

Guidance for miscarriages that occur at home

This guidance note is intended to provide support and information to parents, healthcare professionals, and burial and cremation authorities, in circumstances where a miscarriage occurs at home with no medical practitioner or midwife present. The guidance expands upon previous recommendations made by Sands, the Miscarriage Association and the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM).

This guidance applies to babies that are miscarried prior to 24 weeks gestation and were born showing no sign of life.

Some parents who experience a miscarriage decide that they want to honour their baby's memory by arranging a burial or cremation. It is possible to have a funeral for a baby born at any stage or under any circumstances. However, the cemetery or crematorium where the burial or cremation is to take place will require confirmation (either a certificate or letter) that the miscarriage occurred at less than 24 weeks gestation. Therefore, parents will need to obtain a certificate or letter confirming that their loss occurred prior to 24 weeks gestation.

To support parents whose baby is born dead before 24 weeks, Sands has produced an example certificate in letter form that can be found at www.uk-sands.org/professionals/resources-for-health-professionals/forms-and-certificates.

The production of a certificate or letter is straightforward where a miscarriage occurs in hospital. An alternative approach to obtaining a certificate or letter is required when a miscarriage occurs at home without the presence of a medical practitioner or midwife.

Where a miscarriage occurs at home with no medical practitioner or midwife present, parent(s) can encounter difficulties in obtaining a certificate or letter which may exacerbate parents' distress at what is likely to be an extremely difficult time. If parents decide to arrange a burial or cremation for their baby, this can also pose a problem for the cemetery or crematorium who require confirmation that the miscarriage occurred at less than 24 weeks gestation.

It is advised that parents take their baby to the hospital or GP where they are registered and explain the circumstances. Parents can then request a certificate or letter from a medical practitioner giving their professional opinion that the miscarriage occurred prior to 24 weeks gestation and that there were no signs of life.

Parents should note that if their baby had shown signs of life, they should inform the hospital or GP as full registration will be required.

The certificate or letter can then be given to a funeral director or directly to the cemetery or crematorium if parents are making their own arrangements. The cemetery or crematorium will also require that parents complete a simple burial/cremation application form.

Burial and cremation authorities should accept the certificate or letter that is supplied by bereaved parents in order to proceed with burial or cremation.

The above guidance is compatible with:

Sands' position statement on the Disposal of Fetal Remains which is available at www.uk-sands.org/sites/default/files/Position%20statement%20Disposal%20of%20Fetal%20Remains_0.pdf

Guidance from the Miscarriage Association is available at www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

ICCM Guidance on the Sensitive Disposal of Fetal Remains and its Charter for the Bereaved can be found at www.iccm-uk.com