

INVESTIGATING CHILD FATALITIES



Many child fatalities are initially reported as accidents or natural deaths. Half of these sudden, unexplained infant deaths are due to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), the leading cause of unexplained infant deaths ages 1 month to 1 year.

Child Fatality Review Teams

In 1995, the Child Fatality Review and Prevention Act was established in order to form a statewide network of multi-disciplinary teams to review the deaths of all children seventeen years of age or younger, including those deaths resulting from SIDS.

Department of Children's Services Child Fatality Review Team

- **All child fatalities and/or near fatalities involving families with prior (within 3 years) and/or current Child Protective Services involvement are presented to the DCS Internal Child Fatality Review Team.**
- **The findings from these reviews are used to improve the delivery of services to children, youth and families, to improve the health and safety of our children and youth, and to take action that may prevent other deaths in the future.**

What is DCS' Role in Investigating Child Fatalities?

- Works collaboratively with law enforcement and other community agencies to investigate instances of child fatalities and/or near fatalities in which abuse and/or neglect is suspected
- Works collaboratively with law enforcement and other community agencies to ensure the safety of children in a home where there has been a child fatality

Collaborating with First Responders in Child Fatality Investigations...

- **Call the DCS hotline immediately if DCS intervention is warranted**
- **Document observations of the scene in relation to the child (articles of clothing, measurements, temperature, etc.)**
- **Photograph the scene**
- **Document statements of parents, witnesses, etc.**
- **Document if there are other children residing in the home**

What to expect when contacting the DCS hotline:

- Specific allegations, date(s), and description of the injuries or dangers
- Identities of alleged perpetrator(s) and their relationship to the victim
- Witnesses to the incident(s) and how to reach those witnesses
- Details of any physical evidence
- Perpetrator's current access to the child

Recognizing Potential Child Abuse:

- Child has repeated injuries that are not properly treated or adequately explained
- Seems frightened of the parents
- Child begins to act unusually, ranging from withdrawn or aggressive behavior
- Child discloses being abused by perpetrator

Recognizing Signs of Potential Child Neglect:

- Lacks medical and/or dental care
- Begg or steals food or money
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Has poor weight gain
- Very poor hygiene, such as a strong, foul odor, chronic lice or regularly unwashed clothing

Recognizing Signs of a Potentially Abusive Parent/Caretaker:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Appears depressed or isolated from community
- Possible drug/alcohol history
- Has a history of abuse as a child
- Blames, belittles or berates the child
- Disorganized home life

Central Intake Hotline:

To report child abuse and/or neglect
for medical, legal and law
enforcement professionals ONLY:

1-877-237-0026

Central Intake Hotline

The following toll-free numbers are
for PUBLIC use:

1-877-542-2873 (ABUSE)

OR

1-877-237-0004

Fax Number: 615-253-6588

Sources

- Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms Fact Sheet, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006
- Investigating Unexpected Child Death, TN Department of Health
- Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2005

Contact Information

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