



2wish

When a Child Dies

A Guide for Parents & Carers

Support for those affected by sudden death in young people



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Introduction

This booklet aims to provide helpful information for parents and carers following the loss of a child.

The death of a child is a tragedy for the family and the wider community.

Whether the death is expected or unexpected it is vital that all child deaths are carefully reviewed so that we may learn as much as possible, to try to prevent future deaths, and to support families, carers and friends.

Some organisations which offer support in bereavement are listed at the end of this booklet.





Expected Deaths

If your child had a long-term illness or life-limiting condition, and death was expected, it is likely that your family and the team supporting you will have made an appropriate 'care pathway' together. This might include an emergency care plan for your child. Local health and other professionals such as hospice or hospital staff will work with you and your family to support you.

It may be necessary for the Coroner to arrange a post-mortem examination. Otherwise, you should be able to register your child's death quickly and proceed with your family's planned funeral and memorial arrangements.

Information about your child will be shared with the child death review team.

If your child had a long-term illness or a life-limiting condition, but was not expected to die at this particular time, then the death will be treated as an unexpected death.

Unexpected Deaths

An unexpected death is one which was not expected in the previous 24 hours, or before the event that led to the death, for example, a road traffic collision.

Professionals are required by law to report all unexpected deaths to the Coroner and the Police.

Unexpected child deaths start the procedural Child Death Overview Panel response (CDOP) process





Meetings Between Professionals

For both expected and unexpected deaths, professionals involved with your child may meet to talk to each other about why your child died.

They will consider what happened to your child and review the care and support provided. You will be kept informed during this process by a professional whom you have met, perhaps someone you knew before your child died. If you have any questions, or wish to share any information, speak to this professional. There may also be information that the professionals need from you because information from you is very important.

It is important that all the professionals involved talk to each other to gather as much information as possible about your child's death.

CDOP

The child death overview panel review covers children (a person under 18 years of age), it does not include stillbirths, late foetal loss, or terminations of pregnancy (of any gestation) carried out within the law.

This review must be carried out for all children regardless of the cause of death and sets out how professionals respond to the unexpected death of a child, to make sure the response is safe, consistent and sensitive to the needs of the bereaved family. This includes the death of any live-born baby where a death certificate has been issued.

- Stillbirth: baby born without signs of life after 24 weeks gestation
- Late foetal loss: where a pregnancy ends without signs of life before 24 weeks gestation

Cases where there is a live birth after a planned termination of pregnancy carried out within the law are not subject to a child death review.

Under the CDOP process, professionals will have a series of meetings to share information about your child and family. If any safeguarding concerns arise, the appropriate procedures will be followed.

Immediately following your child's death and throughout the CDOP process, professionals will offer support to you and your family and will signpost you to appropriate organisations that will be able to provide ongoing bereavement support.

It is important that all the professionals involved talk to each other to gather as much information as possible about your child's death.



Child Death Review

The Child Death Review (CDR) collects information about the deaths of children normally resident in their area are reviewed. The information is used by the CDR to review what happened and to see what can be learned to prevent the same thing happening to another child or young person.

Reviews are not investigations, they do not look at who might be at fault or who is to blame for individual deaths, they focus on improvements for the future. It is not possible for families and carers to attend review meetings. The CDR receives information from professionals, however, if families and carers wish particular information to be considered they can contact the CDR.

The CDR does not report on individual cases. CDR reports consider common themes, contain only anonymised information and discuss opportunities for prevention of future deaths. CDR reports are available on the CDR website.

The Coroner And The Coroner's Inquest

The Coroner is an officer appointed by the local authority to investigate unexpected deaths. The Coroner's job is to find out who has died and how, when and where they died.

The Coroner may request a post-mortem examination. If the cause of death remains uncertain an inquest is held. If the Coroner decides to hold an inquest you will be given details of when and where it will take place. The inquest will be opened within a few days of your child's death.

Further information about coroners and inquests can be found in the leaflet 'A Guide to Coroner's services for Bereaved People'

You can use any search engine and search for...
"A Guide to Coroner Services for Bereaved People"
to find this leaflet

Or you can ask your supporting professional for a copy.





Post-Mortem Examination & The Pathologist

A post-mortem examination, also known as an autopsy, is an examination after death by a doctor called a pathologist. Post-mortem examinations for children and young people will be carried out by a specialist pathologist which may mean that your child is moved to another hospital.

If a Coroner is not involved, then a post-mortem examination can only take place with parental consent. You should have a full discussion with health care staff to decide if this is the right decision for you and your family.

You can request your own representation at the post-mortem.

After the post-mortem examination has taken place, and the Coroner has given permission, you can see and hold your child, and decide where you would like your child to be before the funeral. This includes the possibility of some time at home. If your family would like this, you can discuss it with hospital staff.

Registering Your Child's Death

If you are given a medical certificate showing the cause of your child's death by your GP or a hospital doctor you can take it to the Registrar and register the death.

If your child's death has been reported to the Coroner you cannot register the death until the Coroner gives permission. The Coroner may decide that the cause of death is clear and ask a doctor to give you a medical showing the cause of death. You can then go to the Registrar and register the death.

If a post-mortem examination has taken place then the Coroner is responsible for sending the relevant paperwork to the Registrar. If an inquest is required the death cannot be registered until after the inquest, but the Coroner can give you a certificate confirming that your child has died. When the inquest is over the Coroner will tell the Registrar what to put in the register.

Once the death is registered you can obtain a death certificate.



When Can You Have Your Child's Funeral?

You can start to plan the funeral at any time but you can only hold it once you have the death certificate or other appropriate form from the Coroner. You may wish to discuss possible choices with your chosen funeral director and take time to consider the type of service most meaningful for you and your family.

If you have religious or other requirements that may affect the timing of your child's funeral, please discuss these with hospital staff. They will alert the Coroner who will try to accommodate your wishes, though it may not always be possible.

You may be eligible for some help with the cost of the funeral. Further information and advice can be found at www.gov.uk/funeral-payments or at jobcentre plus.



Bereavement Support

Help Is At Hand

A resource for people bereaved through suicide or other unexplained death, and for those helping them.

www.supportaftersuicide.org.uk/resource/help-is-at-hand/

2wish

Support for those affected by sudden death in young people.

W: www.2wish.org.uk

E: support@2wish.org.uk

T: 01443 853125

Bliss

Support, including after bereavement, for the family of a premature baby.

W: www.bliss.org.uk

T: 020 73781122

Childhood Bereavement Network

Information and advice about local and national services to support bereaved children and young people.

W: www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Child Death Helpline

For anyone affected by the death of a child of any age from any cause.

W: www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

T: 0800 282986

Bereavement Support

Cruse

Cruse is the UK's largest bereavement charity.

W: www.cruse.org.uk

T: 0808 8081677

Hope Again

Cruse has a dedicated website designed for young people which aims to support them after the death of someone close.

W: www.hopeagain.org.uk

T: 0808 8081677

HM Coroner – guide to coroners services

W: www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-coroner-services-and-coroner-investigations-a-short-guide

The Compassionate Friends

Support for bereaved parents, siblings and extended family.

W: www.tcf.org.uk

T: 0345 1232304

The Lullaby Trust

Support and advice for anyone following the sudden death of a baby.

W: www.lullabytrust.org.uk

T: 0808 802 6868

Road Peace

The national charity for road crash victims.

W: www.roadpeace.org/

T: 0800 1601069

Bereavement Support

SANDS

Supporting anyone affected by the death of a baby.

W: www.sands.org.uk

T: 0808 1643332

Winston's Wish

The leading childhood bereavement charity.

W: www.winstonswish.org

T: 08088 020021

CBUK

For support when a child grieves or when a child dies.

W: www.childbereavementuk.org

T: 0800 0288840

BRAKE

The road safety charity.

W: www.brake.org.uk

T: 0808 8000401

The Good Grief Trust

Help and Hope in one place.

W: www.thegoodgrieftrust.org



Contact us

If you feel you would like further support or information about the services we offer, please call or email:

support@2wish.org.uk

01443 853125

www.2wish.org.uk

Registered charity in England and Wales
Charity number: 1168140

