Sensitive and effective communication

Health care professionals 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.

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.

- 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

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

Support

t: 0808 164 3332

helpline@sands.org.uk

sands.org.uk/app

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Sands is produced in partnership with UCL EGA Institute for Women’s Health.