

Writing a Plan for Your Baby's Birth

A good first step is to summarize your vision for your baby's birth with a short statement that can help guide you and your caregivers. For example, one family's statement was, "Our overriding wish is that our son's brief life be free of pain and filled with love." This mission statement helps you and your caregivers keep your goals in mind, even if you need to accommodate unexpected detours during your labor or in your baby's condition. The details will flow from your overriding vision.

Your birth plan can be as unique as your baby is, but most plans need to address some similar topics. A typical perinatal hospice/palliative care birth plan includes:

Essential information

- Your baby's name (if you have already chosen one)
- The parents' names
- Contact numbers for your obstetrician, pediatrician, clergyperson, or other key caregivers
- Your baby's diagnosis

Wishes for labor and delivery

- Caesarean birth vs. vaginal birth
- Fetal heart monitoring during labor
- Comfort measures and pain relief for the mother
- Cutting the umbilical cord
- Support people you wish to be present

Wishes for your time with your baby

You may want to include wishes regarding:

- Family and friends
- Other siblings
- Spiritual rituals
- Photographs and videotape
- Keepsakes such as footprints, handprints, locks of hair, crib card, ID bands
- Bathing your baby
- Being with your baby during and after death

Medical decisions

If medical intervention for your baby is possible and you have already reached some decisions, these should be specified in your plan. Possible topics include:

- Suctioning and oxygen after birth
- Delaying routine procedures or providing them while your baby is in a parent's arms
- Resuscitation
- Ventilators

- Feeding
- Medications
- Additional testing
- Taking your baby home if possible

Plans for your baby's body

The plan can also include information about your preferences if your baby dies in the hospital:

- Autopsy
- Organ or tissue donation
- After-death care for the baby's body

Your birth plan is a way to share your decisions and hopes with your caregivers, who can use it as a guide as your baby's birth unfolds. Your birth plan is not set in stone; you can modify it and be flexible if new circumstances arise or if your wishes change. You can let your baby lead you.

Adapted with permission from [A Gift of Time: Continuing Your Pregnancy When Your Baby's Life is Expected to be Brief](#), by Amy Kuebelbeck and Deborah L. Davis, forthcoming in 2010 from Johns Hopkins University Press.

For more resources for parents and caregivers, visit www.perinatalhospice.org.