



When a child dies in hospital

A guide for bereaved parents, families,
and carers

When a child dies in hospital

The loss of a child is a deeply sad and upsetting time. We are here to support you and your family as much as possible. This leaflet is a guide to some of the practical steps that need to be taken as well as things you may wish to think about as a family together.

Immediately after your child dies

You are welcome to stay with your child for as much or as little time as feels right for you. If you would like family members to be with you, staff will help to make this possible.

You will be able to hold your child and spend as long as you wish together. Many parents take photographs at this time or, if you wish, a member of the hospital photography team can do this for you. If you would like to help wash and dress your child, staff can help support this. Special items such as a favourite toy or teddy can stay with your child.

Some parents find it helpful to have a ceremony of blessing for their child. This can be a non-religious or religious blessing. The Chaplain can organise this for you.

Please ask the nurse if you would like the chaplain to be called, or for a representative of your own faith or belief community to be contacted.

Keepsakes and memory boxes

Making memories with your child can be very comforting. You may like to make mementos such as photographs, a lock of hair or hand and footprints. We will offer you support to create these precious keepsakes and give you a special memory box to keep them in. If you prefer, these can be kept safely for you in the hospital in case you want them at a later time.

If you have any questions or there is anything else you would like to do, we will do our best to accommodate your wishes.

When you leave the hospital

We will continue to care for your child until you make arrangements for your child to go into the care of the funeral director, or to another place of your choice. In the meantime, you can come back to spend time with your child in the hospital's bereavement suite – you will be given a contact before you leave hospital, please contact them to arrange this. You will also have the opportunity to visit your child at the funeral director's and it might be possible for your child to be brought home or moved to a children's hospice before their funeral. The ward staff or your funeral director will be able to discuss these options with you.

Taking your child home

Some families wish to consider taking their child home themselves. If you would like to discuss this, please speak to a member of staff.

The medical certificate of cause of death

It may take longer, for example if the doctor needs to find out more about why your child has died or report their death to the Procurator Fiscal. The registration process is explained in more detail in the leaflet, *Registering your child's death* but please do not hesitate to contact staff should you have any questions.

Hospital post-mortem examination

A senior doctor may ask your permission to carry out a hospital post-mortem examination to gain more information about your child's death to better understand their illness or to increase medical knowledge. If this is the case, the doctor will discuss it with you, explain what is involved, and ask for your permission.

You do not have to agree to a hospital post-mortem, but if you do agree the doctor will ask you to sign an authorisation form. Please speak to staff if you have any questions or concerns about the decision. If you do authorise a hospital post-mortem, it should not delay the funeral arrangements. Further information leaflets about hospital post-mortem examinations are also available - please ask staff for a copy if you would like one.

Follow-up meeting

Many parents find they have unanswered questions about their child's illness or death, and it is important to have a chance to ask these. It can be helpful to come back to the hospital sometime later to speak to the staff who cared for your child. Within 6-8 weeks your child's doctor will contact you to offer a follow-up meeting. Please contact them sooner if you feel you would like to meet before then. This provides an opportunity to discuss the results from any examinations carried out, to go over exactly what happened and ask any questions.

Remembering your child

A Memorial Book is kept in the Department of Spiritual Care at the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People (RHCYP). If you would like to have a page created in memory of your child, please contact the Chaplain via email: rhcy spiritualcare@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk or call 0131 312 0168.

There is also an annual Memorial Service to remember children who have sadly died. This is held in Edinburgh on the last Sunday in November every year. You are welcome to attend with family and friends.

Details of the Memorial Service will be posted on the RHCYP website and social media nearer to the event.