

Dear family,

*It is with sadness that we extend our sincere sympathy to you on the death of your child.*

*In your grief, it is common to have many questions. You also will need to make several decisions.*

*You will receive a lot of information from various professionals over the next several days. During this difficult time, it is common to feel overwhelmed and to forget much of what is said.*

*Grieving can be lonely and frightening. It is important for you to know you don't have to do this alone. There are resources available to help you.*

*Please do not hesitate to contact us. Our professionals will assist you in obtaining answers.*

*Sincerely,  
The staff of the Infant Death Center*

## Important contacts

### Investigator/police officer

Name .....  
Phone .....

### Coroner/medical examiner

Name .....  
Phone .....

### Hospital contact

Name .....  
Phone .....

### Funeral home

Name .....  
Phone .....

### Religious, spiritual or other support contact

Name .....  
Phone .....

# When your child dies...

## information to help you during this difficult time.



**6737 W. Washington St., Ste. 1111  
West Allis, WI 53214  
(414) 337-4571  
[www.chawisconsin.org](http://www.chawisconsin.org)**

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## Grief

Grief is a normal and natural reaction to the death of a loved one. Often we are not prepared for the journey of grief.

The range of emotions you may feel are:

- Anger
- Confusion
- Disbelief
- Guilt
- Horror
- Rage
- Relief
- Sadness
- Shock

These emotions may make it hard to function on a daily basis. It may be difficult to eat, sleep, think or care about anyone or anything. This is natural and normal.

**Losing a child is one of life's most devastating and painful experiences.**

Grieving is a long, difficult process that everyone experiences differently. There is no way around it, only through it. Trusting yourself and taking care of yourself will be important during the difficult times ahead.

Most of all, be patient with yourself. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

## Investigation and autopsy

### Why is there an investigation?

A death-scene investigation is standard in determining cause of death. The investigation is needed to define the circumstances surrounding the death. This may include removal of certain items for testing.

### Why is an autopsy important?

Wisconsin requires an autopsy when a child younger than age 2 dies suddenly and unexpectedly. An autopsy is necessary for the pathologist to determine cause of death and identify congenital and/or genetic conditions. This information may be helpful in preventing future deaths.

### What is an autopsy?

An autopsy is the careful examination of organs for causes and/or factors that may have contributed to your child's death. An autopsy is done with sensitivity and care. Nothing is done during the autopsy that will prevent or complicate a funeral or viewing of the body.

It may take several weeks for all of the laboratory tests to be completed. A written report will then be available to you. The autopsy is performed at no cost to the family.

## Roles

### Investigator/police officer

The primary role of the investigator is to be an advocate for the deceased child. He or she must maintain an objective approach in investigating the cause and manner of death.

### Coroner/medical examiner

Each Wisconsin county has a coroner or medical examiner. These individuals become involved in the investigation of deaths that are sudden, unexpected or of a traumatic nature.

The coroner or medical examiner can explain the autopsy procedure and facilitate discussion of the autopsy findings.

### Pathologist

A pathologist is the physician who performs the autopsy and prepares a report of the findings.

### Funeral director

One of the decisions you will need to make is the choice of a funeral home. The funeral director will assist you in making arrangements for your child.

You will be offered a variety of options, including the opportunity to spend time with your child prior to the service. You may want to do something in memory of your child, either public or private. **Remember, the final decisions are yours.**