car rather than using the hearse.
- Carrying the child's casket to the gravesite.
- Remembering even if you said you did not want to see your child you can change your mind even up to the gravesite.
- That you don't need to worry if you are running late for the service; they'll wait for you.

GRAVESITE: *Please consider...*

- Burying the child with another deceased family member; having them share a gravesite can be comforting.
- That if you decide to cremate your child, you may wish to keep the ashes, scatter them, place them in a niche, or bury them in a cemetery or at home (but you need to ask about restrictions).
- Watching or having someone watch for you as the gravesite is closed.
- Asking if you can participate in the closing of the gravesite.
- That you don't have to buy a marker right away, but check about any restrictions for the burial site, i.e. matching others in area, height, width, in ground, upright, color, future planting of tree or flowers.
- Designing the headstone yourselves (wording poem, infant's picture, artwork); or many stonemasons have photo albums.
- Having a small ceremony to mark the placing of the marker.
- Having someone take a photo for you if you can't be there to see the gravesite after the stone has been set.

IN THE DAYS AND MONTHS THAT FOLLOW: *Have you considered...*

- Seeking out a peer or professional support group.
- Using the memorial/service card to announce your child's death to friends who may not have heard of the death.
- That there isn't any hurry in deciding what to do with the personal belongings of your child.
- Donating your child's toys to a hospital or church nursery.
- Asking for a copy of the autopsy report.
- Putting together a memory box to store pictures, cards, etc.
- Many religions have anniversary services or masses.

ADDITIONAL PLANNING RESOURCES

As you plan your service, you may want to look at other books designed for infant funerals. All are from Centering Corporation. 402-553-1200. If your funeral director doesn't have the resources, ask them to contact the publisher and order them by phone asking for overnight delivery.

- Comfort Us Lord, Our Baby Died – Norman Hagley, D. Min. A book of prayers. \$3.10
- Little Footprints – Dorothy Ferguson. A special memory book for infants who are miscarriage or stillborn. \$5.75.
- Making Loving Memories – Mary Lou Eddy and Linda Raydo. A gentle guide of suggestions. \$2.00.
- Planning a Precious Good-bye – Pregnancy and Infant Loss Center. Contains ideas for songs, scriptures, poems. \$3.50.

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