



Hosting Remembrance Events

Why host remembrance events?

Remembrance events offer the perfect way for families to continue to honor and connect with their baby long after his or her death. These events provide positive meaning and connection to their child's life and facilitate a way for families to cope, survive and even thrive in their "new normal." While you can host an event at any time, there are certain times that are common to provide a memorial event to your families.

- October, as it is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month
- October 15–Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day
- The winter holidays
- Mother's and Father's Day
- Grandparent's Day

Consider the who, what, when, where and why when planning your event.

Who is your target audience? Is it for bereaved parents, siblings, grandparents, recently bereaved; are family members welcome? Determining your target audience will guide the planning for the rest of your event as a ceremony that is focused on bereaved parents will be different than one that is for grandparents. One that welcomes children will require a different plan than one for parents only.

What type of event do you want it to be?

Will it be a holiday event, a hospital event, a quarterly or annual event? Is it based on a season? Again, think about your intended audience. An event for parents might be better in the evening to accommodate work schedules. An event that includes children might work better on the weekend.

Where will the event take place?

Will it be held in a park, a hospital conference room, library, or community room? Again, consider your intended audience when choosing a location. It can be quite difficult for parents to attend events at the hospital where their loss occurred, but if this is your only option, be aware of other events that might be going on at the same time. For instance, you will not want to host your event at the hospital on the same night as childbirth classes.

Why are you hosting the event?

What is your goal, or what do you hope to achieve? Is it to bring grandparents together, or a group of parents? This is important to know when you promote your event to the community.

Provide Keepsakes:

Parents appreciate being able to take a keepsake home with them. They find it touching and healing to leave with something that maximizes memories of their child's life. Following are some ideas for keepsakes that are inexpensive yet meaningful:

- Packets of flower seeds.
- Ornaments—if you host a ceremony around the holiday season, consider providing each family with an ornament to take home. Choose one based on your theme. During the ceremony, parents can place it on a tree as you read their baby's name.
- Healing stone—many families find meaningful connection to their baby in nature, and stones provide an easy and inexpensive keepsake. Purchase smooth rocks at landscaping companies or craft/hobby stores. You can glue a fabric heart or other symbol to one side of the rock and provide permanent markers so parents can write their baby's name on the other side.
- Journal—expressive writing is a powerful therapeutic tool that can allow bereaved parents to release their pain and process emotions and thoughts.
- Charm—a charm that symbolizes the theme of your event tied to a ribbon and attached to a poem or quote on a small card is an easy and inexpensive way to provide a keepsake.

Other things to keep in mind when planning your program:

- Parents and others who attend these events often feel emotional and anxious, especially those who are new. Make sure you have adequate staff or others to offer support when needed.
- Keep the event hopeful. Yes, it is sad to have a remembrance event for babies who have died, but you want the overall theme to be one of hope, encouragement, and healing. Keep this in mind when choosing guest speakers, music, and poems.
- Those who are grieving often find great comfort and solace in music and poetry, so be aware that what you choose may resonate with parents. Poems and songs should be uplifting and not be religious in order to make all feel welcome.

- During some point in the program, read baby names. You can also allow parents to say their own baby's name or write it on a stone, ribbon, tree tag or other item. Following the reading of baby names, request a moment of silence.
- Include luminaries or candlelight when possible. Candlelight is symbolic of light illuminating dark times, and the warmth of a candle conveys love and support. Finding ways to incorporate light into your events will add a meaningful touch. Whether the event is indoors or outdoors, purchase white paper lunch bags, let families decorate them with markers and add battery operated candles. Line pathways or aisles with the luminaries. You can also use glass jars and tie ribbons around the top.
- Refreshments/fellowship–The informal time parents spend together is important. You will often see parents gravitate toward each other and make connections they may not have made otherwise. This is also the time when you as caregivers may be called upon to provide support to families, so make sure you have others there to assist you.

Planning remembrance events can feel overwhelming, so give yourself permission to start out simple. Pick one event you would like to host, find a few parents or others to help you, and have fun! Even a small and intimate event planned with love will be much appreciated by your families. Hosting events for families may be one of the more rewarding things you do as a perinatal loss caregiver.



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