



**Health and Justice
Learning Hub**
London

Support and information when a loved one passes away in custody

A guide for bereaved families



We are deeply sorry for your loss and recognise this may be an exceptionally painful time for you. Losing a loved one is never easy, and we understand that the circumstances surrounding a death in custody can make things particularly difficult.

To assist you during this challenging period, we have prepared a guide that outlines the processes that will follow, your potential involvement, and the support available to you.

We recognise that you may be experiencing a mix of emotions, and any information at this moment may feel overwhelming. We hope you can revisit this guide at your own pace, whenever it feels right for you.

Your Family Liaison Officer

Your key contact with the prison during this time will be your Family Liaison Officer, also known as the FLO. The FLO is a member of prison staff who is trained to support and guide you.

Their role:

Support: The FLO is there to assist families during a challenging time, particularly when a loved one has died in custody.

Advice: They provide guidance on practical matters related to the situation.

Communication: The FLO serves as the main point of contact between the family and the prison, ensuring that families stay informed about the processes involved.

You may have already met your FLO, or you will do so soon. They will be dedicated to helping you through this difficult time.

Name of Family Liaison Officer (FLO):

Telephone number for FLO:

Email address for FLO:

Support for you

Coping with the loss of a loved one can be overwhelming. There are a range of different organisations who can provide support and information to you.

Inquest

This charity specialises in supporting people who have been bereaved through a death in custody or similar circumstances. They provide free, confidential and independent advice. Their website has many resources including a handbook with detailed information on what happens next and your rights. They can provide contacts for legal support available to those bereaved by deaths in custody.

E: inquest@inquest.org.uk

T: 020 7263 1111

www.inquest.org.uk/Listing/Category/help-and-advice

Samaritans

If you need someone to talk to, Samaritans will listen. They provide confidential support through their listening service – available 24/7 by phone on 116 123, via email, by letter and in person.

E: jo@samaritans.org

T: 116 123

www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help

Cruse Bereavement Support

This charity provides support to people who are grieving. They provide a telephone support line with trained volunteers. This is open on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 9.30am to 5pm, and on Tuesdays from 1pm to 8pm, closed at weekends.

They also have local services which can provide groups or contacts in your area.

T: 0808 808 1677

www.cruse.org.uk/get-support

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

This charity offers peer-led support to adults who have been impacted by suicide loss. They have a website that contains many useful resources and provide a phone line which is open everyday from 9am to 7pm. More information is available on their website.

T: 0300 111 5065

<https://uksobs.com/>

Winston's Wish – support for Children and Young People

The charity Winston's Wish provides grief support for children, young people and advice to the adults supporting them. They can help with thinking about how to speak with children affected by a bereavement.

T: 0808 8020 021

<https://winstonswish.org/>



Chaplaincy

You may also find it useful to access support through prison chaplaincy. The Chaplaincy team provides a range of different faith-based supports to those of any faith or none. They are very used to working within and around the prison system and with issues around stigma, shame or honour that may be relevant around this death or your loved one's time in prison.

Chaplaincy teams are also sometimes able to support with visits you may make to the prison, with funeral planning or officiating. Your FLO can link you in with Chaplaincy in the prison if this would be of use to you.

There may also be faith-based support services in your local area that chaplaincy services can put you in touch with.

Practicalities

This section contains information you may wish to know about the practicalities of what will happen next.

Visiting the scene

It is possible in some circumstances to visit the prison and the site where your loved one died. It may be important for you to meet staff or prisoners who knew your loved one or to go there to pay your respects. This can be arranged through your FLO.

Property

Your FLO should be able to help you retrieve your loved one's personal belongings.

The coroner or the police will take a decision about whether any property needs to be kept as evidence, but most items should be released to you at an early stage.

If your loved one left any letters for you or your family, it might not be possible for you to be given these straight away because they might be needed as evidence. However, you may be able to receive copies and have the original letters once the inquest has concluded (for information about the inquest, please see page 8). Please ask your Family Liaison Officer for more information about this.

Post-mortems

After any death in custody, a Pathologist (chosen by the Coroner) carries out a post-mortem (also known as an autopsy). This is a medical examination of the body to establish the medical cause of death and usually happens very soon after the person has passed away.

If you'd like to know when your loved one's post-mortem is taking place, please talk to your FLO who can find this out from the Coroner's Officer.

You have a right to have your own representative Medical Practitioner present at the post-mortem if you wish.

After the post-mortem, the Coroner can usually provide you with a copy of the post-mortem report. If you would like to receive this, please contact your FLO.



Getting a death certificate

The Coroner will issue an 'Interim Certificate of Fact of Death' to assist with the administration of your loved one's estate.

When the inquest has been completed, the Coroner will notify the Registrar and a Death Certificate can then be obtained. Your FLO can help you with this paperwork.

Arranging a Funeral

It may not be possible to organise a funeral immediately. The coroner has to give authorisation to release your loved one's body before a funeral can take place. They will usually be able to release the body after the preliminary inquest hearing. They will then provide a burial order or cremation certificate.

Your FLO should be able to help you with the paperwork and practicalities of arranging the funeral. If you prefer, they can also arrange the funeral for you.

The prison should offer to pay reasonable funeral expenses. Please ask the FLO for more information about this.

Getting legal advice

If you are worried about the circumstances of your loved one's death you should consider seeking advice from a specialist solicitor as soon as possible.

If you wish to have legal representation during the inquest or investigation, legal aid may be available.

Organisations like INQUEST provide free advice and support for families who have lost someone in custody, and their handbook has information about how to find a specialist solicitor.

It's a good idea to keep your own notes of who you are in contact with and what they say. It can be useful to have a record of what's been said, especially when there is a lot to remember.

Investigations

Any death in custody leads to a number of investigations and reviews. The aim of these is to understand the facts of what has happened and any learning or improvements that should be made.

Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO)

The PPO will conduct an independent investigation into the death of your loved one. They sometimes complete two reports, one focused on the prison's work and one focused on healthcare provided within the prison. Their investigations aim to ensure transparency and accountability, and you will be invited to be involved and be informed of their findings. If you want to contact the PPO directly, they can be reached via email at **PPOFilladmin@ppo.gov.uk**

Healthcare Investigations

The healthcare provider (which may be an NHS Trust or a private health organisation) will also complete their own investigation. They will speak with staff involved, review clinical notes and procedures and invite involvement of family members. This process is known as the Patient Safety Incident Investigation (PSII) and looks in detail at healthcare systems to improve patient safety and reduce the chances of similar incidents reoccurring. They do not

look to blame individuals or identify a cause of death.

The healthcare provider should write to you and see if you have any questions or concerns about the healthcare your loved one received. They will aim to address these questions in their investigation, if possible. You should receive contact details so you can get involved at any stage of the in process but you can also ask the FLO for their contact details if you need them.

Coroner's Inquest

After any death in custody, the coroner will be informed and an inquest will be opened. This is a legal process aimed at establishing the cause of death. The coroner will investigate the circumstances surrounding the death, and you will be invited to attend the inquest to hear the findings.

What is an Inquest?

An inquest is a fact-finding inquiry to determine how, when, and where the person died. It is not a trial but a way to gather the

necessary information. The Coroner can require specific people to give evidence. This will often include prison and healthcare staff who were involved in the care of your loved one.

Your Rights at the Inquest

You have the right to attend the inquest and, if needed, request legal representation. Legal aid may be available to support you through this process. Your legal representatives can put questions to the inquest for consideration.

Expected Timeline

Inquests can take a long time to be heard. It is not uncommon for them to be held more than two years after the death. You should receive, and can ask for, updates from your FLO or from the Coroner's Office during this time.

Outcome

Having considered all the facts, the Coroner will give a cause of death. They have the power to issue a Prevention of Future Deaths Notice (PFD). This legal notice is issued if there have been issues in care delivery or process that were not satisfactory and contributed to the death. The PFD is issued if the Coroner believes that there needs to be a change in practice to prevent a similar situation occurring again and requires a response from the recipient.

The organisation INQUEST has detailed and helpful information about the process of an inquest, your involvement and the support available. There is a handbook available through their website: <https://info.inquest.org.uk/handbook/>

Q: What if I'm not happy with the investigations?

A: If you feel the investigation has not addressed all of your concerns, you can raise this with the Prison and Probation Ombudsman or seek independent legal advice.

Notes

It may be helpful to use these pages to keep a note of any useful information or contacts you have. When you are shocked or distressed it can be hard to hold onto information so it can be good to note down things you might want to come back to.

You may also want to add in information about local contacts and numbers here (ask the FLO to help you to complete these if this would be of use).

Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO):

Coroner's Office:

Legal Aid Services:

Bereavement Support:

Extra notes:

Glossary

PPO – Prison Probation Ombudsman

FLO – Family Liaison Officer

PSII – Patient Safety Incident Investigation

PFD – Prevention of Future Deaths

This document is also available in other languages, large print, Braille, and audio format upon request. Please email communications.cnwl@nhs.net

هذه الوثيقة متاحة أيضاً بلغات أخرى والأحرف الطباعية الكبيرة وبطريقة برايل للمكفوفين وبصيغة سمعية عند الطلب

Arabic

این مدرک همچنین بنا به درخواست به زبانهای دیگر، در چاپ درشت و در فرمت صوتی موجود است.

Farsi

এই ডকুমেন্ট অন্য ভাষায়, বড় প্রিন্ট আকারে, ব্রেল এবং অডিও টেপ আকারেও অনুরোধ পাওয়া যায়

Bengali

Dokumentigaan waxaa xitaa lagu heli karaa luqado kale, daabacad far waa-wayn, farta indhoolaha (Braille) iyo hab dhegaysi ah markii la soo codsado.

Somali

Mediante solicitação, este documento encontra-se também disponível noutras línguas, num formato de impressão maior, em Braille e em áudio.

Portuguese

நீங்கள் கேட்டுக்கொண்டால், இந்த ஆவணம் வேறு மொழிகளிலும், பெரிய எழுத்து அச்சிலும் அல்லது ஒலிநாடா வடிவிலும் அளிக்கப்படும்.

Tamil

Este documento también está disponible y puede solicitarse en otros idiomas, letra grande, braille y formato de audio.

Spanish

Dokument ten jest na życzenie udostępniany także w innych wersjach językowych, w dużym druku, w alfabecie Braille'a lub w formie audio.

Polish

આ દસ્તાવેજ વિનંતી કરવાથી બીજી ભાષાઓ, મોટા છાપેલા અક્ષરો અથવા ઓડિઓ રચનામાં પણ મળી રહેશે.

Gujarati

Be belge istenirse, başka dillerde, iri harflerle, Braille ile (görme engelliler için) ve ses kasetinde de temin edilebilir.

Turkish