



Policy Attachment: 20.29

Subject:	Death of a Child in Department of Children's Services Custody/Guardianship
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Additional Information:

Suggestions regarding Family Notification

1. Use the child/youth's name when speaking with survivors
2. Speak in short sentences and use plain language.
3. Avoid euphemism for death (e.g. "gone to a better place"); use the word dead.
4. Try to make eye contact and speak to all survivors, not just the most vocal ones.
5. Look for nonverbal communication from survivors. Be aware of body language. Try to sit. Touching an arm or shoulder can be appropriate.
6. Ask about any religious beliefs and family customs that may impact the next steps in the death investigation and/or burial process.
7. If expressions of anger are directed at you or others, try to accept them without fighting back. The family may just be venting. If they have significant misconceptions about the death of their child/youth, attempts to accurately inform the family is reasonable. If resistance is encountered, it is probably wise to return to the subject at another time and place.
8. Do not "hit and run." Remain with the family long enough for them to absorb it emotionally.
9. Try to be comfortable with silence. Sometimes doing nothing is actually doing something. Your presence alone can help survivors.
10. Accept the family's discomfort. Staff can support survivors in their pain, but removal of the pain is not within your abilities as a professional. Do not speak philosophically.