

When a child dies

Information for parents, families and carers



Help for you following the death of your child

The death of a child is a very distressing and painful time. Even at this most difficult of times there are certain things that have to be dealt with, and this booklet aims to provide some help and advice during the early days of your bereavement. We hope you find it useful. If you have any questions or want to discuss anything relating to the hospital, please feel free to contact the ward or our bereavement care team on 023 8120 4587.

When you leave the hospital we will continue to care for your child until you have been able to make contact with a funeral director. You and your family will still be able to visit your child, but will need to ring either the ward or the bereavement care team so that the staff can make the necessary arrangements. You will also have the opportunity to see your child at the funeral director's premises and in some circumstances it might be possible for you to take your child home. The ward staff, a member of the bereavement care team or your funeral director should be able to discuss these choices with you.

Collecting the medical certificate of cause of death

In most cases a medical certificate of cause of death (or neonatal death certificate if the death occurred within 28 days of the birth) will be issued by the hospital doctors. You will need this in order to register your child's death at the Registrar's office (see page 4-5). Please telephone the ward who will arrange for you to collect the certificate if it was not issued to you at the time.

If the cause of your child's death is uncertain, for example if it happened after an operation, within 24 hours of admission to the hospital or following an accident, the Coroner may wish to investigate the death further. Under these circumstances the doctors will not issue a medical certificate of cause of death or neonatal death certificate.

The Coroner's office and post mortems

Some deaths are reported by hospital doctors to the Coroner's office, for example those where:

- the cause of death is uncertain
- death was sudden, violent or caused by an accident
- the death occurred during an operation, before recovering from the effects of an anaesthetic or within 24 hours of hospital admission

The Coroner will then decide whether or not a post mortem examination is needed. The Coroner has a legal right to order a post mortem even if this is against your wishes. He or she will make the necessary arrangements and give the Registrar's office the forms that will enable you to register your child's death.

You will not receive a medical certificate of cause of death or neonatal death certificate from the hospital when a Coroner's post mortem examination is carried out. If there is a post mortem, the results go only to the Coroner in the first instance, but can be obtained later by your GP.

We will also make arrangements for you to discuss the results with your child's medical team here at the hospital if you wish. We will contact you by post, normally within 6-8 weeks, to make an appointment for this.

Please tell your funeral director if you child's death has been reported to the Coroner. He or she will liaise with the Coroner's office on your behalf and let you know when you can register your child's death at the Registrar's office.

Hospital post mortems

The doctor who certified your child's death may ask for your permission to carry out a post mortem examination to help them understand more about your child's illness and advance medical knowledge and teaching.

It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to grant permission. If you do, the examination should not delay the funeral arrangements. You will still receive a medical certificate of cause of death or neonatal death certificate from the hospital.

Registering the death

Your child's death needs to be formally registered with the Registrar of Births, Deaths & Marriages. You have up to **five days** from the date of death to do this.

The Registrar's office is in Bugle Street, Southampton. There is a small car park and the office is open Monday, Wednesday and Thursday 9.00am to 4.30pm, Tuesday 10.00am to 4.30pm and Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm. It is advisable to telephone the office on 023 8063 1422 to make an appointment.

Please check that you can register the death – only certain people are qualified to do so. Usually this will be one of the parents, but it is possible

for another relative or a member of hospital staff to do this (unless the birth has not been registered).

If it is a baby that has died and you have been unable to register the birth, you can do this at the same time. If you and your baby's other parent are not married, you both need to be present at the registration of the birth for both names to be on the birth certificate.

Registering a death out of the district where the death occurred (registering by declaration)

If it is not possible for you to register the death in Southampton, you may be able to 'register by declaration' in your home town. The local Registrar will not be able to register the death or issue you with any certificates, but will take the necessary information and then forward it to the Registrar's office in Southampton. They will then register the death and issue the relevant certificates. These will be posted to you, which may therefore cause delays in organising the funeral.

At the Registrar's office

Please take the medical certificate of cause of death or neonatal death certificate with you if you have it.

The Registrar will ask you the following questions:

- your child's full name and date of birth
- the date and place of death
- your child's home address, including the post code (or the mother's home address if your child has not left hospital)
- the parents' full names (including mother's maiden name, if applicable), occupations and home addresses

This information will form the entry in the Death Register. After registering the death the Registrar will give you:

- Copies of the death certificate. The Registrar will ask you how many copies of the certificate you will need. A fee is payable for all copies.
- A green form to hand to the funeral director unless the Registrar states otherwise.



Tell Us Once

If you wish, when you register your child's death, you can request assistance to notify other government departments and local councils. This includes those dealing with state benefits, child benefits, disability living allowance and passports. You will need to take your child's NHS number with you. For more information please see www.gov.uk/after-a-death. The Registrar will be able to help you complete the forms.

Arranging the funeral

It is important to contact the funeral director of your choice as soon you feel ready, so that they can start making arrangements on your behalf. You don't have to wait until the death certificate has been issued.

Most funeral directors are available seven days a week and are usually happy to visit you at home to help and advise you. You may wish to contact several funeral directors and compare prices before you make a decision, as prices for funerals vary and some funeral directors make no charge to carry out a child's funeral.

If you receive certain benefits, you can apply for help towards the cost of the funeral. Benefits may include one of the following: income support; housing or council tax benefit; family credit; job seeker's allowance or working tax credit. Ask for form SF200 (Funeral payment from the Social Fund), which is available at the Registrar's office and most funeral directors. Please check the details carefully so that you understand which costs the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) will cover.

Remembering

Everyone will have their own ways to remember a child who has died. It is natural to want to talk about them and look back at both the happy and sad times. This does not make things worse. Members of the family, including young children or close friends, might appreciate a photograph or a small object as a reminder. The ward staff can also arrange for you to have hand and foot prints, or a lock of your child's hair, if you wish.

How you might feel

Grief is a very individual process and we all react differently. What is important is that you allow yourself time to grieve and come to terms with your loss in whatever way is right for you.

Many parents find it useful to return to the hospital sometime after their child's death to talk to the staff who helped care for them. The ward will write to you and invite you to attend a meeting if you feel that would be helpful.

The death of someone you love is a devastating experience and can bring about very strong emotions. Even if you have known that your child was dying, there is still a sense of shock when the death occurs. You may feel cold, numb or empty and you might experience anger, panic, guilt and sadness or feel restless and find it hard to sleep. You may become irritable or critical of yourself and others, which can lead to feelings of despair. These are natural reactions to bereavement and are not a sign that you cannot cope anymore.

Don't be afraid to share your feelings with people, including any children who may also find it difficult to express their grief. Even though at first it may seem difficult to include them in conversations about the child who has died and the funeral arrangements, it is important to talk to them about what has happened; they need honest and appropriate explanations in language that they can understand which acknowledges their loss. Children are no different to adults when it comes to bereavement; there is no right way to react and every child will respond differently. It is important to remember though that children may not have the words to express their feelings and may show how they feel through their behaviour.

You might also wish to seek the support of a minister or priest, regardless of your religious beliefs. The hospital chaplains will be happy to offer their support and/or put you in touch with a minister of your own denomination or faith. You can contact them on 023 8120 8517 or ask the ward staff to do it for you.

Organisations that can help

If you feel unable to see a way forward or would like to talk to someone about how you feel, there is a variety of professional help and guidance available. The following telephone numbers may be helpful:

Child Death Helpline

Manned by bereaved parents who provide a listening service that offers emotional support to all those affected by the death of a child.

Helpline: 0800 282986

Web: www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

Compassionate Friends

Provide help and support for bereaved parents and their families.

Helpline: 0845 123 2304

Web: www.tcf.org.uk

CRUSE Bereavement Care

Provides face-to-face, telephone, e-mail and website support.

Tel: 023 8023 2500 (South Hampshire branch)

Tel: 0844 477 9400 (National Helpline)

Web: www.cruse.org.uk

Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS)

Provides support for bereaved parents when their baby dies at, or soon after, birth.

Helpline: 020 7436 5881

Web: www.uk-sands.org

Child Funeral Charity

Provides financial support to help with funeral costs, together with practical advice and guidance. Please speak to the ward that cared for your child or your funeral director who will be able to make a referral on your behalf.

Tel: 01480 276088

Web: www.childfuneralcharity.org.uk

Organisations for children and young people

Child Bereavement Charity

Provide support for bereaved children and teenagers.

Tel: 01494 568900

Web: www.childbereavement.org.uk

CRUSE Bereavement Care

Helpline: 0808 808 1677

RD4U web: www.RD4U.org.uk

Simon Says

Provide information and support to bereaved children and their families throughout Hampshire.

Tel: 023 8064 7550

Web: www.simonsays.org.uk

Helpful books explaining death to children

Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine by Diana Crossley, Hawthorn Press.
ISBN: 1869890582

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley, Picture Lions.
ISBN: 0006643175

Remembering My Brother by Ginny Perkins and Leon Morris,
A & C Black. ISBN: 0713645415

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst, Prentice Hall.
ISBN: 0689712030

Books for parents and families

The Bereaved Parent by Harriet Sarnoff Schiff, Souvenir Press Ltd.
ISBN: 0285648918

A Heartbeat Away by Flappy Lane-Thomas, The Child Bereavement Trust.
ISBN: 095216616X

Losing a Child: Explorations in Grief by Linda Hurcombe, Sheldon Press.
ISBN: 0859698866

Useful contacts

Paediatric intensive care unit (PICU): 023 8120 6972

Child health: 023 8077 7222 bleep 2209

Ocean ward (E1): 023 8120 6470

Psychology team: 023 8120 4657 or via PICU

Bereavement care team: 023 8120 4587

Bereavement care team

University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust
Victoria House (MP310)
Tremona Road
Southampton
SO16 6YD
Tel: 023 8120 4587

Web: www.uhs.nhs.uk/childhealth

If you need a translation of this document,
an interpreter or a version in large print,
Braille or on audio tape, please telephone
023 8120 4688 for help.