

What happens next



STAFFORDSHIRE
POLICE

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Our commitment to you

We will:

- Treat your loved one with dignity and respect.
- Be empathetic, timely and professional, giving you information as soon as it is available.
- Return your loved one's belongings to you where possible and as soon as possible.
- Contact you to discuss what is happening within 24 hours of first speaking with you, and at least weekly until we conclude our enquiries (unless we agree a different time frame with you).
- Explain both the investigative and inquest processes to you and support you through them.
- Find out about your loved one to establish relevant lines of inquiry and discuss any concerns you may have.
- Conduct a thorough and professional investigation into what happened.

Introduction

We are sorry that you find yourself in these tragic circumstances and we offer you our condolences.

This booklet is designed to guide you through some of the practical arrangements which need to be made.

There are processes which have to be followed after an unexplained or unexpected death, which are outlined in this booklet.

There is also a list of national organisations at the back of this booklet where you can find support.

Why are we involved?

Staffordshire Police has a duty to attend and investigate all unexpected, unexplained or suspicious deaths on behalf of the Coroner.

Our guiding principles are to maintain respect for the dignity of the deceased and for the feelings of the family.

In England and Wales, all deaths must be reported to the Coroner for the area where it occurred. An inquest will be held except when a death is a result of natural causes.

Criteria for classification

- **Non-suspicious** – we believe there were no suspicious contributing factors.
- **Unexplained** – we are not able to say whether or not there were other factors at this time.
- **Suspicious** – we are investigating the possibility of there being another factor involved.
- **Work-related** – resulting from an incident arising from or in connection with work.
- **Sudden death** – where the death is not suspicious and does not involve an unnatural occurrence, such as a death through illness.

The officer discussing your case with you may be able to tell you which criteria is being investigated. As the investigation progresses, it may be re-classified from one category to another.

Identification and statement

Occasionally we need someone to make a formal identification. This should be done by the next of kin. If you identify your loved one yourself, you may want to

take someone with you. A partner or close friend may be able to do this for you if you wish, as long as the Coroner agrees. We may need to take a statement from you to say that you have made a formal identification.

We have to get a broad understanding of your loved one and the way we do this is to take a background statement referred to as an antecedent statement. Someone specially trained will help you prepare (see below). This may take place over the phone, by email or in person at your home. However, if you would prefer it to take place elsewhere we'll do our best to arrange it.

You may want to ask us for copies of any statements you make for reference at the inquest. The statement is a history of your loved one's life and includes some of the following:

- Name, age and date of birth
- Family make-up e.g. siblings or children
- Childhood and schooling
- Medical history and current illness or injury
- Occupation
- When you last saw them

The person who takes this statement will be:

- A police officer or trained member of police staff
- A Family Liaison Officer, if one has been appointed
- The Coroner's Officer

Personal belongings

We may need to examine personal items for DNA or fingerprints to help us with identifying your loved one. This is carried out by specially trained staff known as Forensic Scene Investigators (FSI's).

The FSI will want to attend the address of your loved one as soon as possible, often the next day. On occasion they may need to take an item of property away with them to examine.

Please avoid touching anything that your loved one may have recently handled until we tell you that we are happy for you to do so. As much as we would like to return an item to you, sometimes this isn't possible due to them being damaged during the forensic processes.

Property can normally only be returned with the permission of the Coroner and you may have to wait some time.

Please bear in mind that items may not be returned to you in the same condition as when you last saw them. Your point of contact will discuss this with you.

Visiting your loved one

If you have not had to formally identify your loved one but want to see them, we will do all we can to help. Please speak to the Coroner's Officer or officer dealing with your case.

Dependant on the circumstances of the death, there may be injuries present. We will talk this through with you and tell you what we know at that time. Hearing details of injuries is likely to be very distressing and if they are severe, you may need to think carefully about going to see them.

Visiting where it happened

If you would like to visit the place where your loved one died, we will do all we can to help you. This can take a few days to arrange as it needs to be planned in advance through the person dealing with your case.

Establishing the cause – medical examination

In some circumstances, a medical examination may be considered and may be completed at the direction of the Coroner to establish a formal cause of death. The 'Post Mortem' examination, as it is often called, can take the form of a visual or physical examination or a digital CT scan or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan. The examination is carried out by a pathologist or other suitably qualified medical consultant.

If you have any religious or cultural concerns or objections, please speak to the Coroner's officer. We will assist you to obtain the relevant contact details if needed.

It is common for samples to be taken at the post-mortem to check for things such as medication, other drugs or alcohol. It is not a reflection on your loved one, rather it is to establish if there could have been any other contributory factors.

The cause of death will appear as a brief entry on the interim and final death certificates.

You can ask for a copy of the post-mortem report. Please be aware that they are written in very graphic, clinical language and can be distressing to read.

Notifying others

These can include:

- Family, friends, acquaintances and neighbours
- Employers
- Doctors
- Utility companies
- Banks/credit/mortgage companies
- Government agencies – e.g. DVLA/DWP
- Solicitors
- Insurance companies

Your funeral director, GP, solicitor and local authority may also be able to help.

The 'Tell Us Once' service allows you to report a death to many government organisations at once. When registering the death, a registrar will explain the 'Tell Us Once' service. They will complete the 'Tell Us Once' service with you or give you a unique reference number so you can use the service yourself online or by phone. Information on this service can be found at:

www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-tocontact-and-tell-us-once

suicidebereavementuk.com/immediate-support-resources

The press and social media

There may be public interest after certain types of death and sometimes local media will contact us for more information. We only release brief details of what happened, such as the time, date and where it happened. Once the next of kin have been informed, if asked, we may then release the gender and age of the person and the general area where they live.

We don't give out the name of your loved one. However, once the inquest has been opened and adjourned their name becomes a matter of public record and the media can publish this.

Sometimes reporters will find out the address of your loved one and may visit their home to speak to you. It is your choice whether you speak to them or not.

Some families like to release a picture or public tribute to their loved one. Our Corporate Communications Team can help you and advise on the best way to release this to the media. They can be contacted via the Officer investigating the death.

It is worth bearing in mind that the media may use social media such as Facebook and Instagram to find out more about your loved one and may use this information in their reporting.

People you may come into contact with

Coroner and Coroner's Officer

In England and Wales, the local Coroner has to be notified of all unusual, unnatural, unexplained or suspicious deaths. You may have contact with a Coroner's Officer who act on their behalf and report directly to them.

OIC - Officer in case

The OIC may be a uniformed officer, a detective or police staff investigator, dependent on the circumstances of the death. They will be responsible for carrying out a proportionate investigation on behalf of the Coroner, ensuring all reasonable lines of enquiry are pursued to establish what has happened.

Family Liaison Officer

- To help the investigating officer by gathering information and evidence which contributes to the investigation.
- To be a single point of contact for you.
- They will provide support and information, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, ensuring information is given in a timely way.

Family Liaison Officers are not usually appointed to deal with all unexplained deaths, however the circumstances or the subsequent investigation may make the appointment of one appropriate.

The inquest

In most cases, the Coroner will open an inquest within a few days of the death.

An inquest is held to establish the following:

- Who died
- Where they died
- When they died
- The circumstances surrounding their death

All inquests in England and Wales are held at a Coroner's court.

Inquests are not held to establish blame. They may be held in a courtroom; we can arrange for you to visit beforehand if it helps to prepare you. Occasionally, a jury will be present at the inquest.

There is no requirement for you to attend the opening of an inquest, but if you wish to attend you can. You can ask for copies of any statements that you make to the

police in case you wish to refer to them at the time of the inquest.

Following the opening of the inquest, it will be adjourned to enable a date to be set for the full inquest. This could be several months later.

Once the inquest has been opened and adjourned, the Coroner will issue the Coroner's Certificate of the Fact of Death, often referred to as an interim death certificate. This allows you to make arrangements for the funeral. You will need to let the Coroner know what type of funeral you are arranging, for example burial or cremation.

You can also use the Coroner's Certificate of the Fact of Death to tell organisations about the death and apply for probate.

Witnesses may be called to give evidence at the inquest. These can include:

- Police officers
- Pathologists
- Doctors
- Eye witnesses
- Family members
- Anyone else the Coroner thinks may help the inquest reach a conclusion

The Coroner will ask questions of witnesses. Anyone who is an interested person (such as a parent, spouse, partner or child of the person) can ask questions of a witness during the inquest. If there is a jury, they can also ask questions of witnesses.

It is also possible the Coroner may ask for your loved one's injuries to be described during the inquest. If you do not wish to hear these details, tell the Coroner's Officer and the inquest will normally be stopped to allow you to leave whilst this is done.

Once the inquest comes to an end, the Coroner, or jury, if one is present, will come to a conclusion. The conclusion can be one of several, including:

- Open (the Coroner or jury is unable to come to a decision as to why the person died)
- Accidental
- Suicide
- Narrative (this is where the Coroner or jury writes a short factual statement outlining the circumstances of the death)

The conclusion of the inquest will then be sent to the registry office where the death will be registered by a registrar. The final death certificate will then be issued. If there were any notes or messages left by your loved one and they are addressed to you, you can ask to have them

along with any personal effects that were kept for the inquest.

Inquests are held in public and journalists may be present. Whether or not you choose to speak to a journalist is a matter for you. If you do not wish to speak to them, tell them.

Getting help

Public Health England provide a booklet called 'Help is at Hand.' Although the contents focus on those bereaved by suicide, it includes practical and emotional guidance for anyone dealing with bereavement.

If this is not provided to you at the same time as this booklet, you can find it at:

supportaftersuicide.org.uk/resource/help-is-at-hand

Who can help

- General Practitioner
- Solicitor
- Funeral Director
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Religious and community leaders

Practical advice

Organisations have varying and changeable opening hours, for national cover 24 hours a day 7 days a week please contact the Samaritans.

NHS 111 Option 2

Mental Health crisis line for adults experiencing a mental health crisis.

[Amparo.org.uk](https://www.amparo.org.uk)

Amparo provides emotional and practical support for anyone affected by suicide. Support can be provided one to one, to family groups, groups of colleagues or peers – whatever is preferred by you.

Tel **0330 088 9255** or referral forms are available in the website.

[StrongerMen.org.uk](https://www.strongermen.org.uk)

StrongerMen provide support to men following a bereavement. Grief can cause severe emotional and physical health conditions which are often overlooked and even ignored in men.

Tel **0800 915 0400** hello@StrongerMen.org.uk

Papyrus HOPELINEUK 247

HOPELINEUK is a PAPYRUS suicide prevention helpline which supports young people, aged 35 and under, experiencing thoughts of suicide, or for anyone concerned that a young person could be thinking about suicide. Tel **0800 068 41 41** Text **07860039967**

ataLoss.org

The ataLoss.org is a signposting website for anyone bereaved and those supporting them.

hopeagain.org.uk

Hope Again is designed for young people by young people. It is part of Cruse Bereavement Care and supports young people after the death of someone close to them.

0808 808 1677 helpline@cruse.org.uk

hubofhope.co.uk

The Hub of Hope is the UK's leading mental health support database. It is free and provides links to local, peer, community, charity, private and NHS support and services that may be useful or of help to you or someone you care at this distressing time. Please visit the website or download via the app using the QR code.



[gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

Offers advice and information on what to do when someone dies. [gov.uk/when-someone-dies](https://www.gov.uk/when-someone-dies)

[childbereavementuk.org](https://www.childbereavementuk.org)

Child Bereavement UK support children and young people up to the age of 25 who are facing bereavement, and anyone impacted by the death of a child of any age.

0800 028 8840 support@childbereavementuk.org

[samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)

Samaritans deliver a 24-hour emotional support service to callers. **116 123**

[childdeathhelpline.org.uk](https://www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk)

The Child Death Helpline is staffed by volunteers who are bereaved parents. They are trained, supervised and supported by professional teams within Great Ormond Street Hospital.

0800 282 986 contact@childdeathhelpline.org

cruse.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care promotes the wellbeing of bereaved people and helps them to understand their grief and cope with their loss. They provide counselling, support, information and advice. **0808 808 1677**
helpline@cruse.org.uk

tcf.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends is an organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support and care of other similarly bereaved family members who have suffered the death of a child or children of any age and from any cause.
0345 123 2304 helpline@tcf.org.uk

muchloved.com

Much Loved helps people establish an online memorial to your loved one. It also has its own community that shares ideas on how to deal with bereavement.

supportaftersuicide.org.uk

The Support After Suicide Partnership brings together national and local organisations that are involved in delivering suicide bereavement support across the UK

uksobs.org

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide is offers support and advice to those bereaved by suicide. **0300 111 5065**

ifucareshare.co.uk

If You Care Share Foundation provides help through the difficult times. They provide emotional and practical support for prevention, intervention and support after suicide. **0191 387 5661** share@ifucareshare.co.uk

winstonswish.org.uk

Winston's Wish support children and young people after the death of a parent or sibling.

08088 020 021 info@winstonswish.org.uk

Useful contacts

Staffordshire Police

Tel: **101**

Website: www.staffordshire.police.uk

Incident number: _____

Contact officer: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Postal address: _____

Coroners Officer

Phone: **01782 234777**

Email: staffordshireandstokecoroners@stoke.gov.uk

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