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# Understanding Safe Surrender of Your Baby

Safe surrender means giving up a baby in a safe way when you're not able to care for them. Safe surrender laws help babies be safely given up. The laws vary from state to state. They are also known as safe haven laws. The goal is to make sure a baby is safe, and not hurt or abandoned in a dangerous way.

These laws help make sure this can happen. The laws ensure that parents are not charged with a crime like child abandonment, if they follow the safe surrender rules in their state. All 50 states and Puerto Rico have safe surrender laws.

## What is a safe surrender site?

There are different kinds of safe surrender sites in each state and city. They can include hospitals, fire stations, police stations, and churches. These sites have agreed to take in babies, and their staff is trained. Some of the sites may have a sign on the building that shows it's a safe surrender site. The sign may have a picture. Or the sign may say Safe Surrender or Safe Haven.

## What happens if I give my baby to a safe surrender site?

If you have decided to surrender your baby, don't leave the baby there alone. Make sure to give the child to an adult employee at the site. People at the site are trained to accept babies. Tell the employee that you're handing over your baby under the safe surrender or safe haven law. In some states, you may have to give information about the baby's medical history. Once you hand over your baby, they are given any medical care as needed. Your baby will then be put into the process for adoption by a new family. Part of this process may include:

- Making sure the child is not reported as missing
- Putting information on a registry for the baby's father to find the child
- Ending your parental rights

## Your rights as a parent

You may not be required to give any personal information to the safe haven site, such as your name. But if you do, your information may be kept private and not shared with anyone. In most states, you are protected from being arrested and charged with child abandonment, neglect, or endangerment. The only exception may be if your baby shows signs of abuse.

If you leave your baby in a safe surrender site, it may be difficult to see your child again. But some states have rules that can allow it. You may be given an ID number that links you to your child. There may also be a process in your state for reclaiming your baby within a set time period.

Some states also have a special procedure for making sure the father is aware that the child is being given up. The father may have the right to reclaim the baby.

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## Understanding the law in your area

Safe surrender laws are different in each state. These laws say:

- **Where a baby may be handed over.** Some states require a baby be given only to a healthcare facility, such as a hospital or clinic. Some states allow babies to be left at other places such as fire stations, police stations, or other types of law enforcement agencies. In a few states, churches may take in babies.
- **How old the baby can be.** Some states only allow babies who are 72 hours old or less to be given to a safe haven. Other states allow a baby up to 30 days old. Other states may have other age limits.
- **Who can hand over the baby.** Some states allow either parent. Some states allow only the mother. Other states allow a family member or friend who represents the parents.

To find out more about the laws in your state, visit the [Child Welfare Information Gateway at www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov) and search for your state's information. You can also call them at 800-394-3366 or email [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov). Or talk to a healthcare provider at a hospital or health clinic near you.

## Getting help with your baby

If you're having trouble with your new baby and aren't sure what to do, there are lots of places to go for help. There are support groups and other services for new parents in many communities. There are many people who can help you, such as:

- Pastor, priest, rabbi, or other spiritual advisor
- Healthcare providers at a health clinic or hospital
- Local child welfare agency
- Family members, neighbors, and friends