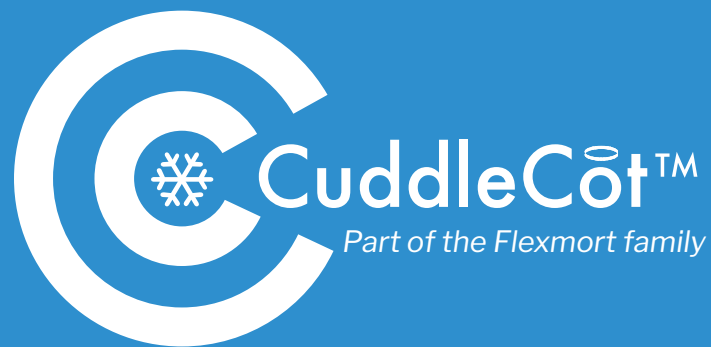




Supporting a family to take baby home after death

cuddlecot.com

Supporting a family to take their baby home after death

"All bereaved parents should receive information about the option of taking their baby home. A health professional should talk them through the practicalities involved and any emotional support offered. The parents' decision will be individual to them and must be supported and respected". (SANDS, 2015)



Families use the gift of time to create memories together

"Having the body of a loved one at home before the funeral is common practice in many countries and cultures. Parents who have a live baby are entrusted with the care of that baby. There is no reason not to entrust to bereaved parents the care of a baby who has died" (SANDS, 2014)



Introduction

Following the death of a baby, some parents decide to take their baby home from the hospital or hospice before the funeral for a short time. All bereaved parents should be offered the opportunity to take their baby's body home.

This isn't necessarily the right option for all families but for some it brings immense comfort. For a bereaved parent, taking your baby home provides you with the opportunity to spend time with them privately and in comforting, familiar surroundings.

Potential benefits for parents who want to take their baby home include:

- Spending time with their baby away from a clinical setting and an opportunity to say goodbye in the privacy of their own home.
- Time to introduce their baby to siblings, extended family and friends and to recognise the baby's place within the family.
- Greater opportunities to create precious memories with their baby.
- An opportunity to parent and care for their baby in the place they envisaged doing so.

Parents may also want to take their baby to a place away from the home that has special significance to them.

There is no legal reason why they should not do this apart from when a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) cannot be issued, and the death is being referred to the coroner or procurator fiscal.

They may be able to take their baby straight home from hospital with them, however if a postmortem is required or they have opted for this investigation, it is preferred that this takes place before they take their baby home. This ensures that the investigation happens as soon as possible, and that any information gained from the postmortem is accurate and as helpful as possible at identifying the cause of death.



Why should all parents be offered the opportunity to take their baby home?

After childbirth, parents are psychologically and biologically primed to be nurturing and attentive to their newborn. These hard-wired instincts do not disappear when a baby dies. When given the right support, bereaved parents can benefit from spending prolonged periods of time with their baby, and the desire to take their baby home is a natural expression of this postpartum love, care and devotion.

Yes, parents will experience profound sadness during the time they spend with their baby. But they would also experience profound sadness in the absence of their baby. Nestled in at home, they also get to experience contentment plus memories they'll always cherish. Being able to cry with their baby in their arms is also a comfort, which makes the letting go more gradual and is certainly less wrenching than surrendering the baby to a mortuary or funeral home.

Historically

You may have never heard of this practice, but it's a longstanding tradition in many parts of the world. Birth and death have always happened in the home until, just during the last century in certain parts of the world, hospitals became the place to go. But as more people return to traditional ways and choose to be at home during these momentous occasions, the idea of returning a body to the home, and even having the funeral there, is becoming more widely accepted again.

For bereaved parents who only have a short window of time to spend with a baby who died during pregnancy, birth, or infancy, this option makes a lot of sense. Spending time with the baby's body can offer several therapeutic benefits over the course of several days or longer.

Spending time with their baby at home allows parents to say hello before saying goodbye. Saying hello gives parents the opportunity to become acquainted with their baby, affirming this child's life and importance. It also reassures them about the normal aspects of their baby's appearance, creates memories of love, and grants opportunities to gather keepsakes and integrate the baby into their family, all of which can ease emotional suffering. It allows parents to express their love.

Continued...



Why should all parents be offered the opportunity to take their baby home? Continued

As parents express their love to their baby in the tangible ways that parents naturally do, they learn to become a special kind of parent to a special kind of baby. This enables them to develop their parental identity with this child, which facilitates mourning this child's death. Parents can benefit from examining the body, admiring adorable features, noticing family resemblances, bathing, dressing, sleeping with their little one, and doing whatever else they find meaningful.

Parents are given the 'Gift of Time'

Having this gift of time allows parents to find their way into doing what is most meaningful for them, including formal rituals and informal or spontaneous moments of ritual, and to revel in this time without feeling rushed and unsure.

Having this gift of time also allows parents to recover somewhat from the shock of their baby's death, a traumatic delivery, analgesia, medication or exhaustion, ensuring that their memories of this time aren't just a hazy fog.

Providing the special care their baby needs, parents can feel a sense of competence and authority, counteracting the failure and helplessness that parents typically feel when a baby dies.

They can say goodbye in their own time.

When parents set the pace for spending time with their baby, they get to gradually say their hellos and goodbyes and determine for themselves when to part with their baby's physical body.

Some parents report that they feel like they got to witness the soul's leave-taking, and that the experience was reassuring. Setting their own pace, rather than having the hospital staff, morgue, or funeral home determine it, also offers parents a sense of control, which can minimise regrets and avert the trauma of letting go too soon.

It allows family and friends the time and privacy to meet their baby.

Having their baby with them for an extended period enables parents to invite family and friends to meet and welcome their little one. This sharing can enable them to cultivate shared memories and surround themselves with support.



A parent's voice

"It was very beautiful having her body every day...I felt like that was a chance to be a mother, even though she was dead. You know, just to hold her".

Vanessa, Layla's Mummy

"No one bothers to tell grieving families their options. Our bedroom was where Thor was supposed to have slept with us, where I was supposed to have nursed him. Where we were supposed to have said hello.

This was when I understood: Thor was our baby. He did not belong to the hospital. He did not belong to the funeral home. He was ours".

Elizabeth and Mike, Thor's Mummy and Daddy

"The CuddleCot gave us time but time gave us so much more! I truly believe that having Dexter at home for 10 days gave us the opportunity to process and make rational choices about what we did. The support from the funeral home was a relationship I hadn't anticipated to be such an important and special one. The hand. Feet and face casts are something I'm so excited to get. Rosie got to be a big sister and got to love her brother before saying goodbye. Time is limited but a CuddleCot helps you make the most of it!" Emily - Dexter's Mum

"It was only after we said goodbye that I fully appreciated how vital the CuddleCot was for us. If we didn't have it then we would not have been able to create such precious memories. I am eternally grateful for the CuddleCot and I believe that it is vital for all bereaved families to have access to one." Mary Murray



Things to be aware of when supporting a family to take their baby home

When you embark on a sensitive discussion with the parents after their baby has died, it's important that you make them aware of all the options that are available to them regarding the care of their baby. They must feel fully informed and empowered to make a decision that is right for them.

Some parents may not realise that taking their baby home to spend time with them is an option. We have a responsibility to inform them of this and discuss the process of leaving the hospital and the practicalities to be aware of at home. Only after receiving all of this information, are they fully informed in order to make a decision.



National Perinatal Mortality Review Tool

Learning from Standardised Reviews When Babies Die

National Perinatal Mortality Review Tool
Fourth Annual Report - Tables of Findings



September 2022



MBRRACE

MBRRACE has made the question 'Were the parents offered to take their baby home?' a mandatory question as part of the PMRT process. This means that during the process of investigation following the death of a baby, the bereavement specialist or risk midwife at your trust needs to be able to evidence this conversation and confirm that the parents were offered the opportunity to take their baby home. The parents are included in this investigation process so will have access to this information.

Table 3.7: The most common issues identified with bereavement care* from Mar 2020 to Feb 2022

Issue group	Reviews Jan 2018 to Feb 2019	Reviews Mar 2021 to Feb 2022		
	Number and percentage of reviews N=2,322* n (%)	Number and percentage of reviews of late miscarriages and stillbirths N=2,810 n (%)	Number and percentage of reviews of neonatal deaths N=1,389 n (%)	Number and percentage of all reviews N=4,199 n (%)
Policy, support and practical help to take their baby home was not available	542 (24%)	567 (20%)	350 (25%)	917 (22%)
Inadequate documentation regarding taking the baby home	413 (18%)	394 (14%)	172 (12%)	566 (13%)



Responsibility for the baby's body

In the United Kingdom, when a baby dies, the parents are legally responsible for ensuring that the body is buried or cremated. The legal requirement for burial or cremation does not apply to babies who are miscarried before 24 weeks' gestation, although some parents may arrange burial or cremation for these babies. Some parents may also choose to delegate responsibility for the burial or cremation to the hospital if this option is offered.

In the United States, the legal responsibilities surrounding the burial or cremation of a baby vary by state law, and depend primarily on gestational age and whether the baby showed signs of life at birth. Please consult local state law for variations. A general overview:

If the Baby is Born Alive (Regardless of Gestational Age)

- Parents (or legal guardians) are typically responsible for arranging burial or cremation.
- A death certificate is issued, and standard funeral and burial laws apply.
- Families can choose a funeral home, cemetery, or crematorium, or in some cases may opt for hospital assistance or direct cremation.

If the Baby is Stillborn (Varies by State)

Most states define stillbirth as fetal death occurring after 20 weeks' gestation or weighing more than 350-500 grams. In these cases:

- A fetal death certificate may be required.
- Parents may be responsible for burial/cremation or can sometimes authorize the hospital to handle arrangements.
- In some states (like California or Texas), hospitals must offer the option of burial or cremation, and parents can opt in or out.

If the Loss Occurs Before 20 Weeks (Miscarriage)

- There is usually no legal requirement to bury or cremate the fetal remains.
- Some hospitals offer communal cremation, burial services, or allow parents to take the remains for private arrangements.
- Parental choice is key; state law does not generally impose requirements.



How do parent's take their baby home from a hospital or hospice?

In most hospital settings, parents can take their baby home with them directly from the ward on which they have been being cared for. For some hospitals, it may be that they have to take their baby home from the mortuary so that the mortuary team are involved in their care and have complete records of the baby's location.

If parents go home and later decide that they would like to bring their baby home, they can discuss arranging this with their bereavement specialist team or their funeral director depending on where their baby is being cared for at the time.

Before they leave the hospital, they may be asked to sign a form stating that they are taking their baby home, accepting responsibility for the care of their baby's body and will either be arranging their burial or cremation or will be bringing them back to the hospital. This option will depend on your individual hospital guidance around taking a baby home.

We would recommend providing a letter for the parents to take home with them confirming that their baby had died prior to leaving the hospital. This is used in the unlikely circumstances that they are involved in an accident or a police incident.

They can take their baby home themselves by car if they wish, or they may want to use a funeral director for this (they may charge for this service).

If they take their baby home themselves, they can carry him/her in their arms, use a Moses basket, a car seat or, if they prefer, a casket from a funeral director. Some authorities do advise that safety seats and belts are preferred to ensure that the baby is secure during the journey. If they want to take their baby home by taxi or minicab, they must check first that the driver is willing to transport their baby in these circumstances. **Public transport is not advisable.**





Who should be informed?

The hospital mortuary should be informed, and best practice is for the bereavement team to provide them with a copy of the signed form for the mortuary register. The woman's GP/doctor, community midwife/nurse and health visitor should be informed that they are taking their baby home in case they require any support. In most cases there is no need to inform the police or any other authorities if the death occurred in a hospital. Please check your local state laws.



Below is an example letter from SANDs:

Downloadable copy at cuddlecot.com/manuals

Name of hospital/ trust/ health board

Form for parents who take their baby's body home

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that (name(s) of parent(s))

of (address) _____

Who had a late miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death on (date) _____

have taken their baby from (name and address of hospital) _____

_____ Date _____

I / We, the parent(s), hereby take full responsibility for our baby whilst he /she is in our care. We will (tick as appropriate):

☐

return our baby to the hospital on (date) _____

☐

make our own funeral arrangements.

Parent(s) Name(s) (please print):

Signature _____ Signature _____

Name of staff member (please print) _____

Position (please print) _____

In case of need or concern please contact:

Staff member's name _____ Job Title _____

Department direct line _____ Signature _____

24-hour phone contact for support _____

© Sands 2014

Improving Bereavement Care Team



Care of a baby at home

It's good practice to prepare the family for how to best care for their baby at home. We would recommend providing this information to parents as they leave hospital with their baby:

Whilst a family is at home with their baby, there are no specific rules about what they can and cannot do; they should be encouraged to spend time together with their baby in a way that is best for them. If they decide to take their baby out of the home environment to a special place, and in order to prevent any distress or misunderstanding, they should be advised to carry the letter that was provided to them by the hospital



Safely caring for a baby at home

When at home, the room that baby is in will need to be kept as cool as possible and well ventilated. We recommend keeping windows closed whilst baby is at home, refrain from putting any heating on in the room and keep clothes and blankets to a minimum. The use of fans may be beneficial.

It's important to be aware of other children and consider the presence of pets within the home environment. We strongly advise parents take general safety precautions and ensure that baby is not left alone with any other children or animals.

How should a baby be cared for at home?

We would recommend baby is cared for using a CuddleCot whilst they are at home.



The CuddleCot:

- The CuddleCot is a small, compact unit that cools a baby using a water-based system rather than traditional refrigeration components. Water is circulated from the unit through a hose to a cooling pad, which maintains an optimal temperature when in contact with baby.
- The temperature controlled cooling pad is interchangeable to accommodate different baby sizes. A small pad is available for early gestation or premature babies, while a larger mat is ideal for babies over 24 weeks or neonates. Both are included as standard with the unit.
- There is no baby too small to use the CuddleCot. If parents wish to spend time with their baby, regardless of size, they should be offered a cooling device. It is important to inform parents that the appearance of a smaller gestation baby may change more quickly than that of a later gestation baby due to a smaller surface area.
- The CuddleCot is a portable device that can be used with any cot or basket and can also be placed on a bed, allowing parents to have their baby close to them. It is also suitable for home use if parents choose to take their baby home.
- The CuddleCot provides families with greater choice. The baby can be cooled while lying in a cot near the parents, or, thanks to the soft, flexible mat, the baby can also be swaddled and held in the parents' arms. Parents can spend time with their baby without feeling rushed to lay them down, as the cooling process continues even while the baby is being held. Despite the cooling effect, parents will not feel cold when holding their baby. Find step by step guides at **cuddlecot.com/manuals**



User Guide - How to setup the CuddleCot

Below, you will find our 'Quick start guide' here which will guide you through how to correctly set up a CuddleCot at home. For more practical information on how to use CuddleCot, please see our website for more information: cuddlecot.com/manuals



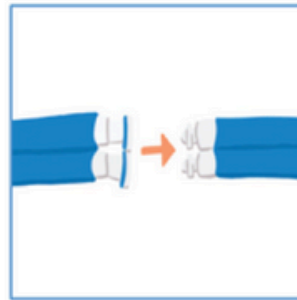
CuddleCot Quickstart Guide



1. Add the foil sheet centrally on top of the blanket, with the shiny side facing up.



2. Place cooling pad on top of foil and cover with a thin sheet or insert into pillow case.



3. Connect the double connectors of hose to cooling mat, and the single connector to the cooling unit.



4. Remove filler cap, add two drops of biocide, or one sterilising tablet, and fill 3/4 with purified water.



5. Plug in the unit and switch on. Check water level and top up if required.

The temperature will read high initially, this will cool over time. Press the downward arrow to ensure the temperature target is 8°C/46°F. Click 'enter' to set.



6. Wrap the foil, pad and baby with blankets. Tuck the blanket in to aid insulation. Minimising gaps & wrapping baby aids insulation & reduces condensation.

Ensure the hose is not kinked when swaddling the baby.



How to use the CuddleCot to hold a baby and keep them cool

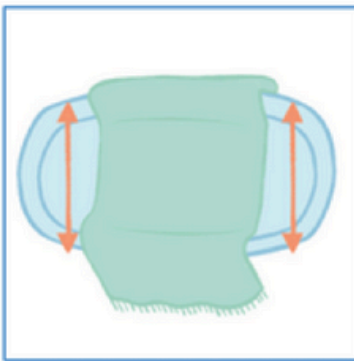
With the CuddleCot, parents can hold their baby without worrying about temperature changes or feeling pressured to place them back in a cot or crib. This provides parents with greater flexibility and empowerment to make the choices that feel right for them.

The CuddleCot delivers continuous, gentle cooling, allowing families to lovingly wrap their baby in blankets with the flexible cooling pad or place them in any cot. It offers modern families choice, comfort, and dignity during this difficult time.





Maximising the efficiency of the CuddleCot - a guide for enabling families to keep their baby cool & holding their baby



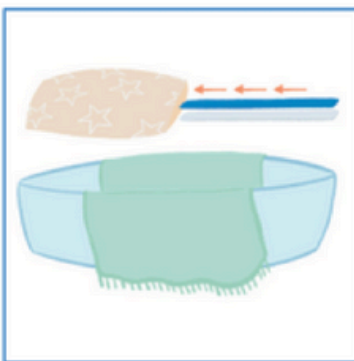
1. Place the blanket over chosen basket/crib. The longest length of blanket should be across the width of the basket.
(A polyester blanket with no holes is recommended)



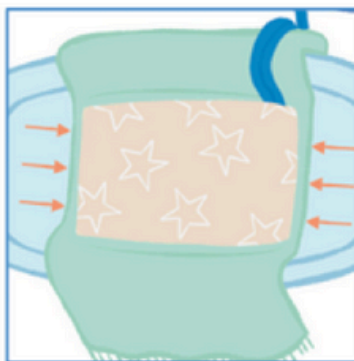
2. Add the foil sheet centrally on top of the blanket, with the shiny side facing up.



3. Set up the CuddleCot system, & add the cooling pad on top of the insulated foil.



4. Place the insulated foil & cooling pad inside a pillow case, or wrap both with a small sheet.

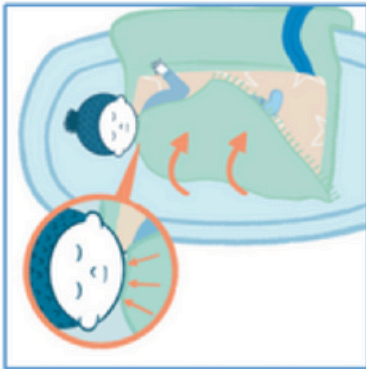


5. Return them into the basket/crib, & ensure there is an equal amount of blanket at the top & bottom of the pad.

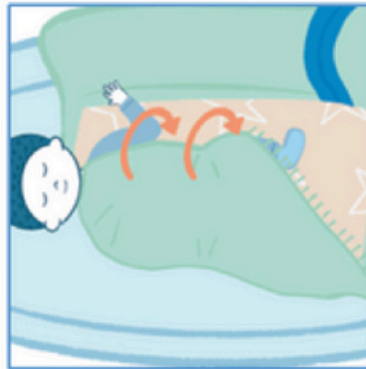


6. Place the baby into the basket/crib. Their neck should sit in line with the top of the cooling pad. Their feet should be at the same end as the hose.





7. On the opposite side to the hose, bring across the top corner of the blanket, ensuring the blanket is tucked in near baby's neck.



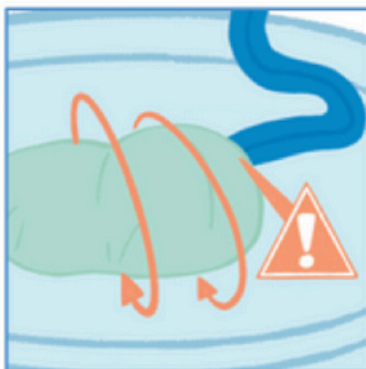
8. Tuck the remaining top part of the blanket under baby's opposite arm & under their back.



9. Tuck the remaining bottom part of the blanket on the same side over baby's leg, & tuck in under their back.



10. Tuck the top of blanket on the other side, over the remainder of the baby, & tuck in under baby's chin & back.



11. Take the last part of the blanket & tuck around the hose covering as much space as possible.

Ensure the hose is not kinked when swaddling the baby.



12. Baby can now be easily held by families without needing assistance & cooled at the same time.

A second blanket can be laid on top of the basket/crib whilst baby is in there.



Minimising gaps & wrapping baby aids insulation & reduces condensation.



Supporting parents when they are at home with their baby

It's important to sensitively prepare the parents for any changes that may occur to their baby's appearance during the time they are at home.

During the time the baby is at home, it's important that parents are aware of some physical changes that may occur to the baby's overall condition. The colour of their baby's skin and lips may change over time, and parents may notice some peeling of their skin as it becomes fragile. This is often more evident on their hands, feet and wrists but can occur in other places too. It is also not unusual for small amounts of watery fluid to leak from the baby's nose after he/she has died. Although this can be difficult for the parents to see, it is nothing to be alarmed by and can be wiped away gently using a soft tissue or baby wipe.

If their baby is being cared for in a CuddleCot, the rate that these natural changes occur will be much slower than if they weren't being actively cooled. Occasionally, they may notice a mild odour in the room and sometimes, parents find it useful to use a calming, pleasant, scented candle/diffuser. It is worth remembering that often, when we are grieving, our memories are formed by our senses so they may go on to associate this specific smell with the loss of their baby.

We would recommend you remain in close contact with the family whilst they are at home with their baby. This way, if they have any questions about any physical changes that occur, you are able to discuss these with them.

It is also best practice to regularly visit the family at home to offer support, whether this be a bereavement specialist midwife/nurse or midwife/nurse from the community team.



Supporting parents when they are at home with their baby

How long can the baby remain at home?

The length of time that the baby is at home will depend on the wishes of the parents. Some parents will have their baby at home for just the day or night before the funeral takes place however others choose to have them at home for longer. Like grief, the decisions they make are unique.

There is no legal time limit on how long the baby spends at home in the UK, however it is important to remember that over time, the baby's appearance will change. Please consult local state laws for accurate US information.

If the hospital is assisting in the arrangements for the baby's funeral, it's important that you are in close contact with the parents. This enables them to keep you informed of how long they want to keep their baby at home. During this time, you will need to liaise with the nominated funeral director and the mortuary staff at the hospital to help facilitate the care of their baby.

Once a baby has left the care of the hospital, it is not always possible for them to be returned to their care. Some mortuary guidance and policy prevent this. If this is the case at your hospital, and the parents are arranging a private funeral (without hospital involvement), we would recommend they choose a funeral director as soon as they are home, if not before, and inform them that their baby is at home with them. They will provide the parents with their contact details, including out of hours emergency contact numbers to arrange for collection of their baby as and when they are ready. Again, it is helpful to keep an open line of communication with them during the time their baby is at home, so you are able to offer the support they need.



Supporting parents when they are at home with their baby

What support is required whilst they are at home?

The maternity bereavement team should arrange for either themselves or the community midwife to visit whilst the baby is at home. This is to provide general support as well as to answer any questions or discuss any concerns that the parents may have.

It's important to provide the parents with a 24-hour telephone number to call in the event that they need immediate support or advice. This is usually the delivery suite or maternity triage number.

The bereavement support midwife/team at your hospital should be notified when the parents have been discharged home with their baby, and they should call them regularly to check in whilst their baby is at home. Parents can also contact their allocated funeral director for help and support.

Should they have any queries during the time they are at home with their baby, they can contact any of the above for further support and advice.



CuddleCot Training

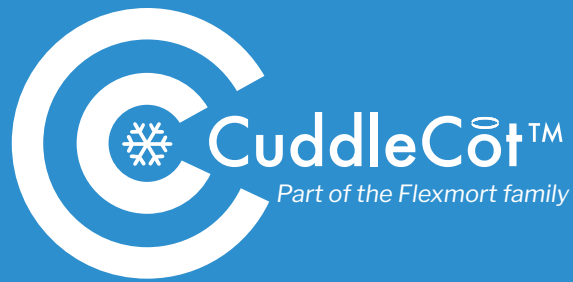
For further help and support please visit cuddlecot.com/training

Or reach out to our team on 08455 333561 or contact info@cuddlecot.com



Davies, D L (2022), 'Why Some Parents Want to Take Home Their Deceased Baby - Reclaiming an old tradition that soothes grief and comforts bereaved parents' Psychology Today, May 18 2022





Portable, temperature-controlled cooling for pre- and full-term infants, usable in any bassinet or while held in a parent's arms.



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**Guides include
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