Death of a baby
Miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death (death of a newborn infant) can be a shattering event for anyone expecting a baby, and for their families. Everyone reacts and responds in different ways.

Reactions to the death of a baby

Some common grief reactions include:

- **Shock and disbelief** – many people report feeling numb and empty when they learn their baby has died. Normal grief reactions include shock, physical pain, and feelings of loss, anger, sadness and guilt.
- **Guilt, anger and blame** – these are normal reactions. For example, parents worry that something they did or didn’t do during the pregnancy caused the baby’s death.
- **Isolation** – friends and relatives may not know how to handle the situation and choose to avoid the grieving parents and their families, or they may lend support for a month or two before leaving them to cope alone.
- **Family conflict** – people may grieve in different, and sometimes conflicting, ways. Parents may notice behavioural changes in their other children, or impacts on other family members such as grandparents. Men and women may cope and express their feelings very differently, which can cause friction between couples. However, contrary to popular belief, most couples stay together after the death of a baby.
- **Lack of acknowledgment of loss** – if the parents’ loss is not recognised or acknowledged, they may feel very unsupported.

Miscarriage

Losing a baby by miscarriage can be particularly isolating. If the baby dies during the first trimester, it is possible that most people didn’t even know the woman was expecting a baby. In such cases a miscarriage can go unrecognised by others.

Other difficulties include:

- **The suddenness of the miscarriage** – it may be over before anyone has time to do anything to stop it.
- **Lack of ritual** – people who experience a miscarriage don’t have the opportunity to express their grief through rituals such as a funeral and burial.
- **Understanding** – often there is no medical explanation for a woman’s miscarriage. This can leave parents feeling guilty, anxious and fearful of another miscarriage.

Sudden unexpected death in infants (SUDI)

SUDI, including sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and fatal sleeping accidents, is the sudden and unexpected death of a baby. Concerns for grieving parents and
families include:

- Never knowing what caused their baby to die
- Guilt or self-blame that somehow they were responsible for the baby’s death
- The distress caused by police and coronial involvement
- The autopsy of their baby
- Others’ ignorance about SUDI may lead to parents not receiving support and even being blamed for the death of their child.

Coping with the death of a baby in the long term

In the months and years ahead, parents may experience painful reminders from expected and unexpected sources, including:

- The pregnancies and newborn babies of friends and relatives
- Packing away the layette (items bought for the baby such as a cot, pram and clothes) to be stored or given away
- Special dates – such as the child’s birthday, estimated due date or death anniversary
- Family occasions – such as Christmas, Mother’s Day or Father’s Day
- For months or even years, parents may note when their child was due to reach certain milestones, such as crawling, walking and talking
- Dealing with well-meaning questions such as “How many children do you have?” or “Was it a girl or a boy?” when meeting acquaintances who don’t know the baby has died
- Possibly being excessively vigilant or protective over other or later children
- Feeling anxiety and fear during subsequent pregnancies or when subsequent babies are asleep or sick.

Suggestions for grieving parents

Suggestions include:

- Acknowledge painful anniversaries – such as your child’s birthday – by creating your own rituals.
- Take your time with the difficult task of packing or giving away the layette. Dealing with the physical reminders of your expectations and hopes is an important and often painful part of grieving.
- Talk to your doctor and other healthcare professionals about the cause of your baby’s death. Reassure yourself that it wasn’t your fault.
- Contact bereavement services or self-help groups such as SIDS and Kids Victoria or Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Support (SANDS) for information, advice and support.
- Seek counselling.
- Remember that grief is an individual experience and different people grieve in different ways. If your significant relationships are suffering, seek counselling together.
- Get in touch with other bereaved parents. Organisations such as those listed above have trained parent supporters and offer support groups.

Subsequent pregnancies after the death of a baby

Many parents who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth choose to try again for a child. However, pregnancy can be an anxious and bewildering time until the health and survival of the new baby is assured.

Some reactions include:

- Emotionally reliving the death of your child
- Feeling that conceiving another child will ‘betray’ the child who has died
- Anxiety that the next baby will also die
- Lack of confidence in yourself as a competent parent because you couldn’t prevent the death of your baby.

Suggestions for subsequent pregnancies

Suggestions for any further pregnancies include:

- If your baby died from a genetic disorder, try to find out as much as you can about the disorder and seek genetic counselling.
- If you are pregnant again, starting a pregnancy diary may help you work through your thoughts and feelings, both positive and negative.
- Tell your doctor and other healthcare professionals about your feelings. Ask for and expect sensitive emotional support during subsequent pregnancies.

Where to get help

- **Red Nose** (formerly SIDS and Kids) Tel. (03) 8888 1600 or the 24-hour Bereavement Support Line Tel. 1300 308 307
- Your doctor
- **National Association for Loss and Grief (Vic)** (NALAG) Tel. (03) 9329 4003 or 1800 100 023 – for referral to an accredited grief counsellor
- **Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Support (SANDS)** Tel. 1300 672 672
- **Post and Antenatal Depression Association (PANDA)** Tel. 1300 726 306
- **Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement** Tel. (03) 9265 2100 or 1800 642 066

References

- Grief reactions associated with SIDS, GriefLink.
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More information

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Babies and toddlers basics

- Baby bath - bathing (video)
  Detailing on bathing from the Royal Women's Hospital.
- Baby bath - preparation and safety (video)
  Detailing on baby bathing from Royal Women's Hospital.
- Baby bath - skin care (video)
  Detail on baby skin care from Royal Women's Hospital.
- Childhood immunisation
  Being immunised from an early age helps protect your child against serious childhood infections.
- Children and health services
  There is a range of subsidised and free health services, including services for mental health and dental health, available for children in Victoria.
- Early support for a child with disabilities
  For children diagnosed with a disability, getting the support they need as early as possible will give them the best chance of minimising the long-term effects of the disability.
- Immunisation – deciding which vaccines you need
  Everyone's immunisation needs are different and are influence by your health, lifestyle, age and occupation.
- Maternal and child health services
  Your local maternal and child health service will be a great source of support after your baby is born.
- No Jab No Play
  No Jab No Play – from 1 January 2016, all parents/guardians seeking to enrol their child at an early childhood service in Victoria must provide evidence that the child is fully immunised for their age.
- Parenting services
  Parenting is one of the most important tasks we undertake but it doesn't always come naturally.

Newborn babies

- Baby bath - bathing (video)
  Detailing on bathing from the Royal Women's Hospital.
- Baby bath - preparation and safety (video)
  Detailing on baby bathing from Royal Women's Hospital.
- Baby bath - skin care (video)
  Detail on baby skin care from Royal Women's Hospital.
- Jaundice in babies
  If your baby is full-term and healthy, mild jaundice is nothing to worry about and will resolve by itself within a week or so.
- Newborn bloodspot screening

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Every newborn baby in Australia is offered a newborn bloodspot screening test to identify those at risk of rare, but serious, medical conditions.

- Phenylketonuria (PKU)
  PKU is an inherited disorder that prevents the normal breakdown of a protein found in some foods.

- Phototherapy at Home
  Jaundice is very common in newborns, so it’s nothing to be too worried about. Treatment is very easy and safe. It all happens using blue light from a special blanket that you wrap your baby in.

- Premature babies
  Sometimes premature labour can be delayed to increase a baby's chance of survival.

- Sudden unexpected death in infants (SUDI and SIDS)
  You can reduce your baby's risk of sudden unexpected death by providing a safe sleeping environment and avoiding tobacco smoke.

- The Maternal and Child Health phone app
  The Maternal & Child Health app (MCH) provides reliable maternal and child health (MCH) information that families can use every day.

**Feeding your baby**

- Asthma - pregnancy and breastfeeding
  Pregnant women with asthma need to continue to take their asthma medication as it is important to the health of both mother and baby that the mother's asthma is well managed.

- Baby care - weaning
  Be guided by your baby and let them set the pace when weaning and introducing solid foods.

- Bottle feeding - nutrition and safety
  Breastmilk or commercial infant formula is necessary for all babies less than 12 months.

- Breastfeeding
  Breastfeeding positioning and attachment come naturally to some babies and mothers, but many need time and practice to get it right.

- Breastfeeding and travel
  Breastmilk protects your baby from illness and infection, so it is the safest drink for your baby while travelling.

- Breastfeeding and work
  You can successfully combine breastfeeding with work if you have support from your employer, colleagues and family.

- Breastfeeding and your diet
  Breastfeeding women need to eat regularly and include a wide variety of healthy foods in their diet.

- Breastfeeding - dealing with mastitis
  Mastitis affects some breastfeeding women and may be caused by blocked milk ducts or a bacterial infection.

- Breastfeeding - dealing with nipple problems
  Your nipples may be sensitive in the first few days after birth, but nipple pain is not a normal part of breastfeeding.

- Breastfeeding - deciding when to stop
  It is up to you and your baby to decide when breastfeeding should stop.

- Breastfeeding - the first days
  Let your baby feed as much as they want in the first few days to help establish good breastfeeding patterns.

- Breastfeeding - when to start
  Breastfeeding within the first hour after birth allows your baby to behave instinctively and breastfeed with little intervention.

- Food for babies - tucker talk tips
  Before six months, breastmilk or formula is the only food and drink that your baby needs.

- Lactose intolerance
  Symptoms of lactose intolerance include bloating, gas, abdominal pain and diarrhoea.
Growth and development

- Child development (1) - newborn to three months
  Infants in the first eight weeks have no control over their movements and all their physical activity is involuntary or reflex.

- Child development (2) - three to six months
  Young babies still have a notion that the whole of life is happening inside themselves, and they are 'making it all happen'.

- Child development (3) - six to nine months
  Fun activities, such as shaking or banging objects, helps a baby understand they have an effect on the world.

- Child development (4) - nine to 12 months
  At nine months your baby is moving around by crawling or pulling along with their arms. Safety is very important now. Your baby is also 'talking' with recognisable sounds and may even say simple words.

- Child development (5) - one to two years
  Between the ages of one and two, your toddler understands they are a completely separate person from you.

- Child development (6) - two to three years
  Parents can be tricked into thinking our toddlers are more grown up than they really are.

- Children's feet and shoes
  A child learning to walk receives important sensory information from the soles of their feet, and shoes can make walking more difficult.

- Growth charts for children
  Babies and young children do not usually grow in a perfectly smooth way, but instead grow in 'bursts'.

- Teeth development in children
  Teething symptoms are common in children and can be managed without medications.

- The Maternal and Child Health phone app
  The Maternal & Child Health app (MCH) provides reliable maternal and child health (MCH) information that families can use every day.

- Toilet training
  When toilet training your toddler, praise every little success and remain calm about accidents.

Behaviour and learning

- 10 tips for managing sibling rivalry
  Teach your children to sort out minor differences themselves.

- 10 tips to raise an optimistic child
  Be a positive role model.

- Anxiety and fear in children
  You can help your child overcome anxiety by taking their fears seriously and encouraging them to talk about their feelings.

- Children and shyness
  If your child's shyness is especially debilitating, you may like to consider professional help from a counsellor or psychologist.

- Children and sibling rivalry
  Sibling rivalry is a common problem, particularly among children who are the same sex and close together in age.

- Discipline and children
  Disciplining your child means teaching them responsible behaviour and self-control.

- Dummies
  Dummy sucking should stop before school age to avoid teeth or mouth problems.

- Left-handedness
  If your child is naturally left-handed, don't try to force them to use their right hand.

- Tantrums
When a young child is having a tantrum, it is because the emotional (limbic system) part of the brain is dominating the child's behaviour.

- **Thumb and finger sucking**
  Finger or thumb sucking should stop before school age to avoid mouth problems.

- **Toddlers and finicky eating**
  If you restrict yourself to a narrow range of foods, your child will notice and copy your wariness.

- **Toddlers and mealtime manners**
  Some toddlers do most of their eating on the run, refusing to sit down at the table at all.

**Healthy eating**

- **Baby care - weaning**
  Be guided by your baby and let them set the pace when weaning and introducing solid foods.

- **Breakfast**
  Children who skip breakfast may lack sufficient vitamins and minerals including iron, calcium, zinc and vitamin B2.

- **Childcare and healthy eating**
  Childcare centres should provide healthy meals for your children.

- **Children's diet - fruit and vegetables**
  If you eat and enjoy fruit and vegetables every day, your child may eventually follow your lead.

- **Eating tips for babies**
  First foods for babies can be prepared easily and cheaply at home without salt, seasonings and sweeteners.

- **Eating tips for children (1) - older toddlers**
  Offer children the same foods as the family, with a variety of textures and flavours for balanced nutrition.

- **Eating tips for young toddlers**
  Children have a natural ability to sense when they are hungry and when they are full.

- **Soft drinks, juice and sweet drinks - children**
  Encourage children to drink and enjoy water. Sweet drinks such as juice, cordial and soft drinks may cause health problems for children if consumed in large amounts.

- **Toddlers and finicky eating**
  If you restrict yourself to a narrow range of foods, your child will notice and copy your wariness.

- **Toddlers and mealtime manners**
  Some toddlers do most of their eating on the run, refusing to sit down at the table at all.

**Care and wellbeing**

- **Baby bath - bathing (video)**
  Detailing on bathing from the Royal Women's Hospital.

- **Baby bath - preparation and safety (video)**
  Detailing on baby bathing from Royal Women's Hospital.

- **Baby bath - skin care (video)**
  Detail on baby skin care from Royal Women's Hospital.

- **Childhood immunisation**
  Being immunised from an early age helps protect your child against serious childhood infections.

- **Children and health services**
  There is a range of subsidised and free health services, including services for mental health and dental health, available for children in Victoria.

- **Child safety in the car**
Taking care to restrain children correctly while travelling in a car is the best way to prevent injuries.

- Dental checks for young children
  Children should have an oral health check by the time they turn two.

- Immunisations - vaccinations in Victoria, Australia (video)
  Vaccinations are encouraged for all individuals living in the state of Victoria, Australia. The immunisation program in Victoria may be different than other countries, and individuals who have moved.

- Melissa's story (video)
  Melissa shares her story of how her baby caught chickenpox at 5 weeks old.

- No Jab No Play
  No Jab No Play – from 1 January 2016, all parents/guardians seeking to enrol their child at an early childhood service in Victoria must provide evidence that the child is fully immunised for their age.

- Phototherapy at Home
  Jaundice is very common in newborns, so it’s nothing to be too worried about. Treatment is very easy and safe. It all happens using blue light from a special blanket that you wrap your baby in.

- The Maternal and Child Health phone app
  The Maternal & Child Health app (MCH) provides reliable maternal and child health (MCH) information that families can use every day.

- Travelling with children
  If your child is old enough, involve them in planning a trip so they can get excited about it.

Health conditions and complaints

- Asthma in childhood - triggers (video)
  Parents and children talk about some of the factors that can cause a child’s asthma to flare up.

- Back pain in children
  Children with back pain may grow into adults with chronic bad backs, so it is important to encourage sensible back care.

- Bedwetting
  Bedwetting is a problem for many children and punishing them for it will only add to their distress.

- Bronchiolitis
  Bronchiolitis is a common chest infection in babies under six months of age.

- Colic
  Caring for a crying baby with colic can be stressful, so take some time out to calm down.

- Constipation and children
  A healthy diet, plenty of fluids, exercise and regular toilet habits can help relieve constipation in children.

- Cradle cap
  Cradle cap is not contagious and it is not caused by poor hygiene or bad parenting.

- Croup
  Croup is a viral infection of the throat and windpipe that causes noisy breathing, a hoarse voice and a harsh, barking cough.

- Fever - children
  Fever is a way in which the body fights infection. A fever is not dangerous and does not always indicate a serious illness.

- Gastroenteritis in children
  Gastroenteritis or Gastro can be dangerous for very young babies. Gastro is common in young children and spreads easily. Gastro is a bowel infection which causes diarrhoea (runny or watery poo) and...

- Nappy rash
  Most babies get nappy rash at some stage, no matter how well they are cared for.

- Phototherapy at Home
Jaundice is very common in newborns, so it’s nothing to be too worried about. Treatment is very easy and safe. It all happens using blue light from a special blanket that you wrap your baby in. The...

- **Roseola infantum**
  Roseola is a mild viral infection with associated fever and rash that affects babies and young children.

**Sleep**

- **Baby care - moving from cot to bed**
  Some children are unsettled the first few nights in a 'big bed'. Try to be patient, loving and reassuring.

- **Sleep and your baby**
  Sleeping habits are learned, so try to set up a bedtime routine for your baby as soon as you can.

- **Sleep - children and naps**
  A child needs a daytime nap until they are around two and a half to three years of age.

- **Sleep - children and nightmares**
  Your child may have only a few scary dreams a year, or be troubled by nightmares much more often.

- **Sudden unexpected death in infants (SUDI and SIDS)**
  You can reduce your baby's risk of sudden unexpected death by providing a safe sleeping environment and avoiding tobacco smoke.

**Safety**

- **Animals and child safety**
  Children should always be closely supervised near animals and taught how to behave safely around pets.

- **Babies and safety**
  Most injuries to babies do not occur by chance - many are predictable and largely preventable.

- **Baby care - moving from cot to bed**
  Some children are unsettled the first few nights in a 'big bed'. Try to be patient, loving and reassuring.

- **Baby furniture - safety tips**
  Even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and recommendation, your child still needs close supervision.

- **Bicycle safety and children**
  As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety and become safer road and bicycle users.

- **Burns and scalds - children**
  Most hot tap water scald injuries to children happen in the bathroom.

- **Child safety and injury prevention**
  By making a few practical changes to your home, you can dramatically reduce the risk of injury to your child.

- **Child safety – at home**
  The best way to reduce the risk of injury to children is to remove a potentially dangerous item or add a safety product.

- **Child safety in the car**
  Taking care to restrain children correctly while travelling in a car is the best way to prevent injuries.

- **Family violence and children**
  Children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural problems.

- **Farm safety – children**
  Children who live on farms are at greater risk of injury and death than their parents or other farm workers.

- **Hot weather and child safety**
  Babies and children can quickly lose body fluids in hot weather, which can lead to dehydration.

- **Playgrounds and child safety**
Play environments can be safe and beneficial for your child. With proper planning, you can make sure your child gets plenty of playtime activity.

- **Poisoning and child safety**
  Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine.

- **Road and traffic safety for children**
  As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety, and become safer road users.

- **Sudden unexpected death in infants (SUDI and SIDS)**
  You can reduce your baby's risk of sudden unexpected death by providing a safe sleeping environment and avoiding tobacco smoke.

- **Water safety for children**
  Toddlers are most at risk of drowning because they are mobile and curious but don't understand the danger of water.

**Grief and trauma**

- **Child Protection Service**
  Child Protection provides child-centred, family-focused services to protect children from harm caused by abuse within the family.

- **Death of a baby**
  Miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death is a shattering event for those expecting a baby, and for their families. Grief, relationship stresses and anxiety about subsequent pregnancies are common in.

- **Sudden unexpected death in infants (SUDI and SIDS)**
  You can reduce your baby's risk of sudden unexpected death by providing a safe sleeping environment and avoiding tobacco smoke.

- **Trauma and children - newborns to two years**
  Babies and toddlers can be as affected by trauma as any other family member.

- **Trauma and children – tips for parents**
  Tell your child the facts about a distressing or frightening experience using language they can understand.

- **Trauma and children – two to five years**
  Preschoolers may not have the words but will show their distress at traumatic events through changes in behaviour and functioning.

**Related Information**

- **No Jab No Play**
  No Jab No Play – from 1 January 2016, all parents/guardians seeking to enrol their child at an early childhood service in Victoria must provide evidence that the child is fully immunised for their age.

- **A Healthy Start to School**
  A Healthy Start to School – a guide for parents of children in their foundation year of school.

- **Sudden unexpected death in infants (SUDI and SIDS)**
  You can reduce your baby's risk of sudden unexpected death by providing a safe sleeping environment and avoiding tobacco smoke.

- **Miscarriage**
  A range of feelings is normal after a miscarriage, and they often linger for some time.

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Death of a baby

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