



Best Practice for Providing Angel Gowns to Bereaved Families

We believe there are best practices to meet the needs of a grieving family in a personal manner.

- The giving of an Angel Gown should be done in a way that shows respect to the baby and the family.
- We believe this is best accomplished by first establishing a relationship with the leadership of a hospital to determine their gown needs based on the number of losses at their facility annually and gestational ages of the majority of their losses. This information allows us to send them exactly the items they need and prevents gowns from being sent that are not needed and will not be used.
- Through our experience with bereaved families we know that receiving an Angel Gown in a manner that honors and respects the loss of a precious life is key in the start of their grieving process. We believe that a family should receive their child's Angel Gown individually, wrapped in tissue, and in simple white boxes that are presented to them by their medical care team or directly from an organization when a request is received from the family.
- In our professional experience we know that most hospitals, due to funding, cannot provide clothing to a bereaved family in the above manner, and most donated gowns and clothing are placed in buckets, baskets or bins that have to be sorted through each time a baby passes away. We do not believe that gowns should be placed in a bin or basket that hospital personnel or bereaved parents have to sift through trying to locate a burial item that will fit or that look nice.

It is with this knowledge that we created our Angel Gown Program and the guidelines surrounding distribution of our Angel Gowns.

Policies for Angel Gown Volunteers

The following are policies we have created for volunteers wanting to work with our organization to provide Angel Gowns to hospitals and bereaved families. **We respectfully request that the following policies be followed when working with our organization so that we can provide families with the absolute best experience.**

We need volunteer seamstresses to commit to sewing for us so we can provide gowns to families and hospitals in the above manner.

If you wish to start your own private program we understand but **we encourage you to consider the above information so that the items you provide to a local hospital are provided in a way that meet best practice and the ongoing needs of families in your community.** We also provide other bereavement support information to both the hospital and the family and this is done when we send gowns to the hospitals. If you are starting your own program, we recommend you include this information for the families with your gowns. You may download this information on our website to include in your shipment.

NOTE: We have received requests for patterns from individuals who wish to sew for us but want to drop off gowns themselves at their local hospitals. While we understand those who feel this is more economical we are not able at this time to accommodate that request from seamstresses. Our commitment is to providing these gowns to hospitals in the above manner. **WE WILL PROVIDE GOWNS TO YOUR LOCAL HOSPITAL** if you are a volunteer seamstress for us – but we need to establish a relationship with a hospital to ensure these beautiful gowns make it into the hands of bereaved families in an appropriate way. We also provide other bereavement support information to both the hospital and the family and this is done when we send gowns to the hospitals.

Volunteer seamstresses for NICU Helping Hands will return gowns to us so that we can follow established best practice. Sending Angel Gowns back to us will cost a minimal amount (under \$10 in most cases).

We need your name and mailing address in order to send you wedding gowns to work with and to provide you support as you sew for us. If you have a gown you would like to start with that would be wonderful as well, just let us know. However, we have wedding gowns we can provide to you, so don't feel you must purchase used gowns or collect them to be able to create Angel Gowns.

NICU HELPING HANDS

SEWING INSTRUCTIONS FOR ANGEL GOWNS

As you make these, you will refine your own method of construction. These basic instructions are to get you started.

We do not take any credit for the creation of these patterns; they have been handed from seamstress to seamstress and have had multiple adaptations made along the way. We would like to acknowledge and thank Angel Gowns by Michelle with having shared this with us originally and for encouraging us to start a program locally that has now resulted in a national program that has opened up communication related to infant loss and how to best support bereaved parents. Thank you Michelle.

The patterns are just outlines of the patterns. Line up the lines, tape together and cut out. These can be copied onto heavy weight interfacing since it holds up to repeated pinning and accidental clipping better than paper – then when those start to wear out just copy another.

SUGGESTIONS:

- If a dress you receive is visibly soiled or has a musty smell wash the dress in the washing machine on the gentle cycle, hang dry or tumble dry on a very low heat cycle - it will be fine. For discolored fabrics you can try soaking overnight in the bathtub with water and BIZ.
- You can cut a piece from each gown to send back to the bride who lovingly gave her gown. Try to cut a piece that is particularly beautiful or representative of the gown which the bride will recognize. We often provide a keepsake piece – a 12” strip of the gown that can be used to wrap a bridal bouquet for a daughter or granddaughter’s wedding.
- I cut the skirt from bodice, and then separate each section at the seams. Much easier to work with as the bodice of the dress typically has too many seams to use for a gown, but often there is often a lot of lace or beads that can be removed and applied to other parts of the gowns.
- The bottom of the skirt is a great place to line up the bottom of your pattern with for an easy no sew and beautiful hemline.
- You’ll have odd size pieces left from which you’ll cut a neck facing, approx. 4”x4” round. Larger or smaller depending on the size of the gown you are sewing.

SEWING INSTRUCTIONS FOR ANGEL GOWNS:

1. Sew shoulder seams and press open. (You can serge this seam, press it over one direction and top stitch it down).
2. Neck facing (see drawn tutorial). Lay right side neck facing to right side fabric and pin in place and sew around neck opening. You may need to go around more than once to make it even, sometimes sewing in the opposite direction helps to get an even seam as the space is so small. Trim facing inside the neck hole, clip curves, turn facing, press, and top-stitch about ¼” from edge. Then with pinking shears trim facing to a suitable size.
3. At this point you may want to add trim to front bodice. (We often choose to do it afterwards and sew trim all the way around the bottom of the gown instead of just on the front. For lace appliques and bows etc. we will often use fabric glue like liquid stitch or 444 super glue spray (it is permanent, flexible, and odorless after drying). Sometimes you can hand sew. Sometimes machine sew. Sometimes you can sew a chain of beads around the neck... your creativity along with trial and error will tell you when and how to add embellishments.

4. Hem sleeves. Or add lace. Then sew ¼" elastic on wrong side about ½" from sleeve edge if desired.
5. Pin side ribbons (8-12 inches depending on dress size, you need to have enough to tie a bow) in side seam about 1-2" down from underarm.
6. Sew side seams, attaching gown front to gown back, matching hemmed sleeve edges and bottom edge of gown. Clip underarm seams fairly generously so that when turned right side out, they lay flat as possible – THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT. (Again, after sewing you can serge this seam then clip, turn and iron).
7. Hem bottom if it is a raw edge by turning up and topstitching, or adding lace.
8. Turn center back edges under, press, topstitch, and adding a ribbon on each side just below the neckline. The gowns are open all the way down for ease in dressing the babies.

SEWING INSTRUCTIONS FOR ANGEL WRAPS:

These wraps are for the very small or very fragile infant that cannot be clothed.

There isn't really a pattern to share with you; we cut three squares, roughly 10 x10 with a square quilter's template and do the following:

1. The first square we iron diagonally in half and either sew a seam along the finished edge or sew lace along the finished edge.
2. The second square we sew a 15 (or so) inch length of ribbon diagonally to the right side of the fabric. We zigzag it onto the fabric about half an inch in the center of the square at the center of the ribbon.
3. Sandwich the three layers together
 - The bottom square with the ribbon right side up
 - In the middle, the triangle right side down towards the ribbon on the bottom piece (make sure that the ribbon runs the same diagonal as the triangle piece)
 - The top square you place right side down.
4. Pin edges together and sew. Sew starting just prior to a corner that does not contain the triangle piece, and go around to just past the fourth corner.
5. Turn right side out so that the ribbon is on the back and the pocket is in front and press. Tuck in the raw edges at the opening and sew a seam close to the edge all the way around to finish the wrap and seal the opening.
6. Add any further embellishments you desire (lace to edges, front of pocket or the side corners that show when wrapped up).

After completing your Angel Gowns please send back to NICU Helping Hands so that we can properly package them for giving to a family. We include a special angel, a note, and we wrap them individually and place them in nice white boxes that contain a way for the family to contact us for further bereavement support. We believe this is a best practice in caring for bereaved parents and we thank you for helping us serve them in the best possible manner.

Thank you so very much for helping us provide such a blessing to families across the United States.

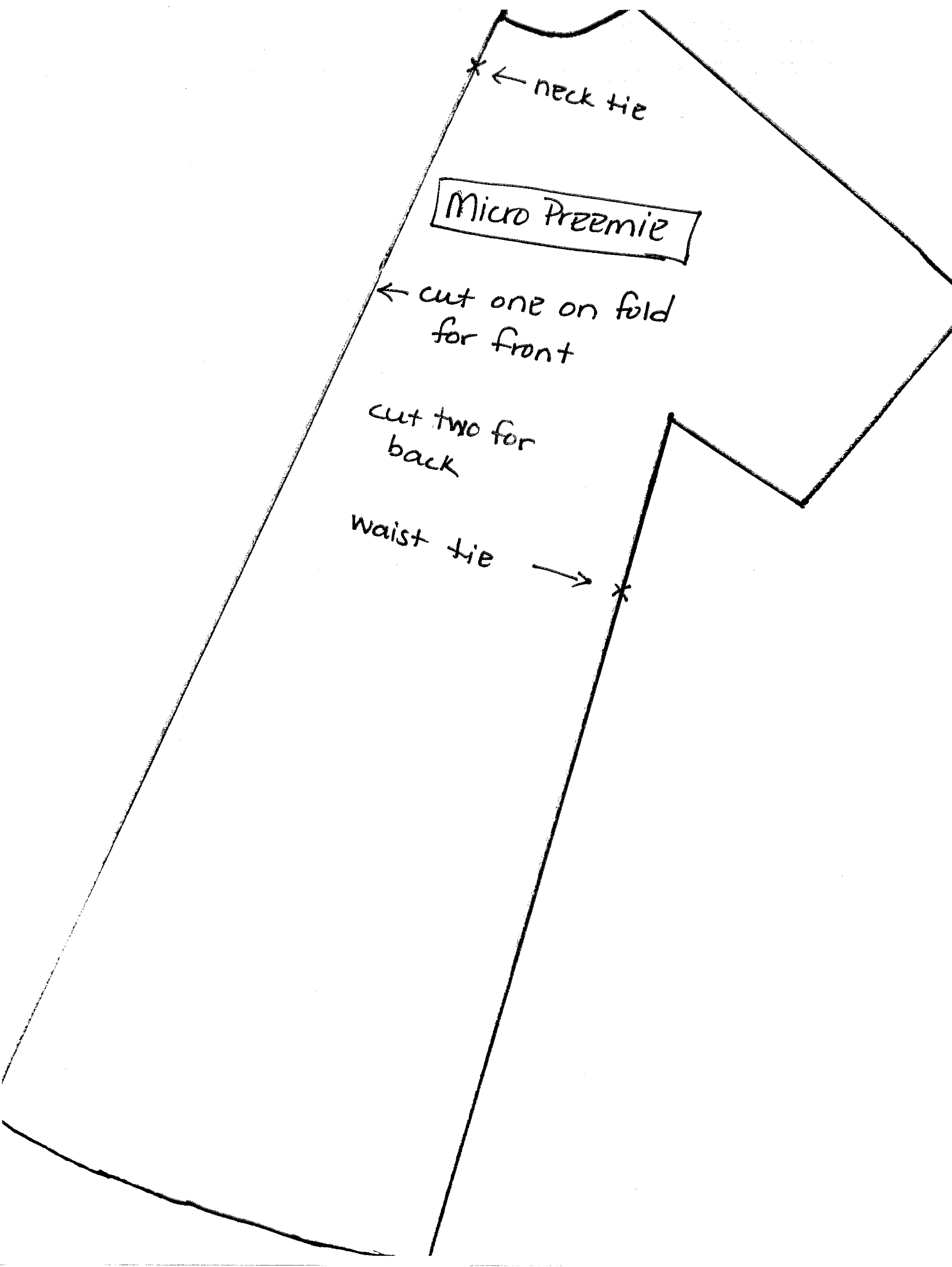
* ← neck tie

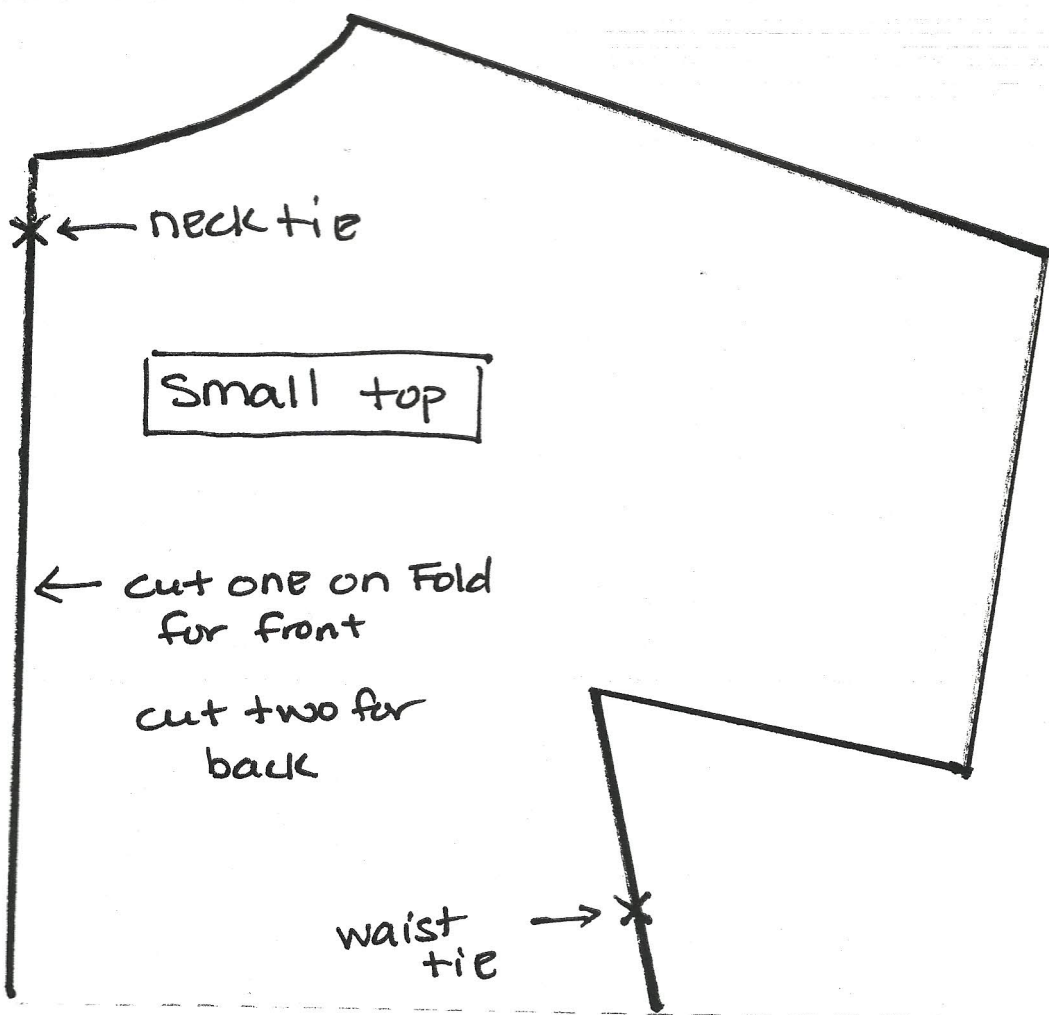
Micro Preemie

← cut one on fold
for front

cut two for
back

waist tie → *





Small top

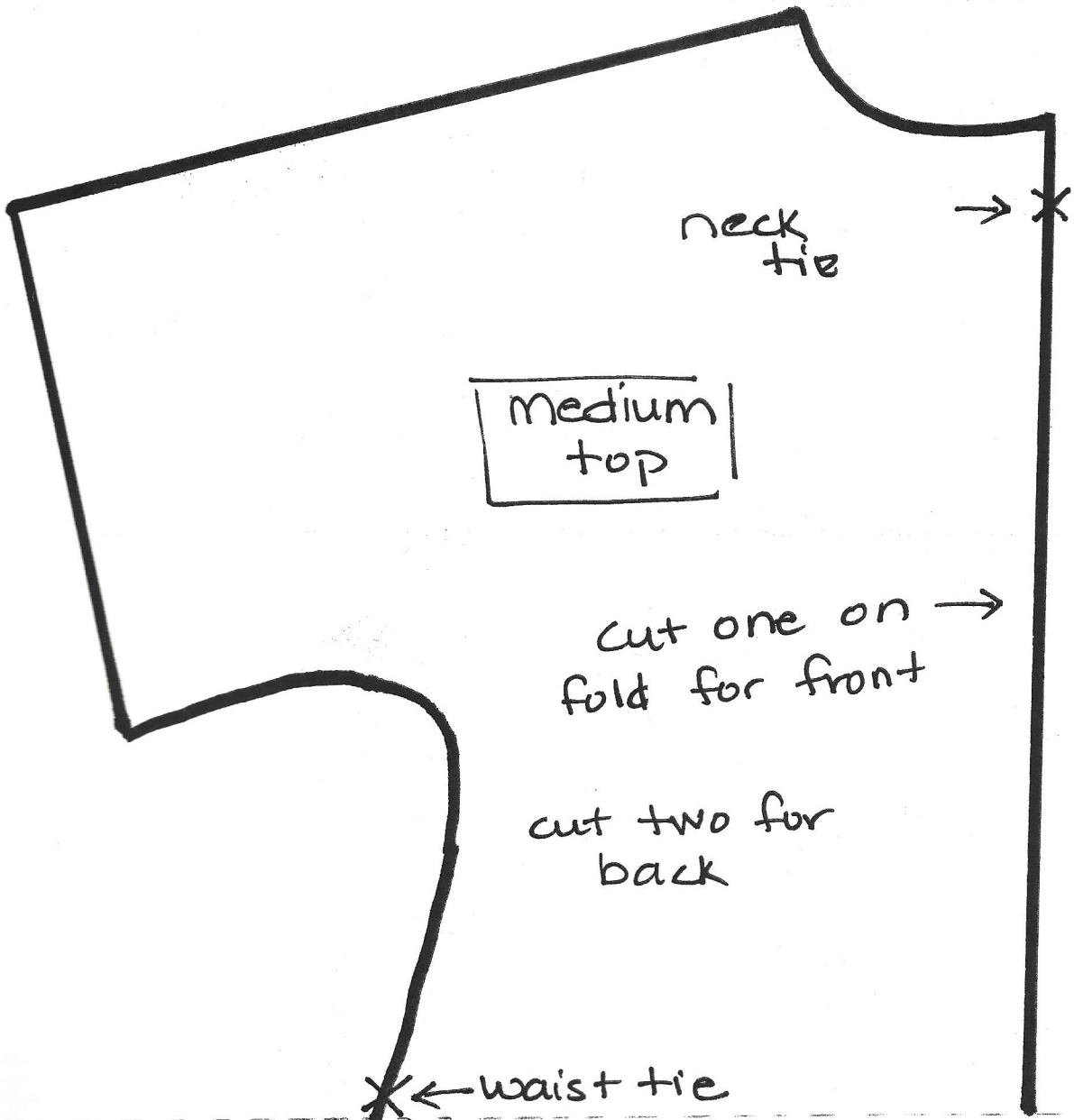
* ← neck tie

← cut one on fold for front

cut two for back

waist tie → *

Small bottom



neck
tie

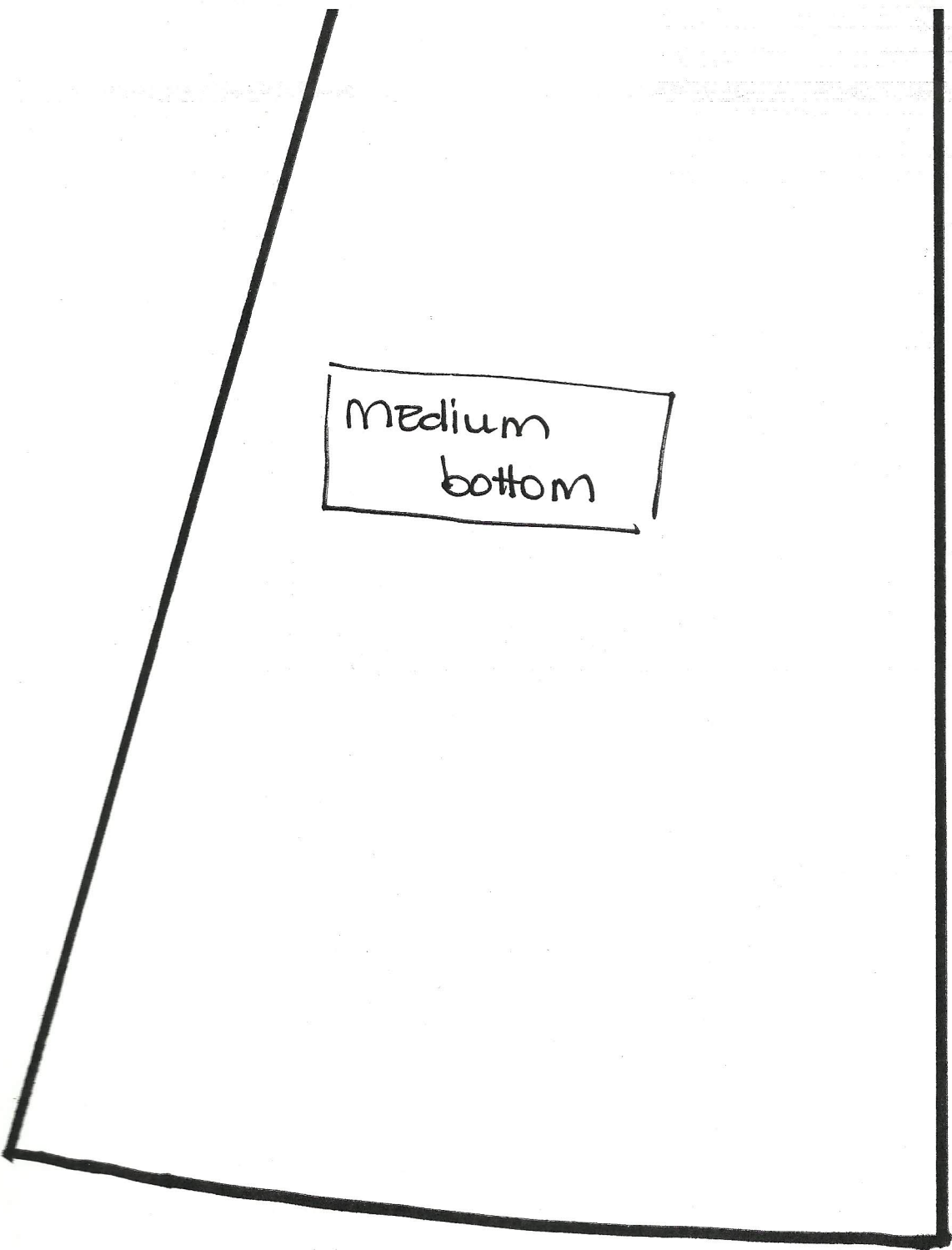


medium
top

cut one on →
fold for front

cut two for
back

← waist tie



medium
bottom