

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services  
(CCDCFS)  
Policy Statement**

**Policy Chapter:** Legal, Juvenile Court & Custody Issues  
**Policy Number:** 7.02.02  
**Policy Name:** Child Fatality Review Process

**Original Effective Date:** 08/15/1996  
**Revision Date(s):** 07/01/2015, 09/28/2009  
**Current Revision Date:** 03/01/2019  
**Approved By:** Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** This policy will ensure that all child fatalities associated with Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) are reviewed to identify any systemic issues which could impact child deaths and to identify the needs of the family and agency staff involved. This policy will ensure that parents/caregivers of children who die while in the custody of CCDCFS receive all necessary support in making funeral arrangements and grief counseling support; and ensure that children in the permanent custody of CCDCFS receive appropriate services at the time of their death.

**SCOPE:** This policy applies to all employees of CCDCFS and the deaths of all children who are currently or have been involved with the agency within the preceding twelve months, as well as fatalities where there is suspicion of child abuse/neglect (CA/N).

**POLICY**

- I. CCDCFS has a Child Fatality Review Process that:
  - A. Fulfills the agency's commitment to ensuring the safety of any surviving child(ren) in the home.
  - B. Ensures that grief support is provided to the family and agency staff.
  - C. Reviews the case record and case management practices by CCDCFS staff and make recommendations for improvement when necessary.
- II. CCDCFS has established procedures surrounding funeral arrangements.
  - A. CCDCFS provides support and assistance in making funeral arrangements to a child's family (for children in custody) and/or substitute caregivers in the event of a child's death.
  - B. When a child is in custody of CCDCFS, the desires of the family are considered, although the feelings, concerns, and desires of the substitute caregivers are also recognized.
    1. If the child is in the permanent custody of the agency, the desires of the substitute caregiver are given the greatest weight.

## PROCEDURES

### I. WHEN CCDCFS RECEIVES NOTIFICATION OF A CHILD'S DEATH

- A. All reports of child fatalities are reported to the Hotline. Hotline staff notifies the Hotline Senior Manager. The Hotline Senior Manager notifies the Director and Administration as appropriate. Hotline staff enters the child's date of death into the State Automated Child Welfare System (SACWIS).
- B. All screened in reports of child fatalities are assigned to and investigated by the Special Investigations Unit child protection specialists (SIU CPS), as required by the Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 5101:2-36-01. SIU CPS staff keep assigned/primary child protections specialists (CPS) and their chain of command updated through the course of the investigation in situations where the family case is active with CCDCFS.
- C. When a fatality is screened in outside of business hours, the hotline initiates the investigation to ensure safety of the children in the home.
- D. SIU CPS staff are the primary contact with law enforcement, and the Medical Examiner's Office. The SIU CPS Investigation is documented in SACWIS.
- E. If a child in the custody of CCDCFS is identified as a criminal suspect in the death of a child, agency staff immediately reports this to the Prosecutor's Office, to determine next steps.
- F. If the child's death occurs in a foster home, the home is immediately placed on hold.
- G. When a child in the custody DCFS dies (except for children in permanent custody), the child's family of origin is immediately notified by the assigned staff, or the hotline if the report is made after hours. CPS notifies any other pertinent parties such as the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), CCDCFS Legal Department, previous foster parents, caregivers, and/or other professionals involved.
- H. The SIU CPS worker in conjunction with the CPS (if applicable) responds to the screened report to determine the safety of the children remaining in the home, and to investigate the fatality. The SIU CPS worker provides the family with supportive services referrals and interviews the caregivers and all household members regarding the child's death.
- I. If a safety threat is identified regarding any surviving children in the home, an emergency staffing is held. The staffing is held on the same business day the agency is notified of the child's death or depending on the circumstances, no later than the next business day.
- J. SIU CPS staff notifies the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) District Office of the child fatality by the next business day if the case is currently open, had been active in the past 12 months or if child abuse/neglect is suspected in the child's death.
- K. If the family case is court involved, a case plan amendment is completed by the CPS filed with the court within five days of the child's death.
- L. The CPS and/or SIU CPS refers surviving family members for grief support/counseling.

- M. Senior Manager refers the CPS and Supervisor, as needed, for peer support/secondary trauma services.
- N. SIU Senior Manager refers the SIU CPS and SIU Supervisor, as needed, for peer support/secondary trauma services

## **II. FATALITY REPORTS/MEETINGS**

- A. Hotline staff distributes an e-mail sharing information about the fatality to the “Fatality Group” (Director, Deputy Directors, Administrators, SIU Senior Manager, SIU Supervisors, Practice Evaluation & Innovation Unit (PEI), Peer Support, Hotline Senior Manager) and includes the assigned Senior Manager, Supervisor and CPS, if applicable.
- B. If the family is or has been active with CCDCFS within the past 12 months and no CA/N is indicated in the child’s death, the referral is set up as a “file review only”, and no investigation is completed.
- C. If the family case is open and/or had been open in the past twelve months, the Deputy Director/Director decides whether a Next Day Fatality Meeting is convened. If the meeting is to occur:
  - 1. The meeting is scheduled by the SIU Senior Manager.
  - 2. The minimum attendees are: CPS, CPS’s Supervisor, CPS’s Senior Manager, SIU Supervisor, SIU CPS Worker, and SIU Senior Manager.
  - 3. The meeting includes dialogue about the family history with CCDCFS, circumstances surrounding the child’s death, and support services for agency staff and family. The SIU Supervisor facilitates the meeting.
  - 4. Meeting minutes are completed by the assigned Senior Manager or designee within 24 hours of the meeting and saved in the child’s fatality folder located on the agency’s shared drive.
- D. The “Final Fatality Report” is completed by PEI on all fatalities where the case is currently active, had been active in the last 12 months or CA/N is suspected. The assigned Senior Manager is responsible for completing the last two sections of the final report (Senior Manager Analysis and Systemic Issues Identified). This report is completed within 30 days of the child’s death and is forwarded to the Administrator/Deputy Director for review. The final report is saved on the agency’s shared drive.
- E. The “Final Fatality Report” is not required in instances where there is no agency history or if the case had not been active in the previous 12 months.
- F. The Deputy Director has the right to waive/request completion of the “Final Fatality Report” based upon individual situations and case circumstances.

## **III. FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS**

- A. The CPS and SIU CPS coordinates responsibility for funeral arrangements if necessary (e.g., if no family, or foster family are available). SIU CPS contacts a funeral home concerning services and burial arrangements.
  - 1. When parents cannot be located, and relatives cannot assume the cost of burial/funeral, the CPS (or designee) contacts a funeral home, preferably from the list of approved homes, with relative and / or substitute caregiver input as deemed appropriate and makes the necessary arrangements.

2. The CPS (or designee) is not restricted to the list of funeral homes used by the agency; however, all homes on the list have accepted the agency's allowable expense limitations in the past. If the funeral home is not already an approved vendor, the funeral home must be first added as an approved vendor, so a purchase order can be completed.
- B. The agency's allowable cost is inclusive of preparation of the body, casket, plot of ground, headstone, opening and closing of the grave site and grave services. The agency offers assistance at a rate approved by the Deputy Director in consultation with the Director.
1. The CPS (or designee) submits a memo and Purchase Order (PO) indicating the amount requested, after other financial resources have been explored.
- C. The memo flows through the Supervisor, Senior Manager and Administrator/Deputy Director for approval (copy to Budget & Accounting).
1. If a relative or caregiver (foster parents) wish a more expensive funeral for the child, the CPS (or designee) notifies such individuals that any amount more than the agency's allowable expense will be their responsibility.

**SEE ALSO:**

**Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Family, Children, and Adult Services Manual**

Ohio Administrative Code 5101:2-42-89

"Public children services agency and private child placing agency procedures when a child is receiving services or is in agency custody dies."

**FORMS:**

Next Day Fatality Meeting Minutes - Template  
Funeral Homes Used by Agency