

Sands briefing for general debate on baby loss

House of Commons, Main Chamber, 13 October 2025

Introduction

Every day in the UK around 13 babies die shortly before, during or soon after birth. It is estimated that 1 in 6 pregnancies end in miscarriage. The trauma of baby loss can last a lifetime.

Parents' memories of the care they received at that moment will stay with them forever. Whilst we can't turn back the clock, better care can help parents and families navigate their bereavement journey. While poor care could add to the trauma of loss increasing the risk of bereaved parents developing mental health conditions.

It is essential that all bereaved parents can access high-quality bereavement care, this includes ensuring signposting and referral for specialist bereavement support or mental health care if needed.

Bereavement Care

Not all bereaved parents in the UK have the same access to high-quality bereavement care after pregnancy or baby loss. Where someone lives and their background can affect their chances of getting the compassionate care they need.

The [National Bereavement Care Pathway \(NBCP\)](#) for pregnancy and baby loss seeks to improve the quality and consistency of bereavement care received by parents after pregnancy loss or the death of a baby.

This includes ensuring families:

- receive care from staff trained in bereavement
- have access to suitable bereavement spaces
- are given the opportunity to make memories with their baby
- and referred, when necessary, for additional support.

[The Sands 2023 survey of bereaved parents care](#), highlighted the impact of good bereavement care:

"The care we received was outstanding. The staff were so kind and respectful. They made what was an awful time feel peaceful. One of the main things the midwives did was refer to our baby by his name; they talked to him and showed him love and respect."

Mother of a baby stillborn at 40 weeks

In England, the bereavement care standards set out in the NBCP have now been adopted by all NHS Trusts providing maternity care. However, the voluntary adoption and lack of ring-fenced support for implementation have led to significant variation.

Bereavement care training is not available to staff across the range of healthcare professionals who come in to contact with families experiencing pregnancy loss or the death of a baby including A&E staff, paramedics and healthcare assistants. And too many staff are not given time in working hours to attend training¹.

All healthcare professionals who care for bereaved families must be able to access bereavement care training during work hours. This training is essential both for the families they care for as well as staff morale and retention, ensuring they have the confidence and skills they need to support bereaved families.

“Some [members of staff] came across that they were walking on eggshells. You lose your sense of control; you need someone to take charge. If you have got someone who is worried about doing the wrong thing and they feel if they are going to offend you and upset you, then you have to take that role”

Bereaved parent²

Sands recently asked bereaved parents to share their experiences of maternity, neonatal and bereavement care. Over 700 people responded, including examples of how high-quality bereavement care was invaluable, whilst poor care added to the trauma of loss. Key issues were a lack of seven day a week bereavement services and stretched bereavement staff.

“I have had no contact since leaving the hospital and no support. I was really struggling and it was my funeral director who shared where I could get support. He was so shocked that we hadn’t heard anything from the hospital.”

Bereaved Parent³

In Scotland, the government has mandated Health Boards to adopt and implement the [Scottish NBCP Standards](#). With work underway in Northern Ireland and Wales to adapt the standards. It is essential that throughout the UK, governments continue to support the roll-out and implementation of the NBCP to ensure all bereaved families receive high-quality bereavement care.

Questions to raise:

- **Does the Minister agree that all bereaved families must be able to access high-quality bereavement care following pregnancy loss or baby death?**
- **Will the government commit to monitoring the implementation of the National Bereavement Care Pathway for Pregnancy and Baby Loss by NHS Trusts?**

¹ [Briefing on access to bereavement care training for healthcare professionals across the UK, Sands, 2022](#)

² [Evaluation of the National Bereavement Care Pathway \(NBCP\), 2019](#)

³ [Evaluation of the National Bereavement Care Pathway \(NBCP\) Scotland, 2024](#)

- **What plans does the government have to ensure that all NHS staff who care for families following baby loss have the training they need?**
- **What action will the Minister take to ensure that all bereaved families receive compassionate care following pregnancy loss or the death of a baby?**

Mental Health Care

Good bereavement care is especially important as we know that bereaved parents are at significantly higher risk of developing mental health conditions and poor care at the time of the death of their baby can exacerbate their trauma.

Whilst all bereaved parents must be able to access high quality bereavement care, some will develop mental health conditions requiring input from specialist services. This is separate from bereavement care and must be provided by specialist mental health staff with the training and knowledge to support bereaved parents who have developed a psychological condition as a result of their loss.

There are currently significant differences in the mental health care bereaved parents can access depending on where they live. This is particularly true for bereaved fathers and partners, for whom specialist services are rarely commissioned. Referral criteria, including experience of pregnancy and baby loss and length of time since loss may also vary in different areas.

In July 2025, Sands published the [Lost in the System report](#) highlighting the experiences of almost 2,000 bereaved parents. **Over 80% felt they needed psychological support following baby loss.**

Despite the introduction of Maternal Mental Health Services in England, **only 50% of bereaved parents reported that they were able to access the support they felt they needed and only 17% did so through the NHS.**

When bereaved parents could access support through the NHS it was helpful, with 87% reporting it was at least “somewhat helpful”. However, only 54% of bereaved parents who received 6 weeks or less support found it helpful. Sadly, parents reported being informed this was due to funding constraints:

“The psychologist made it clear that our sessions would end after six weeks because there isn’t much funding.”

Bereaved mother whose baby died at 39 weeks gestation

Over 25% of bereaved parents reported paying for at least some support, driving inequalities and risking the long-term sustainability of access if financial circumstances change.

Governments across the UK must ensure that there are specialist psychological support pathways commissioned in every area, with access to NHS services open to all bereaved parents who feel they need support.

Questions to raise:

- **Will the Minister commit to evaluating maternal mental health services in England?**
- **What plans does the government have to ensure that fathers and partners who need it, can access psychological support following baby loss?**
- **The Sands *Lost in the System* report found evidence of inequality in access to specialist psychological support for bereaved parents, particularly for parents who experience a miscarriage or sudden unexpected death in infancy. What steps will the government take to ensure equal access to psychological support for all bereaved parents who need it?**

About Sands

Sands is the charity speaking up about pregnancy and baby loss, saving babies' lives and supporting bereaved families. As the UK's leading pregnancy and baby loss charity, we're creating a compassionate community, whose voices inspire change and turn understanding into action. Together, we are saving babies' lives and improving maternity safety and bereavement care through research, training and campaigning.

Please contact the Sands Public Affairs & Campaigns team at campaigns@sands.org.uk if you have any questions.