

When a child dies in hospital what happens next?

This information is about when
a child dies in hospital.
Worthing and Chichester.

We are so very sorry for your loss. We understand that this may be the hardest thing you will ever have to face.

No one will be able to tell you exactly how it feels. Loss affects everyone differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief can involve a range of feelings such as numbness, disbelief, anger, guilt, sadness, emptiness, relief, and denial. You may have so many different feelings that you wonder if you are going mad or will ever be able to enjoy life again. This is a perfectly normal reaction.

This booklet has been written to provide you with information about:

- what might happen next
- who you can expect to hear from
- who you can talk to for help.

During this time, you will need the support of others. Don't be afraid to talk about your feelings to someone. Family and friends can help.

A list of support groups and agencies is included at the end of this leaflet.

What is this information about?

- what happens after your child dies
- understanding the cause of your child's death
- the Child Death Review process
- the medical examiner/coroner and the death certificate
- how to register the death
- arranging the funeral.

What happens after my child dies in hospital?

We want to help you do what feels right for you and your family.

You will be able to spend time with your child. We will try to give you as much time as you need to say goodbye. Please do not feel you have to spend as long as is offered with your child. For some people 10 minutes is enough, so please tell the nursing staff if you would like to leave the room.

Sometimes, someone will need to stay in the room with you. If that is the case, we will let you know.

You will be offered the opportunity to keep mementos, such as photos, a lock of hair, or hand and footprints from your child. If these are not offered to you, please ask.

There will always be a hospital chaplain available to provide support or a blessing or ceremony for your child, whatever your faith. They can also offer support in a non-religious capacity. Please ask your nurse if you would like this.

Understanding the cause of my child's death

Some child deaths may need to be referred to the coroner. The coroner is a special type of judge who, by law, must investigate deaths in certain situations. They may ask for a post-mortem examination (an examination of the body after death) to try to find out why your child died.

They usually do this if:

- your child dies very suddenly or unexpectedly
- your child's death happened in unusual circumstances
- the doctors do not know the cause of death
- your child has had surgery recently.

Your doctors may also wish to carry out a hospital post-mortem examination if your child's death was expected or caused by natural illness, but they want to know more about the cause of death.

You can refuse a hospital post-mortem. You cannot refuse a coroner's post-mortem.

If your child has died unexpectedly, as part of the investigation at the hospital you will be asked questions about your child's death by different people.

These include:

- doctors
- police officers. Sometimes the police may be in uniform, which we understand can be frightening, but is perfectly normal at certain times.
- Coroner's officers. They act for the coroner.

The police and coroner's officer may also do a home visit in the first 24 to 48 hours after your child has died. They will do this along with a specialist doctor or nurse. This is an important and standard part of the investigation. It may help us to build a picture of why your child has died.

What is the Child Death Review process?

All deaths of children in the UK are reviewed by the Child Death Review (CDR) Team. This is for two reasons:

1. to make sure the right support is provided to all family members
 2. to see if there are any lessons to be learned, or anything that could have been done better, during your child's life and death.
- The team will get information from:
- you
 - any services that your child and family has come into contact with, like health and social care services
 - the police.

To help you through this process you will have a named point of contact to be your key worker.

The keyworker will either:

- write to you to tell you who they are, and arrange a visit or
- ask one of the medical professionals that you know to pass their contact details on to you. Sometimes they may visit you with another medical professional to introduce themselves.

The keyworker's role is to:

- be a reliable and accessible point of contact for you
- help arrange meetings between you and other professionals
- keep you informed about the Child Death Review process
- be your voice at meetings to make sure that any questions you have are answered, and that you get feedback from these meetings
- signpost you to bereavement support.

The medical examiner and the death certificate

Some deaths in childhood do not need a coroner's investigation (for example, if the death was expected or is clearly explained). However, the circumstances around the death will still be reviewed by one of our hospital's medical examiners.

Medical examiners are doctors who:

- look at deaths in hospitals to make sure that the cause of death is clear and properly recorded
- highlight any concerns that the family may have. For this, the Medical Examiner will usually contact you directly
- identify any lessons the hospital can learn to help prevent further deaths.

If your child's death was expected or the cause of death is known, your child's doctor will complete a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. This is sometimes called a Death Certificate or MCCD. This is needed to register your child's death which must happen by law for all deaths. The Medical Examiner may contact you before they countersign and send the MCCD to the Registrar.

If your child has been referred to the coroner, or if a post-mortem examination is needed, an interim (temporary) death certificate will be sent to the funeral director. This means that the funeral can take place before the coroner's investigation is finished, which can take several months. The coroner will tell you what you need to do in the meantime.

How do I register the death?

If the death was expected and the coroner is not involved, once the MCCD has been issued, you will need to register your child's death at the West Sussex County Council register office.

To arrange an appointment, you can do this online at:

Registering a death – West Sussex County Council

www.westsussex.gov.uk/births-ceremonies-and-deaths/deaths/registering-a-death

If you prefer to ring and make an appointment the website gives you contact details for all the Register Offices in West Sussex. You can register a death at any one of them.

You will need to provide some information and documents. The website will give details. Once the death is registered, the registrar will give you something called a 'green form' which you will need to take to the funeral directors.

If your child has been referred to the coroner, the final death certificate will be sent straight to the registrar when the investigation is finished. You can then register your child's death.

How do I arrange the funeral?

After registering your child's death, you can take the green form to the funeral directors, and they will guide you through the funeral arrangements. If the coroner is involved, your family's coroner officer will be in regular contact, and they will advise you on how soon the funeral can take place.

If you would like advice on who to go to, you can find more information online at:

The National Association of Funeral Directors

www.nafd.org.uk

The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors

www.saif.org.uk

If you need a funeral to take place within 24 hours for a faith burial, contact the out of hours service for assistance.

Telephone **01243 756622** on Saturdays, Sundays or bank holidays, from 10am to 12pm.

If a coroner's post-mortem is needed, please let the coroner's office know about your faith needs. They can try and organise the post-mortem as quickly as possible, although this may not always be possible.

Useful contacts

Child Death Review Nurse Team

syxicb.sussexcdop@nhs.net

Brighton and Hove Registrar's Office

How to register a death **01273 292016**

Coroner Service:

West Sussex, Brighton and Hove Coroner Service **033 022 25560**

The consultant/doctor who is looking after your child is:

What support is available to me?

Your keyworker will be able to discuss options for counselling, befriending or voluntary support services that you may be interested in for further support.

You can also contact them now if you wish:

The Lullaby Trust support when affected by the sudden and unexpected death of a baby or young child.

0808 802 6868

support@lullabytrust.org.uk

Cruse support following any death.

01273 234007

eastsussex@cruse.org.uk

Winston wish support, advice, resources for parents supporting bereaved children and young people.

0808 802 0021

www.winstonswish.org

Child Bereavement UK is a national charity which helps children, young people, families and parents with their bereavement journey

0800 028 8840

www.childbereavementuk.org

Childhood Bereavement Network holds information about smaller, specialised and local support for you to consider.

020 7843 6309

www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk

Chestnut Tree House is a children's hospice service based in Arundel that provides bereavement care for families who live across Sussex. You can self-refer or ask a family member or friend.

01903 871800

Refer yourself for urgent bereavement care

www.chestnut-tree-house.org.uk/our-care/refer-yourself-for-urgent-bereavement-care

What to do when a child dies booklet

from NCMD (NHS England)



QR code to the NCMD booklet -
What to do when a child dies

Who can I contact for further information or advice?

Please feel free to ask your key worker if you have any questions or need further support.

You may find it useful to speak to your doctors or the team that looked after your child in their final hours. Please contact your key worker if you wish to arrange a meeting in or outside of the hospital.

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information-for-patients-and-public](http://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/research-and-innovation/information-for-patients-and-public)
or scan the QR code



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