

# Bereavement Services

Patient Information Leaflet

## Support and information following the death of your child

Patients and Relatives Information



Milton Keynes  
**Safeguarding**  
Children Board



## **Introduction**

**We would like to offer our deepest sympathy on the death of your child.**

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.

The hospital **bereavement service** will support you through the processes outlined in this book. Please contact them on 01908 996155/996154.

If you would like to speak to a **hospital chaplain** you can do this via the hospital switchboard on 01908 660033 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You may want to feel connected to your faith community, or simply to have someone to listen to you at this very difficult time.

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## What happens now?

If the cause of your child's death is known, a doctor involved in your child's care can complete a medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD). 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 then 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 may visit with the police and talk to you about the days leading up to the day your child died to gather more information.

Under the Coroner's & Justice Act (2009) 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 outside the area. The coroner does not require your permission for this to happen but the Coroner's Officer will explain the procedure to you.

Your formal consent **must** be sought for the retention of any tissue samples. The samples required are usually no larger than a two-pence piece. These could be used for future research into why babies/children die suddenly and unexpectedly.

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 weeks. The family is entitled to a copy of the post mortem report if they so wish. The paediatrician can request a copy of the pathologist's report and will be able to go through it with you, if you wish. A copy of the report will also be sent to your GP.

## Coroner and Coroner's Officers

Coroners are independent judicial officers who work under strict guidance and laws.

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 a 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. After the post-mortem, and once the medical certificate of cause of death 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. You can discuss this with the hospital mortuary staff or funeral directors. They will listen to you and be able to guide you through this difficult time.

It is important to take some time to think about what would be best for you and your family.

The final post-mortem results can take up to three months to come back to the paediatrician. You will be contacted and made aware that the results are available and you can meet with the paediatrician who can explain the findings.

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

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

The hospital bereavement office will support you through the process. You will need to ring them on 01908 996155/996154 and they will guide you. They will scan and send the MCCD to the Register office and give you the details to make a phone appointment with the Registrars. During this appointment the registrar will ask a number of questions in order to complete the Death Certificate. This, and any copies you request will be sent to you, along with a certificate of burial or cremation. The certificate of burial or cremation will be scanned to the funeral directors 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. 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. The family can attend the opening of the inquest

either in person or remotely.

An interim Death Certificate will be issued by the Coroner once the inquest has been opened and adjourned.

The inquest will normally be held within six months of your child's death, again the family will be asked if they wish to attend the proceedings.

Disclosure of all documentation for the purposes of the inquest will be disclosed to the family before the inquest.

Once the inquest has been resumed and a conclusion given, the Coroner will register the death with the Registrar and the family will be notified how to obtain the official Death Certificate.

Once the coroner informs the Registrar about the cause of death, then the death can be registered and a death certificate issued. This will be sent, normally to the next of kin, by post.

**A Ministry of Justice booklet - 'Guide to Coroners Service' - will be given to you should an inquest be necessary.**

## **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 in the Yellow Pages or at [www.uk-funerals.co.uk](http://www.uk-funerals.co.uk)

Many funeral directors do not make any charges for a child's funeral. Under UK law the following can be claimed for the funeral of a child under the age of 18 or for a baby stillborn after the 24<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. You can claim for burial or cremation fees, and for the cost of a coffin up to £300. For more information see <https://www.gov.uk/child-funeral-costs>

## **Burial**

This can be as elaborate or as simple as you wish. If you want your child buried according to particular religious rites then you should contact a leader from that faith to find out more. 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 grave has been purchased, you will be entitled to place a headstone at a later date.

## **Cremation**

Following cremation, your child's ashes can be scattered either in the Child's Garden of Remembrance at the Crematorium in Milton Keynes, or in a place that is chosen by you and your family. This can become a special place for you and your family to visit. Alternatively, ashes can be formally buried in a grave or a memorial plaque can be erected in the crematorium

garden.

The Crematorium Willow Chapel has a Book of Remembrance in which you can place your child's name, date of birth and date of death. Staff from the Crematorium will listen to your wishes and guide you through this difficult time.



## **The Review Process that is carried out when a child dies**

Government legislation now requires all Local Authorities to review the death of every child and young person (up to the age of 18) in their area. They do this through their Local Safeguarding Children Board. Review takes place to make sure that we learn lessons to prevent further deaths wherever possible and, to check that bereaved families feel appropriately supported.

There are two separate parts to this process:

### **Rapid Response following a sudden unexpected death.**

This involves a group of key professionals who come together to complement the role of the Coroner in enquiring into a sudden and unexpected death of a child. Rapid Response is to help ensure that all relevant information is gathered and that the support offered to the family is coordinated.

### **The Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)**

The CDOP includes professionals from a number of agencies including Health, the Police and the Local Authority. The Panel reviews all child deaths to consider whether there is any action that might prevent similar deaths in the future and whether they need to make any recommendations (locally or nationally) to improve services for children and families.

Review usually takes place 6-12 months after the death. The members of the Panel sign a strict confidentiality agreement before taking part and no names are published with the recommendations. Parents are not allowed to attend the Panel.

4-6 weeks before your child is discussed you will receive a letter to invite you to share information about your child and to let the Panel have your views about what would have helped you before and after your child's death. All information is treated with deepest respect and in strictest confidence.

If you have any enquiries about the Child Death Processes please contact

Lesley Mellor, MKSCB Administrator on 01908 254373.

## **Can I discuss my child's death later?**

You will have met a number of professionals before and after your child's death. You may wish to discuss the death of your child with some of these professionals that have been involved in your child's care. The professionals you may want to consider talking to are;

- The local paediatrician who cared for your child Specialist paediatrician if one is involved
- GP
- Health Visitor
- Midwife
- Obstetrician

If you wish to speak to your Child's Consultant or your Obstetrician please contact their secretary to arrange a suitable appointment for you through the hospital switch board Tel: 01908 660033.

If you want to speak to your Child's Health Visitor GP or Midwife please contact them directly through your GP Surgery.

## **What support is available for you and your family?**

There are many different sources of support for families who have lost a child. You may find it helpful to:

- Talk to family and friends
- Attend the MK Bereaved Parents Group  
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

The Bereavement Service can offer help and advice about the next step to take and around practical issues following your child's death in hospital

The Hospital Chaplaincy offers pastoral, spiritual and religious support for people of any faith and those who have no faith. You may simply appreciate having someone else to be with you for a while, or someone to talk to. You may like to



arrange a blessing for your child, or you may feel you would be comforted by prayers being said with you or with your child. Chaplains are available at any time, 24/7.

You can ask your nurse or Bereavement Officer to contact a Chaplain or a specific religious community leader for you, or you may telephone our direct line. A library of Holy Books are also available from the Chaplaincy.

You will receive an annual invitation from our children's department, inviting you to our annual Tree Service, held in the hospital chapel. This is attended by bereaved parents and aims to give some space to remember your child amidst the Christmas season. You will have the opportunity to put a special Christmas decoration on a tree in memory of your child. You may wish for a decoration to be placed on the tree on your behalf, rather than attend the service yourself. Your GP and Health Visitor are also available for you and will be able to put you in touch with local services.

## **Local organisations**

### **Milton Keynes Bereaved Parents Support Group:**

[www.mkbpg.com](http://www.mkbpg.com)

Milton Keynes Bereavement Service

Tel: 07483 308032

HM Coroner's Office

Civic Offices

1 Saxon Gate East

Central Milton Keynes

MK9 3EJ

01908 254327

Email: [coroners.office@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:coroners.office@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

Milton Keynes University Hospital Bereavement Services

01908 996155

01908 996154

The Hospital Chaplaincy Service

01908 996061

01908 996062

01908 996064

[chaplaincy@mkuh.nhs.uk](mailto:chaplaincy@mkuh.nhs.uk)

## **National organisations**

### **The Lullaby Trust**

The Lullaby Trust raises awareness of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and child up to toddler age. They provide expert help and advice on safer sleep for babies and offer emotional support for bereaved families.

Info & Advice: 0808 602 6869

Bereavement Support: 0808 802 6868

### **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 years. 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 one-to-one counselling or support groups. Families should refer themselves by telephone or email:

Helpline: 0808 808 1677

Email: [helpline@cruse.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cruse.org.uk)

### **Child Death Helpline**

A helpline for anyone affected by the death of a child of any age, run by Great Ormond Street Hospital, London and Alder Hey Hospital, Liverpool.

Freephone number: 0800 282986

Website: [www.childdeathhelpline.org](http://www.childdeathhelpline.org)

### **The Child Bereavement UK**

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

Helpline: 0800 028 8840

Website: [www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

Milton Keynes Branch: 01908 550895

### **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.

Helpline: 0808 164 3332

Website: [www.uk-sands.org](http://www.uk-sands.org)

Email: [helpline@sands.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sands.org.uk)

## **Cardiac Risk to 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.

Website: [www.c-r-y.org.uk](http://www.c-r-y.org.uk)  
Email: [cry@c-r-y.org.uk](mailto:cry@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  
Website: [www.brake.org.uk](http://www.brake.org.uk)  
Email: [help@brake.org.uk](mailto:help@brake.org.uk)

## **The 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.

Helpline: 0345 123 2304  
Website: [www.tcf.org.uk](http://www.tcf.org.uk)  
Email: [helpline@tcf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@tcf.org.uk)

## **Sibling Support**

**Harry's Rainbow** – support for bereaved children

Website: [www.harrysrainbow.co.uk](http://www.harrysrainbow.co.uk)  
Email: [info@harrysrainbow.co.uk](mailto:info@harrysrainbow.co.uk)  
Telephone: 01908 061676

## **Winston's Wish**

A national charity which runs a helpline for bereaved families and produces a workbook for children aged seven and under: *Muddy Puddles and sunshine* by Diana Crossley.

The charity offers 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: 08088 020 021  
Website: [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)  
Email: [ask@winstonswish.org](mailto:ask@winstonswish.org)

## 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](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)

Email: [cbn@ncb.org.uk](mailto:cbn@ncb.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](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Email: [info@childline.org.uk](mailto:info@childline.org.uk)

## Useful personal contact list

(For parents' use)

**Hospital paediatrician** : .....

Telephone number : .....

**Lead paediatrician** : .....

Telephone number : .....

**Police officer** : .....

Telephone number : .....

### Any other contacts

**Name** : .....

Telephone number :.....

**Name** :.....

Telephone number :.....

**Name** :.....

Telephone number :.....

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**References for the information used in this leaflet may be obtained from the author.**

**We ask for information about you so that you can receive proper care and treatment. This information remains confidential and is stored securely by the Trust in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018/GDPR. Further guidance can be found within our privacy notice found on our Trust website: [www.mkuh.nhs.uk](http://www.mkuh.nhs.uk)**

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