

When Your Child Dies

A guide for Parents & Carers



NOTES

NOTES

“Those we have held in our
arms for a while we hold
in our hearts forever.”

Author Unknown

Contents

Introduction	5
Expected deaths	6
Unexpected deaths	7
Meetings between professionals	8
PRUDiC	9
Child Death Review	10
The coroner and the coroner's inquest	11
Post mortem examination & the pathologist	12
Registering your child's death	13
When can you have your child's funeral?	14
Bereavement support	15

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 Response to Unexplained Deaths in Childhood (PRUDiC) 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 dies. 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.

PRUDiC

This process sets out how professionals in Wales 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.

Under the PRUDiC process, professionals will have a series of meetings as described previously where they will share information about your child and family. If any safeguarding concerns are identified, the appropriate procedures will be followed.

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

Child Death Review

The Child Death Review Programme (CDRP) collects information about all deaths of children in Wales or Welsh children who die elsewhere. The information is anonymised and used by the CDRP 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 fixes for the future. It is not possible for families and carers to attend review meetings. The CDRP receives information from professionals, however if families and carers wish to share information, they can contact the CDRP. Sometimes it would be helpful to have information about your family to help with the review. You will be asked to consent to this but you may withdraw your consent at any time by contacting the CDRP.

The CDRP will not report on individual cases, however, recommendations made as a result of a review can be made available to families and carers on request. The CDRP can be contacted at:

Website:

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/44351>

Child Death Review Programme

1st Floor Oldway Centre

36 Orchard Street

Swansea SA1 5AQ Tel: 01792 607524

Email: ChildDeath.Review@wales.nhs.uk

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 Coroners and Inquests' which is available at:-

www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_185904.pdf

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 certificate 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', is a resource for people bereaved through suicide or other unexplained death.

It is available at:

www.howis.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/888/HelpIsAtHand%28E%29.pdf

www.howis.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/888/HelpIsAtHand_CymWeb.pdf

(Welsh)

The following organisations can offer support and advice

Bliss

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

www.bliss.org.uk

0500 618140

Childhood Bereavement Network

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

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

020 7843 6309

Child Death Helpline

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

www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

0800 282986

For mobiles:- 0808 800 6019

Cruse

Cruse is the UK's largest bereavement charity

www.cruse.org.uk

0844 477 9400

RD4U

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

www.rd4u.org.uk

0844 477 9400

HM Coroner

www.direct.gov.uk

The Compassionate Friends

Support for bereaved parents, siblings and extended family

www.tcf.org.uk

Helpline 0845 123 2304

The Lullaby Trust

(previously the Foundation for the study of infant deaths)

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

www.lullabytrust.org.uk

0808 802 6868 (freephone helpline)

Road Peace

The national charity for road crash victims.

<http://www.roadpeace.org/>

0845 4500 355 (helpline-local rate, available Mon-Fri 9-5)

SANDS

Supporting anyone affected by the death of a baby

www.uk-sands.org

020 7436 5881 (helpline)

Winston's Wish

The leading childhood bereavement charity.

www.winstonswish.org.uk

08452 03 04 05

LOCAL CONTACTS

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