

Cremations of Babies – Initial Guidance

Due to apparent differences in approach to the cremation of babies, the Institute has drafted this initial guidance note in an attempt to bring some consistency to the cremation technique. Further guidance will be prepared and distributed from the Scottish Government working group that is due to be convened in the near future.

Whilst it has been acknowledged that ashes might not be recovered in all cases, this guidance will assist in increasing the likelihood. The Institute strongly believes that all cremation authorities should develop technique designed to maximize the likelihood of the recovery of ashes for the benefit and wellbeing of bereaved parents.

Private Individual Cremations

Parents opting for a private, individual cremation must be informed prior to the cremation that the return of ashes cannot be guaranteed, however cremation authorities can indicate likelihood. Local funeral directors must be formally requested to convey this information to bereaved parents using their services so that such parents can make an informed decision on whether or not to proceed with cremation or opt for burial. This is important, as some parents may want a tangible focal point, as confirmed in the Charter for the Bereaved and supported by Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity. Authorities are encouraged to produce a guide and policy that explains the options available, and to distribute these to local funeral directors and hospitals to assist them in discussing the choices with parents.

Parents should be informed that they have the right to be contacted by the cremation authority following the cremation, to inform them whether ashes have been recovered. Some parents may not wish to exercise this right, and instead authorise the cremation authority to dispose of any ashes according to local procedure, e.g. scatter in a baby memorial garden. Authority for scattering must be signed by the parent.

Parents must be given the opportunity to choose what happens to any ashes recovered. The authority is encouraged to develop paperwork that gives this choice prior to the cremation, but to also have a procedure in place to enable the parents to change their mind following the cremation. Some parents may not wish to make a decision as to the disposal until they are confident that ashes have been recovered.

Cremation authorities can increase the likelihood of recovering tangible ashes in a number of ways. These can sometimes be dependent on the cremators that are used and approach taken and include:

- If the cremator programme has a setting for baby cremations it should be used.
- Using a cremation tray will maximise the likelihood of the recovery of ashes.
- The small coffin on a tray can be placed close to the ash door where it can be more closely monitored. This area can be less turbulent in some cremators and hence the risk of ashes being blown away by the air jets is reduced.
- The coffin and tray should not be placed directly under a burner, as this is an area where major turbulence is created and ashes could be blown from the tray and lost.
- An element of manual control can be adopted where the cremator programme allows this intervention, in order to reduce turbulence i.e. amount of air reduced.
- Ash recovered from a baby cremation should not be reduced in a cremulator/ash-processing machine. A number of cremation authorities have a small mortar and pestle where reduction can be effected in a more caring and sensitive manner, which also avoids any loss of ashes.
- Nothing should be removed from the ashes, except metals and only then with the consent of the parent(s).

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Crematorium managers are encouraged to discuss the importance of maximising the likelihood of recovering tangible ashes with their crematorium technicians and to develop local procedures to achieve this.

Communal/Shared Cremations

The likelihood of the recovery of ashes from such cremations is high, however the techniques identified above should still be adopted for communal/shared cremations.

Where such cremations take place under an agreement with a local hospital you should include conditions to your agreement/contract requiring that parents are informed of the following:

- Any ashes recovered from a communal/shared cremation are not individually identifiable.
- Any ashes recovered will be scattered within the garden of remembrance and the location recorded. Parents can be shown this area on request.
- A memorial facility is available at the crematorium should this be desired.

Note: Some hospitals arrange individual cremation as opposed communal/shared cremation and in these instances the hospital must inform parents that they will be informed after the cremation if ashes were recovered. Parents must then be given the opportunity to decide on the disposal of such ashes. The hospital can either liaise between parents and the crematorium, or provide parents with contact details for the crematorium.

Cremation authorities that have not already done so, are encouraged to establish a specifically designed children's garden within their gardens of remembrance, where ashes can be scattered or buried.

The Institute wishes to assist cremation authorities in developing technique and approach to the cremation of babies in order to provide a transparent, caring and reliable service to bereaved parents.

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