

# Investigating Child Fatalities



**Many child fatalities are initially reported as accidents or natural deaths.**



**Each year in the United States, more than 4,500 infants die suddenly of no obvious cause. Half of these sudden, unexplained infant deaths (SUID's) are due to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), the leading cause of sudden unexplained infant deaths age 1 month to 1 year.**



# **Background and Overview**

**The Child Fatality Review and Prevention Act of 1995 established a statewide network of child fatality review teams. These multi-disciplinary, multi-agency local teams have been established in each Tennessee judicial district to review deaths of children seventeen years of age or younger.**



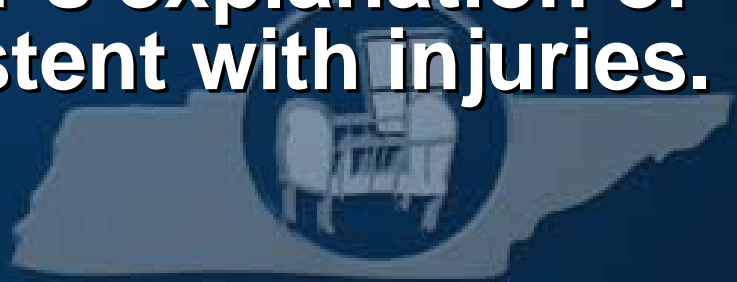
# Background and Overview

Fourteen Department of Health team leaders provide the administration and coordination of these teams. Today, all deaths are subject to a DCS Internal Child Death Review in addition to the review completed in the judicial districts.



# Possible Signs of Child Physical Abuse

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes.
- Has fading bruises, bruises in varying stages of healing or other marks.
- Parent or caretaker's explanation of injuries is inconsistent with injuries.



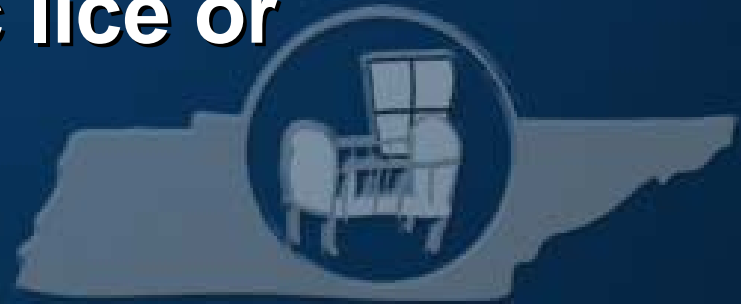
# Possible Signs of Child Physical Abuse (cont.)

- Shrinks at the approach of adults.
- Seems frightened of the parents.
- Cries or protests when it is time to go home.
- Reports injury by a parent.



# Possible Signs of Child Neglect

- Lacks medical and/or dental care.
- Begs or steals food or money.
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather.
- Has poor weight gain.
- Very poor hygiene, such as strong, foul odor, chronic lice or constantly dirty.



# Possible Signs of an Abusive Parent

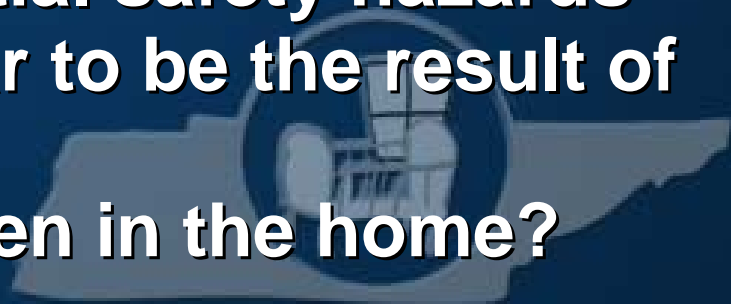
- **Appears to be indifferent to the child.**
- **Seems depressed.**
- **Is abusing alcohol or drugs.**
- **Describes the child as “evil” or in a negative way.**
- **Has a history of abuse as a child.**
- **Constantly blames, belittles or berates the child.**



# What Professionals Can Expect from DCS

**When you call the hotline number you will be asked to provide:**

- Demographic information including where the child lives (address/telephone number)
- Names of child's parents
- Details of the injuries, environmental conditions and potential safety hazards
- Does the death appear to be the result of abuse or neglect?
- Are there other children in the home?



# What DCS needs from First Responders

- Call the DCS hotline as soon as you believe DCS' involvement is warranted
- Make observations of the scene in relation to the child (items, articles, measurements and temperatures very important)
- Photograph the scene
- Make notes of any statements and explanations given
- Even if no other children are present, are there other children?



## Central Intake Hotline

To Report Child Abuse and Neglect for  
medical, legal and law enforcement  
professionals **ONLY**



**1-877-237-0026**

## Central Intake Hotline

**The toll-free numbers for the public  
are as follows:**

**1-877-542-2873  
(ABUSE)**

**OR**

**1-877-237-0004**

**Fax Number 615-253-6588  
(not toll-free)**



# The Role Of Child Protective Services in Death Scene Investigations

- **Child Protective Services coordinates with law enforcement and other first responders**



## **The Role Of Child Protective Services in Death Scene Investigations (cont.)**

- **Child Protective Services convenes the CPIT team (Child Protection Investigative Team), including law enforcement, DA's office, medical, mental health, Juvenile Court, CAC's (where available) and confers as a team to determine if maltreatment was involved.**



# The Role Of Child Protective Services in Death Scene Investigations (cont.)

- If so, the responsible party is identified and protection is provided for any surviving siblings.
- Child Protective Services also provides support for the family and any grief services which may be needed.

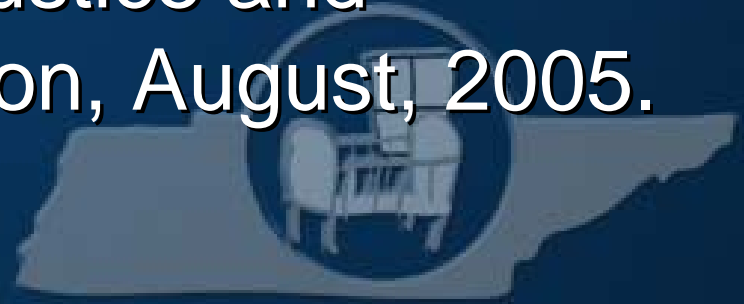


CPS and law enforcement must exchange initial reports of suspected abuse and neglect that each agency receives so that any maltreatment is not overlooked.



# Sources

- Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms Fact Sheet, Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006.
- Investigating Child Fatalities, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, August, 2005.



# Contact Information

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