

Types of Sudden Death

Suspicious / Non-suspicious

How do you establish if there is anything suspicious about the death?

- If in doubt contact a supervisor
- Ascertain facts
- Preserve scene.

It is very difficult to gather evidence from a sudden death crime scene if this death had initially been treated as non-suspicious. In this circumstance the scene will have been contaminated and possible evidence lost. Therefore you should be cautious about assuming a death is non-suspicious if there is any possibility that it could actually be as the result of a crime. You should contact your supervisor if you are at all unsure of the circumstances of a sudden death.

Suicide

- It is not a criminal offence to “completing suicide”
- Aiding and abetting another to “complete suicide” is an offence
- Such deaths must be thoroughly investigated because there is always the possibility of a disguised homicide.
- Be aware of any dangers - The means used to “complete suicide” may present a danger to others, for example electricity or gas.
- Look for and, if possible, take possession of the means employed to “complete suicide” and make a note where seizure is not possible.
- Seize any articles connected with suicide - Suicide letters / Preserve knot from any hangings
- All items are evidence and may be required at any coroner’s court.

NB. Practitioners and MH sector now speak of ‘**completing** Suicide’, not ‘**committing** Suicide’. The use of the word **commit** relates to the time when Suicide was a criminal offence, and is suggestive of blame / shame, which may in itself upset families, particularly if they work in this field and understand the subtle difference.

When Officers write anything about suicide (statements, reports, particularly OEL’s), they should professionally use the term ‘**apparent Suicide**’, as Suicide can only be determined by the Pathologist / Coroner.

*Types of Sudden Death***Drugs**

- A drug related death is where there is evidence of a fatal overdose of controlled drugs. Such evidence would be recent drug misuse, for example, controlled drugs and/or hypodermic syringe found in close proximity to the body, and/or the person is known to the police as a drug misuser although not necessarily a notified addict.
- Consider the criminality of how the drugs came to be obtained, supplied, administered?
- It is expected that reasonable investigative efforts are made to identify who may have been present, and whether this was individual or communal use?
- Much of this will become evident from witnesses, the scene, the body, phones.
- A thorough search of the premises MUST be undertaken for evidence / duty of care.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) / Death of Children

- A sudden death that involves an infant should be treated as a potential crime scene until the cause of death can be investigated.
- If the police are the first professionals to attend the scene, urgent medical assistance should be requested as the first priority.
- However the first police officer to arrive, or any other professional, may be expected by the parents to try and revive the baby, even if it is hopeless, and should be prepared for this. The pathologist will need to be informed of any attempted resuscitation.
- The first officer at the scene must make a visual check of the child and his/her surroundings, noting any obvious signs of injury. It must be established whether the infant/child has been moved and the current position of the infant should be recorded. This information must be passed to the SIO.
- Police attendance should be kept to the minimum. Several police officers arriving at the house can be distressing especially if they are uniformed officers in marked police cars. Visiting officers, so far as possible, should not be in uniform, and should not arrive in marked cars.
- Attending officers should at all times be sensitive in the use of personal radios and mobile phones, etc. If at all possible, the officers liaising with the family, whilst remaining contactable, should have such equipment turned off.
- Don't use such phrases as 'suspicious death' or 'scene of crime', and try to avoid comments that might be misunderstood by, or distressing to, the parents.
- In talking about the baby preferably use the first name, or, if you don't yet know the name, say 'your baby', or 'he' or 'she'. Don't refer to the baby as 'it'.
- A detective officer of at least inspector rank must immediately attend the scene and take charge of the investigation
- Preserve scene and commence scene log

Industrial Death

- Preserve Scene
- Be aware of any dangers
- Contact supervisor
- Investigated by Health & Safety Executive along with Coroner & Police (**Gross Negligence Manslaughter**' (GNM))

NB.

When attending a sudden death Officers are acting on behalf of the Coroner. Our role is [to collate as much information as possible as this may determine if a Post Mortem is required or not.](#)

At the direction of HM Coroner, to represent their interests in the investigation of sudden, violent, suspicious or unnatural deaths or, where the cause of death is unknown and to assist in the execution of their legal and public protection duties.