

Please tell my parents ...

A letter from a baby to a health professional about protection from sudden unexpected death in infancy SUDI

“Please tell my parents what SUDI stands for and how they can protect me from it. Be clear about what is best and what is not because there are lots of people telling them things and they could get confused. Please be positive or they will worry. Do make sure they understand why I need the care you recommend as that will help them believe you. And ask them to tell everyone else in my family, too, so that I will be safe whoever cares for me. Some people have strong opinions that may be wrong or out of date so please help my parents make decisions that will protect me.

My parents need to know that oxygen keeps me alive. Anything that slows down the oxygen I need, will harm me. If this happens before I am born then I won't develop in a healthy way. All of me needs that oxygen, especially my brain. And if it happens after I am born and blocks my breathing I will also be in danger. Make sure my parents know that smoking can do this to me, especially before I am born. And make sure they know the kinds of hazards that could harm me when I sleep. I do not want to be a SUDI baby.

Please tell my parents that I have been designed to be smokefree from the start. This will protect me from SUDI the most. My 'wake-up monitor' will be strong and I won't have been poisoned by all those chemicals in tobacco. Smoking before I am born does the most harm of all to me and it lasts forever.

I have also been designed for sleeping on my back. My 'life support' reflexes work best on my back but some parents don't understand this. Please explain to my parents that my food tube is below my breathing tube when I lie on my back so spills get swallowed. When I gag, swallow or sigh that is my reflexes watching over my breathing. But when I am awake I like all sorts of positions. It helps gravity shape my head evenly. It is just when I sleep, and for **every** sleep, that I must be on my back. Many SUDI babies did not sleep on their backs so make sure my parents do this for me.

I am worried that my parents might hear that babies sleep more soundly on their tummies or sides. And we do. But it is dangerous for me to sleep long and deeply when I am a baby. I need to make little startles and practice my 'wake-up' response. I am designed to need my parents more in the early months, to feed often, wake often, cuddle often. I need them close, even when we are all asleep so please ask them to have my cot near their bed at least for the first months. When they bring me into their bed they will need to be sure this is safe, especially in my first few months. Mostly it is.

Explain to my parents that many SUDI babies die in beds with others or on couches and arm chairs because people do not know the hazards. We can only breathe through our noses at the start so we need a clear face at all times. If we are premature, have a low birth weight or our mothers smoked, then we may not have a strong 'wake-up monitor' so we are always best in our own bed. And if our parents have a weak 'wake-up monitor' from smoking, drinking, drugs or being very tired we are also best in our own beds. Otherwise, if I am smokefree, my face stays clear and I can be on my back, I should be safe if my parents bring me into their bed. Ask that they make sure there are no pillows, the mattress is firm, I have my own space and I cannot roll into gaps or under anyone when they bring me into their bed.

Probably everyone knows that 'breast is best' but I want my parents to know that it really really is. I need the food and the closeness as well as all the other things that breastfeeding does because I am designed for this. Breastfeeding feeds my mind and spirit as well as my body. My parents may need some help to get started so teach them well. I will tell them when I am hungry so help them trust my signs.

I know my parents will get tired looking after me because I need them for everything. Make sure to tell them to take some breaks and have support to turn to. I need to be handled gently even when my parents may feel stressed. Please tell them I am just being a baby when I cry or make demands, that I love them and when I am big and strong I will thank them for protecting me when I was new.”

