

**Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Safeguarding Children Boards  
Inter-Agency Guidance  
(Caring for Families)**

**Guidance for dealing with Grieving Families after the Death of a Child**

1. This document is not intended to be prescriptive but endeavours to provide guidance to practitioners who are involved with supporting grieving families. It gives an insight into the priorities of the professionals when advising the families of their next steps on the way to closure and acceptance of their loss.
2. Every professional may have a different role to play in the investigation of the death but we must not lose sight of the collective role - ie 'to provide support and understanding to the family' and wherever possible guide them through the difficulties they face after all enquiries are complete and they find themselves coping with the loss. A lot of the below will have been covered during the investigation by the agencies. However after intense activity by Professionals which can leave families "bewildered" and confused it is important to remind and refresh them on the next steps and not assume they remember or know what to do.

**Aim of the Guidance**

3. The aim of the guidance is to ensure that for death of a child we achieve:
  - Sensitive care and support to all those affected by the death.
  - Full explanations are given to the family on the "Next step" for them, inclusive of Seeing a body, Post mortems, Inquests and Funeral arrangements.
  - Sign posting for families to other organisations that can assist with the coping/bereavement process.

**Principles**

4. A sudden unexpected death is a very difficult time for everyone. The time spent with the family may be brief but actions may greatly influence how the family experiences the bereavement for a long time afterwards. A sympathetic and supportive attitude whilst maintaining professionalism towards the investigation is essential. The following principles should therefore be adhered to by all agencies:
  - Sensitivity, open mind and balance approach.
  - Recognition of cultural needs.
  - An inter-agency response.

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- Sharing of information.
- Appropriate response to the circumstances.
- Remember that people are in the first stages of grief. They may be shocked, numb, withdrawn or hysterical.
- All professionals need to take into account any religious and cultural beliefs which may impact on procedures. Such issues must be dealt with sensitively.

### **What to tell Families**

- Give “time” to the family there is nothing worse than “rushed” advice.
- Know the name and sex of the child and brief circumstances of the death.
- Make sure that they are with a relative or friend to support the family so they understand what you are telling them.
- Go slowly, leaving pauses for them to take in what you have said or ask questions from what you have said.
- Answer questions and give whatever explanations are available, pointing them towards other Professionals and agencies that can help them.
- Make yourself available or give them a Spoc that they can contact, making sure you have an exist Strategy within a reasonable time.

### **Considerations to aid sensitivity for Families**

- Police Officers wherever possible should consider using unmarked vehicles to attend the premises of families of deceased, including the initial response at an address where the child has died.
- Subsequent visits by officers involved in the investigation should consider non uniform and unmarked vehicles to reduce the distress and sensitivity they are experiencing.
- All agencies should consider joint visits to minimise intrusion of their privacy and prevent over loading distressed families with unnecessary information.