

Neonatal care: end of life conversations

Doctors can have a positive influence on how parents and families experience their care even if their baby dies.

Parents often replay every detail of what happened around their baby's death and in the following weeks. This information was created with parents to support doctors on the Neonatal Unit to support them when having conversations with parents about limiting life-sustaining treatment in the neonatal unit.

Good communication can't take away the pain parents and families feel but it can reduce the impact of trauma, both in the short and long term.

Team Wellbeing

The death of a baby can have a profound and stressful impact on the staff who cared for the baby and family.

It's important to remember your own wellbeing and consider that of your team. Make time for reflection and to debrief, focus on learning lessons and not blame. You and your team members may need support, be kind to yourself and your team and remember self-care.

Sands' helpline is for anyone affected by the death of a baby, including health care professionals.

Communicate Sensitively



Consider the setting

Consider the setting where you talk to families. Ensure the room is private, quiet and comfortable. Consider putting up a screen so equipment is out of sight, make tissues available and use a well-lit room.



Introduce yourself

Introduce yourself: "Hello, my name is..."



Use the baby's name



Ask the parents preference

Ask whether the parents would prefer to be called by their first names, or 'mum' and 'dad'



Speak gently and kindly, conveying compassion



Sit down, use eye contact, and do not rush



Express understanding

Express understanding for the enormity of the situation and your sympathy and regret. Say "I'm sorry"

Communicate Clearly



Take time

Take time to gather your thoughts and be well informed about all options available



Be gentle, clear and honest



Avoid too much medical terminology



Consider your language

Ensure that parents understand what is being presented to them



Be clear about next steps

Be clear about next steps for example what will happen once care is withdrawn



Listen carefully

Listen carefully to what parents say, and try to answer questions clearly and honestly

Support

t: 0808 164 3332

e: helpline@sands.org.uk

Download the app at

sands.org.uk/app

Enquiries

t: 0207 436 7940

e: info@sands.org.uk

sands.org.uk

