

A guide for parents following the death of their child



Northamptonshire Healthcare 
NHS Foundation Trust


University Hospitals
of Northamptonshire
NHS Group


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Introduction

This booklet is being given to you at a very difficult time, but it holds some really important information you may need. You don't need to read it all now, but keep it safe and come back to you when you feel able. It is intended to ensure you have information at hand as need at this difficult time.

The time immediately following the death of a child is deeply distressing and yet important decisions need to be made. This booklet aims to explain what happens after a child dies and help you access further information and support.

What happens now?

If the cause of your child's death is known, a doctor involved in your child's care can complete a death certificate. You may be asked whether you want a post-mortem examination to be carried out in order that more can be understood about the cause of your child's death. There are certain circumstances when a post-mortem is always required.

If your child died suddenly and unexpectedly:

- The police will visit and take photos of where your child died. You may find this shocking and upsetting but they are obliged to gather information on all sudden and unexpected deaths. A Paediatrician or Keyworker may visit with the police and talk to you about the days leading up to the day your child died in order to gather more information.
- Under the Coroner's Act (1988) the coroner must be notified before the death can be registered. This applies to all deaths where the cause is unknown and those that are sudden, unnatural or violent. The coroner is responsible for deciding if further investigation is required. If a post-mortem is required, the Coroner will arrange for your child to be taken to a mortuary where a Specialist Paediatric Pathologist will carry out a post-mortem examination. This is usually done in Leicester or Nottingham. The Coroner does not require your permission for this to happen but the Coroner's Officer should explain the procedure to you.
- Your formal consent must be sought for the retention of any tissue samples and this is usually done by the Coroner's Officer. The samples required are usually very small. The Coroner's Officer will also explain the options for what will happen to the tissue samples after the post-mortem.
- Once the post-mortem examination is completed, you will be able to organise a funeral for your child, although detailed results of the post-mortem may not be available for several months. The Paediatrician or Keyworker can request a copy of the Pathologist's report and will be able to go through it with you, if you wish.
- Coroner and Coroner's Officers:
Coroners are independent judicial officers who must follow laws, which apply, to Coroners and Inquests.

Coroner's Officers, who may be Police Officers, work under the direction of Coroners and liaise with bereaved families, police, doctors and funeral directors.

Care of your child after the post-mortem

You may have been able to hold your child at home or in the hospital before he or she was taken to the mortuary. Some families may wish to have a brief ceremony or blessing before the body is moved which can be arranged. A nurse will accompany your child to the mortuary. After the post-mortem, and once the death certificate has been issued, you may choose how and where you wish to care for your child before the funeral. This could be at the hospital, funeral director's premises or your own home. It is important to take some time to think about what would be best for you and your family.

At Northampton General Hospital, you and your family may be able to visit your child in the visiting room by calling the mortuary on [telephone: 01604 545014](tel:01604545014).

At Kettering General Hospital, the mortuary does not routinely permit visits, however they may accept visits in very exceptional circumstances, but this must be discussed on an individual basis. You can contact the mortuary on [telephone: 01536 492714](tel:01536492714).

The Role of The Medical Examiner Service

From April 2020, it became a statutory requirement for all hospitals to provide a Medical Examiner Service. The Medical Examiners are independent senior doctors working alongside the paediatric doctors to ensure that the information contained on the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) is correct and to ensure that if the Coroner's referral is required, it is made appropriately and in a timely manner. The Paediatrician will discuss your child with the Medical Examiner before writing the Death Certificate.

Registering your child's death if an inquest is not required

Once the certificate is written, a Medical Examiner's Officer from the hospital will call you to let you know that the certificate has been written and sent electronically to the Registrar. You will then be able to make an appointment to register the death. If you would like to speak to the Medical Examiner's team about any aspect of your child's care, as an independent person, they are available from 9:00-17:00 Monday–Friday.

Northampton General Hospital Medical Examiners office [Telephone: 01604 544518](tel:01604544518)

Kettering General Hospital Medical Examiners office [Telephone: 01536 493627](tel:01536493627)

If the Coroner is not carrying out investigations, the certificate will be issued by a Doctor involved in your child's care and the death must be registered within five working days of death. The death can be registered by relatives or someone present at the death – it does not have to be parents of the child.

If there has been a post-mortem, you should register your child's death as soon as the Registrar for Births and Deaths has received notification from the Coroner certifying the cause of death. The Coroner's Officer will inform you of this.

Currently under revision. Please visit the following website for up to date information –

<http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/Community/bdm/register/pages/default.aspx>

West Northants Council Registrar of Births and Deaths
Telephone: 0300 126 3000 (09:00-17:00 Monday-Friday)
Email: Registrationservice.ncc@westnorthants.gov.uk

North Northants Council Registrar of Births and Deaths
Telephone: 0300 126 700 (9:00-17:00 Monday-Friday)
Email: registrationservice.ncc@northnorthants.gov.uk

The Registrar will provide you with one certified copy of the death certificate and a certificate of burial or cremation. The certificate of burial or cremation needs to be given to the funeral director who can then arrange the funeral.

If there is to be an Inquest

An Inquest is an inquiry to confirm who has died, when and where the person died, and to establish the cause of death. If no medical or other explanation has been found at post-mortem, the Coroner will confirm the cause as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) or Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) or Sudden Unexpected Death in Childhood (SUDIC). The Inquest does not set out to establish guilt or blame or comment on any person's actions in relation to the death.

If there is to be an Inquest, the Coroner will issue a burial order or a cremation certificate after the post-mortem is completed in order that the funeral can take place. Once the Coroner informs the Registrar about the cause of death, then the death can be registered and a death certificate issued. An Interim Death Certificate will be issued by the Coroner once the Inquest has been opened and adjourned. This will be sent, normally to the next of kin, by post.

Once the Inquest has been resumed and a verdict given, the Coroner will register the death with the Registrar and the family will be notified how to obtain the official Death Certificate. More information on this process can be found by accessing the Government website on www.gov.uk and searching: [What to do after someone dies: When a death is reports to a coroner](#)

How do we arrange a funeral?

Having received the burial order or cremation certificate from the Registrar, you will need to contact a funeral director. A list of local funeral directors can be found at www.uk-funerals.co.uk.

Some may offer reduced rates for children less than 15 years of age. Parents receiving Income Support, Family Credit or Housing Benefit may be able to get a tax-free lump sum towards funeral costs. If you need any help with finances, your GP or Health Visitor or Keyworker can arrange for you to speak to a Social Worker who can give you advice on what is available to you. The Children's Funeral Fund for England can help to pay for some of the costs of a funeral for a child under 18. It is not means tested and is therefore available to all who need it. They can help pay for burial or cremation fees or a coffin, shroud or casket (up to a cost of £300). www.gov.uk/child-funeral-costs

Burial

This can be as elaborate or as simple as you wish. You should talk to the minister if you want your child to be buried in a churchyard. You can approach any cemetery of your choice. It is possible to bury your child on private land, but you must get permission first. If a private grave has been purchased, you will be entitled to place a headstone at a later date.

Cremation

When making the decision between burial or cremation it is important to bear in mind that there may be little or no ashes. Any ashes can be buried in a cemetery or scattered in a place that is special to you and your family, and this can become a special place to visit. Alternatively, a plaque can be erected in the crematorium gardens. The crematorium chapel has a Book of Remembrance in which you can place your child's name, date of birth and date of death.

The Review Process that is carried out when a child dies

It has been a legal requirement since April 2008 for all Local Authorities to provide a co-ordinated response to all sudden deaths of children and young people up to the age of 18. The Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) has in place procedures to respond rapidly to individual unexpected childhood deaths and to review all childhood deaths in a systematic way. This is called the Child Death Review Process or CDOP. The purpose is to gain a full understanding of what happened and whether anything would help to prevent similar deaths in the future. The process also looks at what support was offered to families around the time of a child's death and in the period afterwards.

The Child Death Review Sub Group includes professionals from a number of agencies including health, police and the local authority. The process involves:

- Rapid response by key professionals who come together to evaluate each death.
- Overview of all child deaths by the Sub Group who consider whether they can make any recommendations to improve services for children and families. The Sub Group members are not given the names of any children who died; all the details are dealt with anonymously.

It is well recognised that valuable lessons can be learnt that could help children and families in the future.

All information gathered is treated with the deepest respect and in strictest confidence.

If you have any questions about this process, or have information that you feel should be included, please contact:

Lisa Walsh
Business Manager
Northampton Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP)
[Telephone: 01604 364036](tel:01604364036)

Can I discuss my child's death later?

You will have met a number of professionals following your child's death. The Paediatrician at the hospital can talk to you about what happened there. If a Paediatrician or Keyworker came to visit you at home, he/she can also discuss the events with you. You may prefer to talk to other health professionals such as your GP, Health Visitor or Midwife. You will be given contact details of all the relevant professionals you may wish to speak to.

The Medical Examiners are also independent senior doctors that you can talk to if you have any questions or concerns.

Northampton General Hospital Medical Examiners office [Telephone: 01604 544518](tel:01604544518)

Kettering General Hospital Medical Examiners office [Telephone: 01536 493627](tel:01536493627)

The final post-mortem results can take up to six to nine months to come back to the Paediatrician. You will be contacted and made aware that the results are available and you can meet with a Paediatrician or Keyworker who can explain the findings.

What support is available?

There are many different sources of support for families who have lost a child.

You may choose to:

- Talk to family and friends
- Talk to previously bereaved parents
- Find spiritual support
- Contact local or national groups or charities
- Talk to a trained bereavement counsellor
- Book of Remembrance & Service of Remembrance
- Read written information or books

Your GP and Health Visitor or Keyworker are also available for you and will be able to put you in touch with local services.

Local organisations

Child and Adolescent Bereavement Service (CABS)

The countywide Child and Adolescent Bereavement Service (CABS) offers individual and group bereavement counselling to children and adolescents in Northamptonshire. It also offers support to families where a member has a terminal illness. The service is run by a full-time qualified bereavement coordinator and administration support. They are assisted by volunteer bereavement counsellors, who are trained in counselling (covering areas such as person-centred counselling, psychodynamics, and cognitive behaviours). Children and young people can be seen as outpatients at Northampton General Hospital, in school, at home, and in a variety of other settings. The location of appointments is agreed between the families and the counsellor to provide the most suitable package of care to the child or young person.

CABS can also support parents, carers, school staff, and other professionals who are working with a bereaved child or adolescent. Training can be provided to schools and agencies. The Child and Adolescent Bereavement Service offers one-to-one counselling and age appropriate bereavement groups. The service has a number of counsellors and volunteers and takes referrals from parents, schools, health professionals and if the child is over 16 from the child themselves.

Telephone: [01604 545131](tel:01604545131)

Northampton General Hospital Bereavement Service

The Bereavement Service is part of the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) and provides advice about taking the next steps and the practical arrangements following a death in the hospital. There is a dedicated Bereavement Officer within PALS who is available if you experience any difficulties or would like advice.

Telephone: [01604 545784](tel:01604545784)

Midwifery Bereavement Team (for neonatal deaths under 28 days of age) Telephone: [07920 505202](tel:07920505202)

Kettering General Hospital Bereavement Service

The Medical Examiners Office is a point of contact for families Telephone: [01536 493627](tel:01536493627)

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) providing advice can be contacted on

Telephone: [01536 493305](tel:01536493305)

Midwifery Bereavement Team (for neonatal deaths under 28 days of age) Telephone [01536 493304](tel:01536493304)

Chaplaincy Services

The Chaplaincy Service, through its contacts, can usually provide help for parents of all the major world faiths. Please contact the hospital chaplains if you would like their support or to find out about the Book of Remembrance and the Service of Remembrance.

Northampton General Hospital Chaplains Telephone: [01604 544608](tel:01604544608)

Kettering General Hospital Chaplains Telephone: [01536 492609](tel:01536492609)

Coroners Offices – for Northampton and Kettering offices Telephone [0300 111 2141](tel:03001112141)

National Organisations

The Lullaby Trust

The Lullaby Trust raises awareness of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), provides expert advice on safer sleep for babies and offers emotional support for bereaved families

[When a child dies - A guide for parents and carers \(lullabytrust.org.uk\)](http://lullabytrust.org.uk)

The Foundation for Sudden Infant Death

Offers support and counselling to bereaved families through its helpline, local befrienders and groups. Promotes and sponsors research into the causes and prevention of sudden and unexpected deaths.

Helpline: 020 7233 2090

Website: www.fsid.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse is a national bereavement charity that offers a website called RD4U designed by young people for young people aged 12 – 18. The website allows young people to share their thoughts, experiences and ideas for coping with grief. Cruse also offers a helpline for bereaved 12 – 18 year olds. Cruse also provides support to bereaved adults in the form of 1:1 counselling or support groups. Families should refer themselves by telephone or email.

Helpline: 0808 808 1677

Email: Northamptonshire@cruse.org.uk

Website: www.cruse.org.uk

Child Funeral Charity

Child Funeral Charity is a UK charity that offers practical and financial support in arranging funerals for children

www.childfuneralcharity.org.uk

Child Death Helpline

A helpline for anyone affected by the death of a child of any age.

Freephone number: 0800 808 8100

Website: www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK

Offers resources for bereaved families. It offers a confidential telephone-based support service as well as materials and training for professionals.

Telephone: 0800 028 8840

Website: www.childbereavement.org.uk

The Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS)

SANDS provides support for bereaved parents and their families when their baby dies at or soon after birth.

Telephone: 0808 164 3332
Email: helpline@sands.org.uk
Website: www.uk-sands.org
Local branch: www.northamptonshiresands.org

Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY)

Offers information and support to families in which sudden cardiac death has occurred in a child or young person. Telephone counselling is available and they can arrange screening for other family members:

Telephone: 01737 363 222
Email: cry@c-r-y.org.uk
Website: www.c-r-y.org.uk

Brake

A national road safety charity working to promote road safety and provide services and support for bereaved families and friends following a death on the roads.

Helpline: 0808 800 0401
Email: help@brake.org.uk
Website: www.brake.org.uk

Compassionate Friends

A national organisation run by bereaved parents and their families. It offers understanding, support and encouragement to others after the death of a child.

Telephone: 0345 123 2304
Email: helpline@tcf.org.uk
Website: www.tcf.org.uk

Sibling Support

Northamptonshire Children and Young Person's Bereavement Service

As above.

Winston's Wish

A national charity who run a helpline for bereaved families and produce a workbook for children aged seven and under: *Muddy Puddles and Sunshine* by Diana Crossley. They offer practical support and guidance to families, professionals and anyone concerned about a grieving child. There are interactive activities for bereaved children on its website and resources for bereaved families.

Helpline: 0808 802 0021
Email: ask@winstonswish.org
Website: www.winstonswish.org.uk

The Childhood Bereavement Network

The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN) is a national, multi-professional federation of organisations and individuals working with bereaved children and young people. It involves and is actively supported by all the major bereavement care providers in the UK. The website gives information about local and national support services.

Website: www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Childline

A free 24-hour helpline for children and young people to talk confidentially to trained volunteers.

Helpline: 0800 1111
Website: www.childline.org.uk

CONTACT LIST:

Hospital paediatrician

Telephone number

Lead paediatrician

Telephone number

Medical Examiners office.....

Telephone number: 01604 544518 / 01536 493627

Police officer

Telephone number.....

Any other contacts:

Name

Telephone number.....

Name

Telephone number.....

Name.....

Telephone number.....

