

A guide for parents following the death of a child



Practical Information



We would like to offer our sincere sympathy to you, your family and friends who are affected by this sad loss. We acknowledge the pain and distress that is felt with the death of a child.

This booklet outlines practical information and guidance following the death of a child, which is relevant for all families and also procedures specific to certain circumstances. You will find contact details within this booklet should you need further guidance and help.

The booklet has been produced by a multi-disciplinary group within Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.



Contents

	Page
Practical information and guidance	4
Taking time	4
Verifying and certifying death	5
Cremation	5
Organ and tissue donation	5
Registering a death	6
Arranging the funeral	7
Consented (hospital) post mortem examinations	8
If the coroner is involved	9
Property	9
People/organisations to tell	10
Useful contacts	11
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust information	12



Practical information and guidance

Taking time

When a child dies, there are many decisions and arrangements that need to be made and dealing with the practicalities can feel overwhelming. Although it may be difficult to cope with such arrangements when you are distressed, it will be important later that you can feel satisfied with how these things were done.

Doing things in your own time and at your own pace is important. There is no need to rush into any decisions and no need to feel pressured. It will help you, both now and later, if you can feel that you made the best possible decisions and did what felt right for you.

You may want to have the support of one or two close family members or friends. This can be comforting for you and for them. If you have other children, our other booklet 'Can children ride bicycles in Heaven? A guide for talking with and supporting children following the death of a brother and sister', may be helpful in answering some of your questions regarding how to deal with them.

If your child has died at home, there are a number of people who will be able to give you the help and information you need, for example your GP, children's community nurse, social/community worker, or church/faith representative.

If your child died in hospital, there will be an opportunity for you and your family to take time to be with your child, if you wish. You will be able to avail of various support services, including social workers and chaplains. The social work department can offer practical advice and support. Chaplains offer counsel, comfort and prayerful support to families. These services are confidential, non-judgmental and available to everyone. Chaplains can also make contact with families' own faith communities if requested. Staff members will contact the social worker or chaplain, if required.



Verifying and certifying death

When your child died, a GP or hospital doctor told you (verified) that death had occurred.

If the doctor knows your child's medical history, a medical certificate of cause of death can usually be given immediately, however, there may be a delay in receiving this due to:

- The death occurring at the weekend, overnight or on a bank holiday and the doctor on-call not knowing your child
- The doctor needing to seek guidance from the coroner.

Deaths in certain circumstances are reportable to the coroner and a post mortem may be required. Go to 'If the coroner is involved' on page 9 for more information.

You need the medical certificate of cause of death to register the death. It is advisable to check the details on it to make sure your child's name, date of birth, address, etc. are correct, as this prevents a delay at the registrar's office.

Cremation

Please let medical staff or your funeral director know if you are planning to have a cremation. This requires a second doctor to confirm the cause of death and complete a cremation form. You will be advised of an additional cost for this. All cremations in Northern Ireland take place at Roselawn Crematorium in Belfast.

Organ and tissue donation

You may wish to have your child's organs or tissue donated. This may be something you and/or your child have already considered. Your child may have



already joined the organ donor register or carried a donor card.

As next of kin, your consent is required for your child's organs/tissue to be donated. If you are considering this, please inform the ward staff, GP or children's community nurse. Sometimes it is not possible for a child to be a donor because of a medical condition or cause/place of death.

In some hospital areas, for example, the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit, you may be specifically asked to consider organ or tissue donation.

Registering a death

When a medical certificate of cause of death has been issued, the death must be registered and a burial form collected at an office of the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. This has to happen within 5 working days and before the funeral takes place.

Where to register?

Telephone numbers and contact details of local offices are listed in Yellow Pages under 'Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages'. You can register the death either at the office closest to your child's home or place of death.

Who can register?

- Any relative who knows the required details
- A person present at the death
- A person taking care of funeral arrangements
- A person living in or responsible for the dwelling where the death occurred
- A person finding the body, or a person taking charge of the body.



What is needed to register?

- The medical certificate of cause of death
- The full name and surname of your child
- Date and place of birth
- Date and place of death and home address
- In the case of a child of married parents, the full name and occupation of the father. If the parents are not married, the full name and occupation of the mother
- The name and address of the GP.

Following registration the registrar will give you:

- GRO 21 – a form which permits burial or cremation
- Form 36 – a form required by Social Security regarding benefits.

There is no charge for registering a death but it is recommended that you buy a number of certified copies of the death certificate, as insurance companies, etc. will require one as proof of the death. See 'People/organisations to tell' on page 10.

Arranging the funeral

You will require the services of a funeral director. Most funeral directors are available 7 days a week and provide a 24 hour on-call service throughout the year. You may have already chosen a funeral director, if not, you will find details in Yellow Pages under 'Funeral Directors'.

Funeral directors will support you with the practical arrangements following the death of your child. He or she will work closely with you to arrange the kind of funeral you want. They will also help you if you need to buy a grave, make an insertion in a newspaper and organise flowers.



If you have a minister, priest or faith representative they will help you plan and prepare for the funeral and provide you with emotional and spiritual support. If your child was older, you may have had a chance to talk with him/her about the kind of funeral he/she would like. Children and young people in the family may like to be involved in planning and taking part in the funeral.

If your child died at the weekend, over a bank holiday or if the coroner is involved, there may be a delay. Do not arrange the date and time of the funeral until you have either the medical certificate of cause of death or permission from the coroner.

If you are on certain benefits you might qualify for financial help. Ask your social worker or funeral director for more information.

Consented (hospital) post mortem examinations

When the doctor gave you the medical certificate of cause of death, you may have been asked to consider a post mortem examination. This is not to discover the cause of death – that will already be stated on the certificate – but may help determine the nature and extent of the disease your child died from and increase medical knowledge about it.

The doctor will discuss what is entailed, answer any questions you may have and complete a consent form. You will also receive a booklet – ‘Information for relatives: Hospital Post Mortems’. You, as next of kin, must give consent before this post mortem examination can take place. It will take place soon after the death and you will later be given an appointment to see the consultant or GP who will explain the findings to you.



If the coroner is involved

There are occasions when, for legal reasons, a death needs to be referred to the coroner. For example when the death is sudden, when the cause is unknown or when it occurs immediately after surgery.

In some cases the coroner may decide to request a post mortem examination. This will take place soon after death. You, as next of kin, will be advised but your permission is not required. You will be contacted by a coroner's liaison officer or family liaison officer who will support you throughout the time of the coroner's involvement. You will be provided with the booklet 'Coroners Postmortem Examination: Information for Relatives'. Your GP will arrange an appointment to explain the findings to you.

Do not set the funeral date until you have permission from the coroner. You will be advised how to obtain the necessary form which permits burial or cremation.

Property

Things to collect

If your child died in a place other than home (eg. hospital), collecting personal belongings can be a difficult experience. You may choose to take everything with you before you leave or to return at a later date.

Things to return

There may be equipment to be returned from the family home. Your community children's nurse will arrange for the removal of equipment such as electric beds, hoists and patient records. He /she will also advise you about the safe return of unused medications to the local chemist.



People/organisations to tell

A number of people and organisations may need to be informed that your child has died. This list will help you determine the relevant people to notify - not all will apply in every case. A family member or close friend could help.

Early contact will help avoid the distress of letters, phone calls and supplies/equipment continuing in the weeks and months ahead.

- GP / community children's nurse / carers / respite facilities
- Other health care professionals (for example, optician, dentist, podiatrist)
- Provider of medical aids / equipment / supplies
- Any hospital your child was attending
- Social Security Agency – regarding disability living allowance, carer's allowance, child benefit, child tax credit
- Motability
- Road Service – regarding disabled persons badge
- Pre-school, school / college
- Bank / building society / Post Office / Credit Union
- Any relevant insurance companies
- Solicitor (particularly if the child is named in your will)
- Translink regarding travel pass
- Passport office
- Mobile phone companies
- Season ticket issuers
- Catalogue companies.



Useful contacts

Registrars' offices

The telephone numbers of local Registrars' offices are listed in Yellow Pages under 'Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages'.

Funeral directors

Details of local funeral directors can be found in Yellow Pages.

Benefits

All the telephone numbers of the benefits offices you will need are listed in The Phone Book in the Business Listings section under 'Government Offices - Benefits and Pensions'.

www.nidirect.gov.uk is the official government website for Northern Ireland and has a very helpful section, 'Death and bereavement', which includes information on what to do after a death. This bereavement section is within 'Government, citizens and rights'.

Belfast Passport Office
Law Society House
90-106 Victoria Street
Belfast BT1 3GN
Tel: 0300 222 0000

Citizens Advice Bureau
(for advice on bereavement benefits)
Tel: (028) 9023 1120

Contact www.the-bereavement-register.org.uk to stop all unsolicited/junk mail.



Belfast Health and Social Care Trust information

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has a bereavement page on the public website. It provides the information contained in this booklet and others in the series. The web address is: www.belfasttrust.hscni.net

We, at Belfast Trust, are keen to understand and learn from the experiences of our patients and their relatives. If you wish to make a comment regarding any aspect of care received please forward your comments to:

Trust Bereavement Coordinator
1st Floor
Bostock House
Royal Group of Hospitals
Grosvenor Road
Belfast
BT12 6BA

If you are unhappy about any aspect of care received and wish to make a complaint, please contact:

Complaints/Patient Liaison Manager
McKinney House
Musgrave Park Hospital
Stockmans Lane
Belfast
BT9 7JB



Notes



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