

nilmtdts  
Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep

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GUIDED PARENTING  
IN THE FACE OF LOSS

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## Guided Parenting in the Face of Loss

Each year in the United States, nearly 40,000 babies are either stillborn or die within the first month of life. And while there is a plethora of parenting resources available, very few address parenting in the face of loss. Though it may initially seem counterintuitive to encourage parenting in these situations, it greatly improves the psychosocial outcomes for these families when we facilitate this type of memory-making.

Since 2015, *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep* has interacted with tens of thousands of families, hospitals, and caregivers. What we've found is that families rarely regret what they did, but they often regret what they didn't do. We often hear from parents about the things they wish they would have thought to do—like brushing their baby's hair, dressing their baby, and holding their baby as long as they wished.

Whether a family's loss is expected or not, parents and family members often find themselves in shock in those moments. They often forget to pull out their phone or a camera or they don't even fully realize that they can hold their own baby.

As care providers of these mothers and babies, it's important that we encourage them to parent their baby in those short moments or hours that they have with them.







Grieving parents look to us to reassure and guide them during these delicate times. Photographs serve as a bridge to this type of parenting as well as offer healing for years to come. The journal *Illness, Crisis & Loss* says that remembrance photography “did not simply produce mementoes, but invited families into a parenting role, to celebrate their baby's life, to tell their story, and to help make meaning of their experiences in an often overwhelming and chaotic medical space.” (Martel & Ives-Baine, 2014)

Having these moments is especially important for parents in order to help construct the future identity of their family. Many loss parents are faced with difficult questions down the road, such as “Do you have any children?” or “How many children do you have?” These are difficult questions to answer because, as outlined in an article in the journal *Death Studies*, “Parents facing early child loss—perinatal death—suffer no less, yet they are faced with the additional burden that their baby is not socially recognized as significant.” (Blood & Cacciato, 2014)



## Tips We Recommend

In order to facilitate as much memory-making as possible, we recommend the following:

-  Introduce the idea of photographs early and often. Contact NILMDTS to see if a photographer is available and encourage parents and caregivers to take as many photos as they wish.
  
-  If your facility offers care packages for families experiencing loss, introduce that early and go through the contents with them so that they understand everything inside and can incorporate them into the memory-making process.
  
-  Call their baby by name and treat them as you would any baby. Point out features of the baby-cute noses, tiny hands, curly hair. Refer to family members as 'mom', 'dad', 'grandma', 'grandpa'. This may be the first time they've ever heard themselves called by those names.
  
-  Encourage parents to hold their baby as long as they want.
  
-  Have parents dress and diaper their baby, bathe their baby, and brush their baby's hair.
  
-  Take handprints, footprints, and molds (if your facility offers them). Make multiple copies.

Always encourage them to take pictures above and beyond what NILMDTS or you as the caregiver takes. They can never have too many. Let parents know that they never have to look at these pictures or keepsakes, but that they will always have them for when they are ready.

# Guided Parenting in the Face of Loss

Suggestions like these and many more can be found in our updated course Remembrance Photography as a Best Practice in Perinatal Loss Populations. This nursing continuing professional development activity was approved by Colorado Nurses Association, an accredited approver by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation. This course is ideal for any practitioner that deals with patients experiencing perinatal loss and will help them to reach families that NILMDTS is unable to serve due to availability, time of day, condition of the baby, or shortened timelines. With the knowledge and skills taught, providers will be able to give their bereaved parents the best patient experience possible under the circumstances.

More information can be found at

[www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org/medical/continuingeducation](http://www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org/medical/continuingeducation)

## More information about NILMDTS

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep (NILMDTS) gifts remembrance portraits to parents experiencing the death of a baby. Since 2005, over 70,000 families from around the world have received photographs free of charge from NILMDTS.

## How to Find a Photographer

NILMDTS will assist in locating a local affiliated photographer to capture images for a bereaved family. It is recommended that you call as soon as possible, even during the admission process, for the best chance of locating an available photographer. Local photography contacts can be located on the [NILMDTS webpage](#).

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"As a labor and delivery nurse, the hardest days are the ones where we send families home without the sweet babies they have longed for, nurtured, and loved. The services provided by NILMDTS allow me to assist in supporting those families by honoring the little lives lost. Working with NILMDTS fosters the preservation of memories for these families during a whirlwind of heartbreak."

~Ada Murdock, Registered Nurse

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## Get to Know Our *services*

### Guidelines

At the request of the parents or medical staff, we will have a NILMDTS affiliated photographer, if available, come to the hospital or hospice location for a private and sensitive photography session. Our affiliated photographers are dedicated to making the photography session as loving, sensitive, and private as possible. When searching for a local NILMDTS photographer, visit our website for contact information in your area.

NILMDTS photographers provide the free gift of professional quality portraiture. Gently retouched black and white or sepia-toned portraits are delivered digitally.

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"I don't know the name of the nurse who took a few photos for us but I am grateful that she was there. To all the nurses and hospital staff that step out of your roles and into the rooms of grieving families to capture the few moments we have with our babies. Thank you!"

~Krysten Rivera, Jakob's Mommy”

### Retouching

If a NILMDTS photographer is not available, please utilize the [Remembrance Photography Guide for Hospitals](#) located on the NILMDTS webpage. The guide includes instructions for submitting images for retouching to NILMDTS. Providers are also welcome to complete our updated course, Bereavement Photography as a Best Practice in Perinatal Loss Populations, for direct access to our retouching pipeline. More information can be found at [www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org/medical/continuingeducation](http://www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org/medical/continuingeducation)

#### Sources:

Death Stud. 2014 Jan-Jun;38(1-5):224-33. doi: 10.1080/07481187.2013.788584. Epub 2013 Nov 11.

Martel, S., & Ives-Baine, L. (2014). 'Most prized possessions': Photography as living relationships within the end-of-life care of newborns. *Illness, Crisis, & Loss*, 22(4), 311-332.

