

When a Baby or Young Child You Care for Dies Suddenly and Unexpectedly

FEELINGS



If a baby or a child you care for has died, you are likely to experience the common feelings associated with grief and traumatic events.

Shock is natural and understandable. At times you might feel disconnected from the event, as if you are living through a bad dream. Other times you might feel nauseous, with physical symptoms such as an upset stomach or food avoidance.

It might be that you were the person who found the baby or child, the person who attempted resuscitation, the person who called the emergency services, or the person who tried to keep other children calm. If you were in sole charge, you might have had to do all the above alone.



PROCEDURES



After the sudden and unexpected death of a baby or child there will be organisational and legal procedures to follow. This might feel as though your professional conduct is being questioned. You might worry about what others may think, especially if you are caring for other children. Try to remember that these procedures are standard and not a reflection on you, your work, or the care you have given.



The police are always involved when a death is sudden and unexpected. They must interview you. This might feel especially difficult for you if you have not yet spoken with the baby's or the child's parents. Even when you feel certain you did everything in your power to care for the baby or child who died, you may feel intense feelings of worry and guilt. Please be assured that these feelings are natural and not an indication that you did anything wrong.



Ofsted requires childminders, nannies, nurseries, and other day-care providers to notify them of the death of a baby/child as soon as possible and within 14 days. You must also notify your local authority children's social care team and follow any action or advice they ask of you or your organisation.

More information and guidance from Ofsted can be found here:
[Report a serious childcare incident](#)

Your organisation may have its own procedures to follow. Your employer should support you through the process and might be able to provide you with additional wellbeing support. Please ask them if you are unsure.

If you are a PACEY member, you can access their information and advice here:
[Legal advice and support helplines | PACEY](#)

MOURNING THE BABY OR CHILD



Unlike a death that occurs in the family, the death of a baby or child in your care can bring additional challenges when it comes to mourning them. The traditional events that support us coming to terms with a death, such as attending the funeral, might not be accessible for you as a professional. You might feel as though you didn't have a chance to say goodbye and may feel less entitled to grieve /or misunderstood in your grief. We know that the love and care early years professionals feel for their little ones can be strong. One nursery owner told The Lullaby Trust:



"Many people asked why I was grieving as the child wasn't mine. Those comments really hurt and still do. I feel very isolated as there was no one that I could talk to who had been through a similar experience. I wouldn't want anyone else to feel the pain and isolation I felt nearly ten years ago. There is a need to talk to someone who understands."



Additionally, you might feel as though your other relationships have changed. You might no longer see the child's family or feel like you want to withdraw from other parents and carers. Often, avoiding something can intensify our feelings of worry. It is most likely that the people around you will feel concerned for you, after your experience. Try to imagine speaking to yourself as you would a good friend.

MANAGING FINANCES

It might be that following a bereavement in the workplace, your financial situation has changed. Citizen Advice has a handy tool that can help you take stock and budget: [Work out your budget - Citizens Advice](#)

If you are struggling to pay your bills, you could be eligible for support reducing your payments or extending the time you need to pay:
[Get help if you're struggling to pay your bills - Citizens Advice](#)

LIVING AFTER LOSS

You might experience many emotions in the days, weeks, and months following the death of a baby or child in your care. You might feel anxious or worried about your return to work and feel particularly worried that the same thing might happen again. Here is a list of things that you can do to care for your wellbeing during this sad time:

- Talk to your employer about your worries and concerns, it might be that they can plan a gradual return to work or duties. Perhaps you would feel more confident working with a different age group or developmental stage.
- Ask for help from colleagues, friends, and family members when you need it. Speak to them about your feelings as they arise.
- Know that your performance at work might vary. Grief and trauma can impact the way we process and retain information. This might feel more apparent some days rather than others.



- If intense feelings persist, speak to your GP or a counsellor.
- Try to stick to your normal routines as much as possible. If you are having time away from work, ensure you still wake up, eat, and go to bed at roughly the same time as you did before.
- Eat nutritious food. This reduces the stress on your gut from processed food and can help you to feel more settled internally.
- Exercise regularly. Bonus points if you can do so in nature. You will be resetting your parasympathetic nervous system, helping you to feel calmer, and sleep better during the night.
- Try mindful activities such as yoga, artwork, or keeping a journal.
- Plan for special days, know that these can bring complex emotions, and be gentle with yourself if you feel unexpectedly low. Take those low points one minute at a time, as they will pass.
- When you are ready, find your own way to say goodbye. This might be completing an activity in their memory, lighting a candle, allowing a leaf to float away down a river or stream, or watching fluffy dandelion seeds float away on the breeze when you say their name.
- Avoid major life decisions for a while, like changing your place of employment, until your emotions have settled.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

If you would like to talk to someone understanding, you can call our Bereavement Support Helpline on 0808 802 6868 or emailsupport@lullabytrust.org.uk. Our helpline is open 10am-2pm Mondays to Fridays and 6pm-10pm on weekends and public holidays.

If you are a PACEY member, you can access Counselling support: [Legal advice and support helplines | PACEY](#)

