

**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:** Death of a Child

**Original Effective Date:** 08/15/1996  
**Revision Date(s):** 09/28/2009  
**Current Revision Date:** 07/01/2015  
**Approved By:** Thomas D. Pristow

**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 problems which could impact child deaths and to identify the needs of the family and agency staff involved. This policy will ensure that parents of children who die while in the custody of CCDCFS receive all necessary support in making funeral arrangements; 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 established 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 typically followed, although the feelings, concerns, and desires of the substitute caregiver are also addressed.
    1. If the child is in permanent custody of the agency, the desires of the substitute caregiver are given the greatest weight.

- C. If a child in CCDCFS custody dies in another county (or state), and the medical examiner of that county is required to rule on the cause of death. The autopsy is performed within that county.

## **PROCEDURES**

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

- A. All reports of child fatalities are reported to the Hotline. Hotline staff notifies the Administrator and Deputy Administrators within one hour of receiving the report.
- B. All investigations of child fatalities are assigned to and investigated by the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), as required by the Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 5101:2-36-01. SIU keep assigned staff and their chain of command updated throughout the course of the investigation in situations where the family case is active with CCDCFS.
- C. SIU staff are the primary contact with law enforcement, and the Medical Examiner's Office. SIU staff obtains all Medical Examiner's reports including the final report and places this information in the case record.
- D. 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.
- E. If the child's death occurs in a foster home, the home is immediately placed on hold.
- F. When a child in the custody of DCFS dies (with the exception of 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. The worker of record (WOR) notifies any other pertinent parties such as the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), previous foster parents, caregivers, and/or other professionals involved).
- G. The SIU worker in conjunction with the WOR (if applicable) responds to the priority to determine the safety of the children remaining in the home. The SIU worker provides the family with supportive services referrals and interviews the caregivers and all household members regarding the child's death.
- H. If a safety factor is identified, an emergency staffing is held regarding the surviving children.
- I. If the safety threat identified is in a foster home, a staffing is held regarding all of the surviving children in that home and includes all assigned staff.
- J. SIU 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 had been active in the past 12 months or if child abuse/neglect is suspected in the child's death.
- K. The assigned staff completes a case plan amendment and files it with the court within five days of the child's death.
- L. The date of the child's death is entered into SACWIS under the child's person number within 5 days of the child's death.

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

- A. Hotline staff distributes an e-mail sharing information about the fatality to the “Fatality Group” (Administrator, Deputies, SIU Chief, SIU Supervisors, Community Relations, Performance Management Unit (PMU), Peer Support, Hotline Chief) and includes the assigned Chief, Supervisor and WOR.
- B. A referral is generated from the hotline regarding the fatality and is printed on pink or white paper and distributed to the same group.
  - 1. A pink report indicates that the family is currently or has been active within the past twelve months. If the family is or has been active 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.
  - 2. A white report indicates that the family has no agency history or has not been active in the past twelve months.
- C. A “Next Day Fatality” meeting is scheduled when the child’s death occurs while the family case is open and/or the case had been open within the last 12 months. The Deputy Administrator has the right to waive/request that a “Next Day Fatality” meeting be convened or not.
  - 1. The meeting is scheduled the by the Senior Supervisor of the WOR if the case is or has been active in the past 12 months. Otherwise, the meeting is scheduled by SIU Senior Supervisor.
  - 2. The minimum attendees for this meeting are: WOR, WOR’s Supervisor, WOR’s Senior Supervisor, SIU Supervisor, SIU worker, and SIU Senior Supervisor.
  - 3. The meeting includes dialogue about the family history with DCFS, 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 Supervisor or designee within 24 hours of the meeting and saved in the child’s fatality folder. See attached template for meeting minutes.
- D. The “Final Fatality Report” is completed by PMU on all fatality cases, including those designated as “file review only”. The assigned Senior Supervisor is responsible for completing the last two sections of the final report (Senior Manager Analysis and Systemic Issues Identified).
- E. The “Final Fatality Report” is not required in instances where there is no agency history or if the case has not been active in the previous 12 months. 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 WOR coordinates responsibility for funeral arrangements if necessary (e.g., if no parents, relatives, or foster family are available). The special investigations unit (SIU) Investigator, 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 WOR (or designee) contacts a funeral home, preferably from the list of approved providers, with relative and

- / or substitute caregiver input as deemed appropriate, and makes the necessary arrangements.
2. The WOR (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 WOR 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 Supervisor and Deputy Administrator for approval (copy to Budget & Accounting).
1. If relatives or caregivers (foster parents) wish a more expensive funeral for the child, the WOR notifies such individuals that any amount in excess of the agency's allowable expense will be borne by them.

#### **IV. SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR THE FAMILY, AGENCY STAFF, AND FOSTER FAMILIES**

- A. The SIU worker ensures surviving family members are referred for grief support/counseling.
- B. The Senior Supervisor refers the WOR and Supervisor, as needed, for grief support services.
- C. SIU staff may access grief support/secondary trauma services, as needed, and is referred by their Senior Supervisor.

#### **SEE ALSO:**

##### **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