



MATERNITY UNIT



WITHOUT YOU...

Perinatal mourning

CLINIKES
DE L'EUROPE

EUROPA
ZIEKENHUIZEN

advanced care - personal touch

WHY HAVE WE WRITTEN THIS BOOKLET?

We accompany many parents for the birth of their child at the maternity of the Europe Hospitals, at the St-Elisabeth site and the St-Michel site. Unfortunately, things do not always turn out as planned. The baby dies during the pregnancy, just before the delivery or just after the birth or shows such deformities that the pregnancy has to be interrupted. It is in all cases a terrible shock, a great loss for the parents as well as for the relatives.

This is why our team has decided to write this booklet in order to meet the parents and their families with their emotions and their questions, especially after returning home.

You have lost a child and while you were at the hospital, we gave you the opportunity to talk about what happened on different occasions. You were then maybe able to talk about what your dreams were for your child. You may have been able to express your sorrow and your anger. You may have thought about how you were going to say goodbye, about how you were going to talk about it with your family, your other children... Coming home is often a difficult moment, with its inevitable confrontation with reality and void. The months following the loss when you are gradually saying goodbye to your child are often very trying.

We have witnessed the arrival and the departure of your child. We wish to remain present and offer our support via this booklet. We hope that it will be useful to you and to the members of your family.

RETURNING HOME

Coming home without your baby will confront you with emotions and feelings that may sometimes be very hard... The sorrow felt then is so intense that you may experience the feeling that you do not wish to go on living. Sometimes, you feel empty and unable to feel anything. Communication with your family and even day-to-day tasks may be hard to endure.

What you should know is that there is no good way to say goodbye to your baby or to react. Every person is unique and has lived his or her story... and will therefore live this loss through in an intimate and personal way.

So, in the beginning, if you always think about your baby, if you dream of your baby, if you cry all the time or if you always talk about your baby, these are natural ways of reacting to this loss. You must give yourself time and room to say goodbye to your baby.

BUT WHAT DOES GOODBYE MEAN IN THIS CASE?

In a few words, we could say that mourning is the healing of the heart after the loss of a person who is very dear to you.

Mourning consists of different steps: at first, there is the shock when you are actually confronted with the "unthinkable". You may have the impression of being lame, that it is as if you were dreaming and that it has not really happened... This step protects you against a very painful feeling during a short time, to allow you to realise what has happened. The actual pain will then arise which will be there all the time and take up a lot of room, especially when the time comes to say "goodbye" to your child.

On the day you come home and the days after, you will become aware of your baby really not being there anymore and of all that this will imply. Your baby will keep your mind busy all the time. Daily tasks are sometimes difficult to carry out, nothing matters more than your baby who has left you. However, experiencing this intense pain is necessary. It helps to become aware of this loss in order to be able to get over it afterwards. This pain is emotional but physical symptoms may also appear since our body and our mind are intimately connected.

During this period, you might always think back about the moments just before the loss of your child and ask yourself these questions: Why us? What have we done? What have we done wrong?

You might feel guilty, you might also reproach yourself all sorts of small things that could have hurt your baby. You will certainly think that you should have been able to give birth to a living and healthy baby, even if several doctors will have assured you that it was fate...

These moments when you think about the child you have lost, about the dreams you have had, have an important function because they give your child a place in the family history.

WITHOUT YOU... PERINATAL MOURNING

There is no rule as to the length of time this period will take. You will probably be tempted to stay at home because you will be afraid of the outside world. How are the others going to react? If you are afraid, you must know that the others probably don't know either how to react. Try and be yourself, and remember that the first words are always the most difficult ones to say.

Then bit by bit life will take over. The pain will diminish and you will probably regret it because you will have the impression that you are forgetting your baby... then this feeling will also slowly disappear and new projects will come through. There will still be difficult moments to cope with (family gatherings, anniversaries...) but life will resume as usual. However, everything will have changed: this experience will have changed your vision of the world and of the human being's frailty. From now on, there will be "before" and "after". Your baby will always be there in your heart and in your souvenirs, but with a space to him/herself, as part of the family history, although painful but with a meaning. And your life, stopped by this loss, will be able to start again.

"With my husband, we seldom talk about our baby who died, but every year, he brings back a bunch of flowers on the day we lost him/her... it is his way of telling me that he remembers him/her..."



HOW CAN I/WE FIND HELP?

Having souvenirs of your baby can help. You were offered a few at the maternity hospital. If you weren't decided to take them then, we keep them in your file.

It helps to talk about what you feel. You must find a person or several persons who will be able to listen to your grief. For some, it will be relatives, friends, groups of mutual aid whereas for others it will be easier to talk to professionals (doctor, midwife, psychologist...) or even to persons who have been through this themselves. The mother and the father often live these moments differently and it is perfectly normal: each one of us is unique, has his/her story, his/her way of reacting.

Fathers show their grief differently from mothers. They usually take care of all the paperwork and have to go back to work more quickly. The family sometimes takes more care of the mother than the father... which may lead to the father not expressing his grief.

The most important thing in your couple is definitely to share those feelings, to avoid hiding your grief to make sure you do not hurt your partner. When parents cannot understand each other or cannot accept having different feelings, it might be necessary to consult.

THE ENTOURAGE CAN HELP

Help can come from relatives although they are also confronted with this loss. They can therefore be very clumsy... and feel unable to comfort you. You must just tell them clearly what it is you need exactly, for e.g. you wish to be listened to or on the contrary, be left alone...

What is most important here is to listen to yourself, to try feeling what will do you good... It might be to talk, and talk again of what happened. It might be to cry or to write his/her story. More concretely, it might be to have some massage, to put away the baby's things or to keep them, but also to ask friends to take over some tasks (they will be happy to help you in any way)... Some might find help on forums, others will rely more on their family, their friends, their religious or cultural community. Everything is worth it except preventing yourself from having any feelings because otherwise they will stay in your body and mind and will prevent you from really saying goodbye. And this is essential for life to come back...

You will find a few useful links at the end of this brochure which will help you to get through.

WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR BODY?

FOR MUM

You are shattered and so is your body, which is going through a fall of the hormones which developed during the pregnancy. Mummies often have a feeling of intense internal emptiness.

As is always the case after giving birth, you will lose blood during some time. If the pregnancy was well advanced, you might produce milk. You will be given some medicine to avoid this but you might still feel some tension in the breast.

It is often difficult for Mummies to take care of their body because it has betrayed them by not allowing them to give birth to the child they were expecting. Some mothers like to be taken care of, by having massages for e.g., which helps them to be reconciled with their body. It is possible to ask for individual sessions of physiotherapy or for a midwife to come at your home to help you out and answer your questions.

FOR MUM AND DAD

Grief can also have physical consequences: lack of appetite, nightmares and other outward signs. Your doctor can always provide you with help and information.

HOW SHOULD I TALK ABOUT THIS TO MY CHILDREN?

It is a very sensitive question, which mostly depends on the age of the child. But it is necessary to go into it even with the youngest ones as long as it is adapted to their age and personality.

Before the "age of reason", children don't give the same meaning to death as we do. Under the age of 2, a child is very sensitive to what he/she feels around them, to his/her emotions. At that age, a child is just beginning to learn how to live separately from his/her parents and has therefore no idea of what death is.

However, he/she will welcome your explanation even if he/she only understands part of it. You might have to talk about the story of his/her small brother/sister later on. The best thing is to keep a few souvenirs (pictures of the echography, footprints etc.) to allow him/her to have a concrete idea of what it is about.

After 2 years on, a child knows what "death" means but it is more like what happens in films: you lie down, you do not move, and as in stories, you can stand up again afterwards. Children of that age are quite disconcerting because they will give the impression that they have understood you and a minute later, they will ask when baby will come back...

Children at that age may be sad at one moment, and very happy the next because they do not yet understand that when you are dead, you never come back. Some children may feel guilty to have been jealous of the new baby, which is normal. You must reassure your child and tell him/her that he/she is not responsible for what happened.

Around 7 years old, a child starts understanding what death is, he/she knows that when someone dies, he will never come back. Later on, he/she becomes aware that he/she too will die some day, that his/her parents will die. He/she might feel concerned about this and think that he/she might disappear all the more so that this is what happened to his/her baby brother/sister. You will have to give some explanation and you will have to reassure him/her.

Testimony

"I couldn't breathe properly the other day at the gym lesson and my heart started thumping... I thought I was going to die like my little brother who died before he was born and who had a heart failure..."



Teenagers often react by keeping things to themselves and what happened scares them but they do not want to show their emotions, they are not babies anymore.

In a general way, children have different feelings than their parents and they express their grief differently. They will know that they are allowed to express their emotions... if they see their parents doing it or if they can talk with them. However, they can also be very anxious if they see that their parents are sad and that they can't talk about it. Some children even manage to avoid expressing their grief to protect their parents.

Other children find other ways to try to take their parents' mind off their grief. If it is difficult to talk this over with your children or if you feel some anxiety about their reactions, we suggest that you search some help with associations or professionals (see end of booklet).

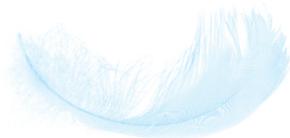
WARNING SIGNS

WHEN MOURNING NEVER SEEMS TO END

If mourning is the healing of the heart, you never completely recover from the loss of a baby and the pain may come and go, even years later, mostly at important dates but even otherwise. This is normal.

But sadness, grief, anger may remain and prevent life from taking over. Or you might have the impression that you have come over it but it is your body that will give signs that there are still things unsaid. If you keep on crying a lot, having nightmares etc. you should consult a therapist or a person trained to help people in their mourning. This will help to the life process.

This can also happen to children: they might have kept silent to help you and this can catch them up later. Keep this in mind if you notice a change in their behaviour e.g. problems at school or even unexplained sores.



A FEW WORDS FOR THE GRANDPARENTS

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY SON OR MY DAUGHTER WHO SUFFERS?

Your son or daughter has lost a baby, who was also a child you were expecting, a child who was going to make you a grandparent. Your children's pain is also yours and you would so much like to suffer in their place or at least comfort them in their grief. It is no use telling them they will have other children, or reassuring them at all costs. They have lost a child and they have the right to be sad, like you. Your children will have lived very little with their baby, they only have a few souvenirs...

To talk about the baby or to call it by his/her first name are different ways of making it live. They might feel the need to talk about him/her for a long time, it comforts them and helps them to say goodbye, even if it is difficult for you.

BUT HOW CAN YOU LISTEN WITHOUT HURTING EVEN MORE?

Try using some of the following sentences...:

- 3 **"We'll miss your baby too"**
- 3 **"As he/she will always be your son/daughter, he/she will always be our grandson/granddaughter"**
- 3 **If you want to talk, we're there..."**

And try avoiding the following ones, which you will be tempted to say but which can sometimes hurt very much...:

- 3 **"You'll have other children"** (maybe not, we don't know)
- 3 **"You have your other children"** (they don't replace the one you have lost...)
- 3 **"It's better that it happens now than later..."** (when you have grief, it is the present moment that counts)
- 3 **"Nature has done its duty or God has done things well"** (this depends of course on the person's religious belief)
- 3 **"Your couple will be stronger after what happened"** (this is not always true, since such an experience can sometimes destabilise a couple)
- 3 **"Stop thinking about it"** (it is impossible!)



A FEW WORDS FOR THE FAMILY

A close relative of yours has lost his/her baby... It's terrible and it's a big blow to you.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

You can find inspiration in the above. Parents generally need to talk about their baby. Just ask them how they feel you can help them (not just once, but on several occasions because the need for help may vary in time...).

You too can make this child live. Tell the parents when you have thought about her/ him, offer your help for small things...

AFTERWARDS

Some couples wish to have another baby quite quickly, while others need more time to say goodbye to their baby.

From a psychological point of view, your desire to have a child could not be fulfilled, you expect him/her to come back. Apart from medical reasons, there is no rule as to when you can be pregnant again, everybody is different.

However, it is to be expected that a new pregnancy will give rise to many anxieties, especially at times such as the echography or at the same period of your pregnancy when a problem was detected with your lost child. During the confinement and after the birth, your new baby will probably arouse grief. You will inevitably think of the baby you have lost... and will feel contradictory emotions. Then your grief will slowly disappear.

You will probably fear that your new baby will feel your sadness. He/she will have to make do with the fact that before him/her there has indeed been a little brother or a little sister who died, it is part of his/her story but it will not necessarily make him/her unhappy. It is advisable to talk about the lost baby as soon as possible and show him/her a few souvenirs. So that even if he/she doesn't understand it all at once, he/she will have become used to hearing about the lost baby and will therefore not suffer from a sudden moment of truth later on.

During your new pregnancy, it will be very important to talk about your fears and your feelings to the medical team and maybe also to ask help from a psychologist.

WHERE CAN I FIND HELP?

EUROPE HOSPITALS

It is always possible to consult your gynaecologist. You, your children or even relatives can consult the psychologist whom you have met before.

Gynaecological secretary	St-Elisabeth site  02 614 27 30	St-Michel site  02 614 37 30
Delivery ward	 02 614 29 20	 02 614 39 81
Pastoral service	 02 614 22 41/42/43	 02 614 32 41/42/45
Social service	 02 614 92 92	 02 614 93 93

ASSOCIATIONS

There are several associations which suggest help in many ways: internet websites, forums, interactive meeting groups, books for adults and for children.

Here is a list of some of them:

- **www.uk-sands.org**
- Kind & Gezin: **www.kindengezin.be**
- **www.perinatalcomfortcare.org**

HELP AT HOME

Your benefit insurance company (mutuelle) might also have a department where you can find some help at home.

MIDWIVES

www.sage-femme.be
www.vroedvrouwen.be

ONE (office de la naissance et de l'enfance)

www.one.be



MATERNITY UNIT

ACCESS

St-Elisabeth site

By car:

There is a pay car park underneath the clinic, avenue de Fré

By bus:

Lines 38, 41, 136, 137, 365 and W

St-Michel site

By car:

There is a pay car park underneath the clinic, in rue Charles Degroux

by tram:

Lines 23, 24, 25, 81 and 83

By underground:

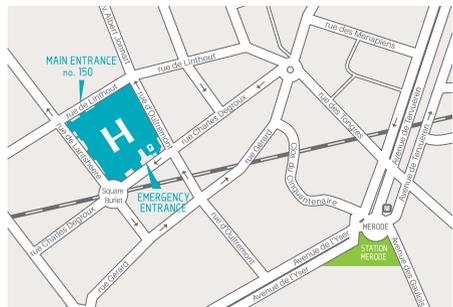
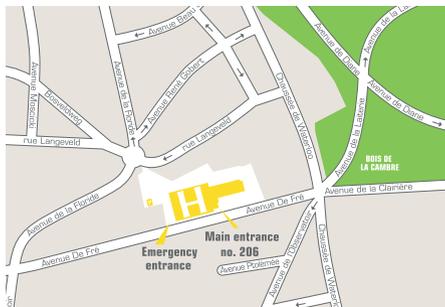
Lines 1 or 5

By bus:

Lines 20, 22, 27, 28, 61 and 80

By train:

Mérode train station



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advanced care - personal touch

PERSONAL APPROACH
RESPECT
EXPERTISE
EFFICIENCY
CUTTING-EDGE MEDICINE

The Europe Hospitals are a leading hospital group serving the city of Brussels and its surrounding areas. As a multilingual general hospital, we offer comprehensive care at our four sites: St-Elisabeth in Uccle, St-Michel in Etterbeek/European Quarter, the Bella Vita Medical Center in Waterloo and the External Consultation in Halle.

Calling on the expertise of over 300 specialist physicians and 1,800 members of staff, we pride ourselves on providing highly personalised care to around 2,500 patients every day. From accurate diagnoses to the most advanced forms of treatment, we combine state-of-the-art medical technology with contemporary infrastructure to deliver high-quality dedicated care with highest safety standards and excellent comfort. For each and every patient. Every day.

www.europehospitals.be

St-Elisabeth site

Avenue de Frélaan 206 - 1180 Brussels

 02 614 20 00

St-Michel site

Rue de Linthoutstraat 150 - 1040 Brussels

 02 614 30 00

Bella Vita Medical Center

Allée André Delvaux 16 - 1410 Waterloo

 02 614 42 00

External Consultation Halle

Bergensesteenweg 67 - 1500 Halle

 02 614 95 00