

For many people, thinking about holidays, birthdays and other important occasions brings thoughts of joyous celebrations with family and friends. But for someone whose baby has died, imagining these same days often brings on feelings of dread rather than excitement. With careful planning and communication with your loved ones, it is possible to make these days meaningful. This pamphlet has been provided as a source of support for those who have experienced the death of a baby any time during pregnancy or in the first few months of life. The information has been gathered from bereaved parents, their family and friends, as well as professionals. Hopefully, it will give you some ideas for ways to creatively and lovingly honor your precious baby on special days that may otherwise seem bleak.

First of all, keep in mind that everything you have experienced since your baby died has seemed insurmountable, but somehow, you have managed to survive it all. It is understandable, even normal, to feel depressed when a significant day is looming. Careful planning will make it easier for you to face these days. Talk with your partner and your family and decide together the best ways to celebrate and honor your baby.



## Remembering your baby on special days...

For the first year, the milestone days—the date you found out you were pregnant, the day you found out if you were having a boy or a girl, your due date or your baby's birth/death day—may be some of the most difficult you will face. You might find comfort in planning something that can be done each year. If you have other children, ask them what they would like to do and try to incorporate some of their wishes as well. Following are some other ideas:

- Decide if you want to involve other family members or close friends, or if you would prefer a quiet day with your partner and other children. Even if you do plan a gathering with family and friends, make sure to take some time for yourself, too.
- Do something special for yourself. Take the day off work if possible and spend it with your partner or a good friend. Or, plan something to look forward to later.
- Give yourself permission to grieve and feel sad. Chances are, these days will always be a bit sad and/or difficult for you, even after many years. Think ahead about what you can do when the sad feelings overcome you.
- Doing something for others such as Random Acts of Kindness (RAKs) in memory of your baby can be very healing and can give you something to look forward to each year. Some parents ask their family and friends to perform RAKs in their baby's memory and then send them stories and/or photos of what they did.
- Release balloons with notes to your baby attached. Ask others to release a balloon wherever they are on that day and send you a photo. Make an album or online photo book each year to commemorate the day and the special people who took part in it.
- Choose a day, such as his or her birthday, and write a letter each year.

- Burn a CD of songs that have either been helpful to you or are meaningful in some way and give them to friends and family.
- Make a donation to a favorite charity in your baby's name. Some parents ask family and friends to do the same thing.
- Go outdoors, either to a place you love or discover a new retreat. For some parents, being in nature helps them feel close to their baby. Write your baby's name on a rock or other surface and take a photo.
- Plant a memorial garden in your yard, and add a new plant or ornament each year.
- Plant a tree in a park or other public place. Photograph it each year on the same day.



Know that some of your feelings may change over time, and you may not always wish to recognize each significant day in the way you do in the beginning. Also, keep in mind that in the first year, many of your family and friends may wish to participate and do things to commemorate your baby, yet that support may gradually taper off as years pass. They may not know the best ways to support you as time goes on, and it is okay to ask for what you would like them to do for you.

## Holidays...

The holiday season can be most unwelcome by bereaved parents. Many of the celebrations of the fall and winter seasons revolve around children, and when your baby has died, you may wish you could just skip this time of year completely. As this is not always possible, it is up to you to decide how you want to spend the holidays. Even in the best of circumstances, holidays can be stressful, and they may become even more so when you are grieving and missing your baby. Following are some suggestions that may help:

- Discuss it with your partner and only commit to activities and events that you really want to participate in.
- Be firm, and do not feel guilty about the choices you make.
- If being surrounded by your family and friends will be comforting to you, then join in celebrations, even on a limited basis if you need to.
- If you would rather be alone, that is okay, too. Some bereaved parents like to take a trip alone, especially the first holiday season.
- Once you and your partner have decided what you will and will not be doing, let your family and friends know. Some parents find it helpful to write a letter.
- To stay away from the hustle and bustle and crowds, do most of your shopping early or shop on-line.
- Do something to pamper yourself each day. Spend some quiet time taking a bubble bath, having a cup of tea or writing in a journal--reflecting on the little things you are thankful for.
- Do something special for someone who has been especially kind to you.
- Attend a holiday memorial service. Many pregnancy loss support groups plan such events. If you do not have a support group in your area, call a local hospital or funeral home as they often are aware of such events.

- In this season of gift-giving, take some time when your home is quiet to reflect on the precious gifts your baby gave you. Write them in a gratitude journal.
- Start a tradition of buying or making an ornament each year. If you have other children, ask them if they would like to help, or maybe make their own. Some people purchase a small tree where they place the ornaments they collect over the years. You may want to start an album using pictures of your baby's special ornaments along with stories about each one. This may become a treasured keepsake.
- Plant an evergreen tree in your yard, decorate it with lights, and take a picture of your family in front of the tree each year.
- Buy and donate a gift in your baby's name to a charity, women's shelter, or the hospital where your baby was born or your loss occurred.
- Write a letter each year and place it in a stocking that hangs with the rest of your family's stockings. If you have other children, they may want to do this each year as well.
- Choose a child from an Angel Tree that is the same age your baby would be each year and purchase a gift for that child.
- Purchase or make holiday cards that symbolize your baby to you, for instance, one with a teddy bear or angel, or purchase a small stamp to stamp next to your signature that symbolizes your baby.
- If you have a candle from your baby's memorial service, light it during family meals and other special times throughout the season. If you do not have such a candle, pick one out and make it your baby's candle.

Even though you may not feel up to celebrating holidays and other occasions, especially during the first year, it can be possible to find moments of joy and thankfulness. Whatever you choose to do, let your heart guide you, be creative and make it special for you and your family.



## Special Days

*A guide to finding opportunities to celebrate and honor the life of a baby following early pregnancy loss, stillbirth or infant death*