

The background of the page is a blue gradient with a horizontal band of light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. A large, thin white circle is overlaid on the right side of the page, partially overlapping the text.

A Guide for the Jewish Parent on Miscarriages, Stillbirths & Neonatal Deaths



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The Jewish Community is extremely sensitive to the pain that parents feel when a miscarriage or stillbirth occurs, or when they lose a newborn child.

There is a clear distinction in Jewish Law (Halachah) between a foetus under 21 weeks of gestation, and more developed foetuses. The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you with Jewish religious guidance as to what should be done with the foetus in each of the different circumstances that may apply. **However, it is important to make clear that it is the United Synagogue Burial Society's overriding concern that they will do everything they can to accommodate the sincere wishes of the grieving parents in accordance with Halachah.**

Pre-21 Week Miscarriages

There is no halachic imperative that fetuses from “early” miscarriages, under 21 weeks of gestation, be buried and many parents are comfortable with the hospital taking care of the remains. Alternatively, they can be buried in a Jewish cemetery, and will be attended to with dignity and tenderness, being placed in an area that is set aside for such purposes.

No formal prayers are recited at such burials and a Rabbi is not normally in attendance, though if you wish to ask your own Rabbi to attend the burial he will usually be able to do so. Whether or not parents attend the burial is a matter of personal choice though there is no halachic requirement or recommendation to do so.

There are no formal mourning rituals in the case of a miscarriage but that certainly doesn't mean that you are expected to immediately bounce back to normal life. You will need to give yourselves time to heal both physically and emotionally and this may take a while. Some couples find it helpful to seek professional help or support and this leaflet contains contacts that might be useful.

21 Week + Miscarriages

Any fetus which miscarries at 21 weeks or more must be buried in a Jewish cemetery. They will be attended to with dignity and tenderness, and will be placed in an area that is set aside for such purposes. In some instances the parents choose a Hebrew name for the baby but usually the Chevra Kaddisha* will give a name whilst preparing the remains for burial. If a male fetus is sufficiently developed a circumcision will also be carried out. If the fetus miscarries after 24 weeks this is known for civil registration purposes as a stillbirth and a Doctor or Midwife will issue a medical certificate of stillbirth, and the parents must present this certificate to the Registrar of Births and Deaths within 42 days. Further advice will be available from the hospital.

As with earlier-term miscarriages no formal prayers are recited at such burials and a Rabbi is not normally in attendance, though if you wish to ask your own Rabbi to attend the burial he will usually be able to do so. Whether or not parents attend the burial is a matter of personal choice though there is no halachic requirement or recommendation to do so.

*The people who prepare Jewish bodies for burial according to Halachah.

Stillbirths and Early Neonatal Deaths (up to 30 days)

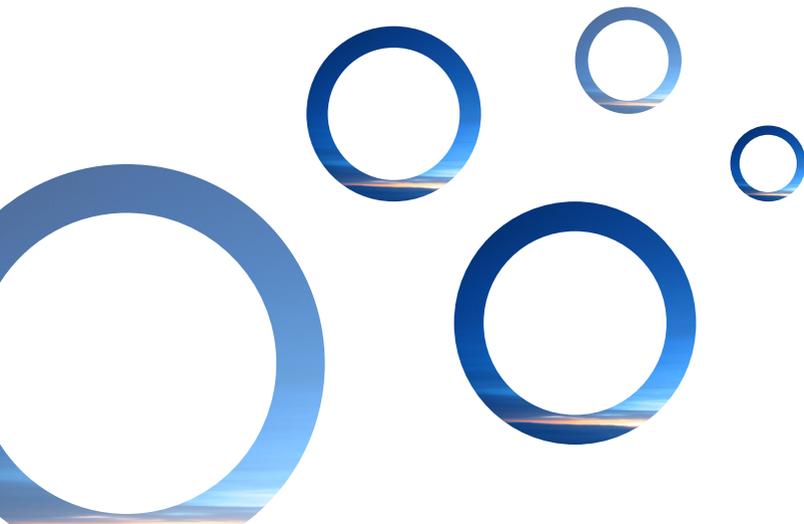
Even though a baby might never have been blessed with the “breath of life”, they are accorded the same dignity and respect as a life which was lived to the full. According to tradition, these children will be included in the ultimate Resurrection of the Dead.

Halachah regards human life as immensely fragile and uncertain for the first thirty days of existence (which is why the Redemption of the Firstborn does not take place until after the first month of life). Consequently, most of the formal mourning practices do not apply.

The Burial Arrangements

As with all Jewish burials, interment in a Jewish cemetery should take place as soon after death as possible, even though this is sometimes emotionally challenging.

Certain paperwork needs to be attended to before a burial can be authorised and the hospital will tell you where you need to go to complete the relevant forms. You should also contact the Burial Society which is associated with your Synagogue. If you are not members of a Synagogue you can contact any of the Jewish Burial Societies to make private arrangements for a burial. The United Synagogue Burial Society may be contacted on **020 8950 7767** and a message can be left if your call is out-of-hours. You should also consider contacting your local Rabbi or the Jewish Chaplain at the hospital who will be able to give you support at this difficult time.



The Burial Service

Prior to the burial the baby's body will be prepared by members of the Chevra Kaddisha. Unless the parents have already done so, the baby will be assigned a Hebrew name and a baby boy is also circumcised as part of these preparations.

Jewish law does not mandate a formal funeral service for a child who died under the age of thirty days, but the baby is always buried with dignity and tenderness. It is customary to have a short service at the graveside and the Rabbi in attendance will choose appropriate psalms and readings to be recited. Some parents find it too difficult to be present for the burial whereas others derive a certain sense of comfort from being there. Both approaches comply with Halachah and every family should do what they feel is best for them. Some close relatives or friends might also attend but it is not usual to have a large gathering of people at such an occasion.

Mourning Practices

In cases of late-term miscarriage, stillbirth or when a child dies under the age of thirty days, shiva is not observed and there is no requirement that Kaddish be recited. However parents might choose that Kaddish be said and a memorial candle may be lit at home. Each family responds differently to their loss and some parents might wish to arrange a prayer service at home when friends can come and comfort them. The lack of a formal period of mourning certainly doesn't mean that life should return to normal right away and parents (as well as other family members) will probably want to take some time out from work and social activities whilst they mourn their loss. Sometimes parents will also want to erect a small tombstone at the grave and this can be arranged through the Burial Society.

Though there is no obligation to observe the Yahrzeit anniversary of the death, some parents choose to light a memorial candle and to recite special prayers and they should ask their synagogue to notify them of the date of the Yahrzeit.

Support and Counselling

Parents who have suffered a miscarriage, stillbirth or the early death of a baby will often want to contact their local Rabbi for support and guidance. We also provide you with the details for several support groups and counselling services that you might wish to contact:

SANDS (Stillbirth & Neonatal Death Charity):

www.uk-sands.org

Tel: 020 7436 5881

Jewish Bereavement Counselling Service:

www.jbcs.org.uk or

Tel: 020 8951 3881

Miscarriage Association:

www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Tel: 01924 200 799

Jewish Pregnancy Loss:

www.jewishpregnancyloss.org

If at any time you have any questions for The United Synagogue Burial Society please do get in touch on **020 8950 7767**.



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