

This is Part 2 of 3 TCF factsheets on inquests in England and Wales. It gives advice on preparation. See Part 1 for an overview, and Part 3 for an explanation of what happens on the day.

As parents who have lost a child, we are suffering the worst grief. The prolonged waiting for the inquest, perhaps months or even years afterwards, may prolong or intensify our feelings. Most family members feel overawed and emotionally charged at the prospect of going to an inquest. No two inquests are the same, but it is far better to seek advice before the hearing than after it, so that you can make informed decisions well in advance.

Who will I be dealing with?

- The **Coroner** is the person who will preside over the case in court. They delegate a lot of their functions to:
- **Coroners Officers.** Coroners' officers work under the direction of coroners and liaise with bereaved people as well as with the police, doctors, witnesses, mortuary staff, hospital bereavement staff and funeral directors. Most coroners' officers are civilians, but some are serving police officers.

How can I prepare for my child's inquest?

- Understanding the process of the inquest is vital. The detailed guide from the Coroners Service is lengthy but worthwhile studying.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/363879/guide-to-coroner-service.pdf

The close relatives of the person who died have a special status called "interested persons" and have the right to attend and be involved in the inquest. As a parent, you are automatically an interested person. <https://www.clinicalnegligenceteam.co.uk/blog/interested-persons-inquests/>

- As an interested person, amongst other things, you are entitled to ask the coroner to supply you with advance information of the evidence to be relied on at the inquest. This could include the post mortem and should include the statements from witnesses whose evidence is to be read at inquest, and the statements or a summary from those who are going to give live evidence.
- Upon receipt of this information you can then try to prepare questions and so on, for the hearing.
- You may want to provide the coroner with information about your child's death or ask questions. You can write to the coroner's office or phone them.
- You may be able to arrange to meet the coroner's officer, whether or not you have specific issues to raise. Having a personal link can help as you cope both with your grief, as well as the difficult wait for the inquest.
- See more: https://coronerscourtsupportservice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CCSS-EL_Inquest_Factsheet_Final29317221_3.pdf

Do I need a solicitor to help me?

- Engaging a **solicitor** can be helpful although is not always essential. He or she can liaise with the coroner's court beforehand and represent you at the inquest, asking questions on your behalf.
- If you are on a low income, you may be able to receive funding for advice and assistance in the run-up to an inquest, but Legal Aid only funds a solicitor for an inquest itself in exceptional circumstances.
- The Compassionate Friends has links with a solicitor who will provide initial free advice to bereaved parents. They could help you consider your options. Send your name and number by text to 07836 630889 or email to sefton@ozonlaw.com and he will contact you.

- Where someone has died whilst in the care of an institution such as under the care of mental health services or in prison, or following contact with those working for a public authority such as the police, it is advisable to seek **specialist legal advice** as soon as possible.

Are there any organisations that can help?

There are some organisations that deal with deaths in particular circumstances. They can provide general advice and in some cases they might also get involved in supporting you.

THE CORONER COURTS SUPPORT SERVICE (CCSS) is an independent charity with trained volunteers who can support close family members of the deceased when attending an inquest or via the Helpline at any time. However, they cannot offer procedural or case specific advice. www.coronerscourtsupportservice.org.uk or call 0300 111 2141

INQUEST: For deaths in custody and detention. <https://www.inquest.org.uk/our-services>

RETHINK: For deaths of those who were suffering from mental illness, whether or not they were receiving treatment. This includes suicide. <https://www.rethink.org/home>

Action against Medical Incidents (AvMA): For deaths related to medical treatment (NHS or private) <https://www.avma.org.uk/help-advice/inquests/>

Victim Support: Supporting those bereaved by murder and manslaughter: <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk>

Road Peace: Supporting those bereaved through road traffic incidents. <http://www.roadpeace.org/support/>

How can I prepare to deal with the media?

- If the media consider our child's death newsworthy, they may attend the inquest, and there may be publicity. It can be wise to prepare a short statement that we or another member of our family can read and distribute to the media.
- There is useful advice here if you think that the media may attend the inquest. <http://www.handlingmedia.org/media-inquest/>

What can I expect from an inquest?

As explained in FAQs Part 1, the purpose of an inquest, the way it is run, and the limits of what it sets out to accomplish, are all set down in law. We need to accept that:

- **Not all of our questions may be answered.**
- **The inquest is not going to blame anybody.** The inquest is not held to establish any criminal or civil liability, it cannot blame individuals for the death, and the coroner and/or the jury must not name anyone in delivering their conclusion.

In the midst

As parents, we may want to find out every detail around the tragic death of our child, but the details that are uncovered can be difficult to bear. We should not feel that we have to read every single piece of information, nor even the post-mortem report, if this is causing us unbearable pain.

Whilst our thoughts are on the inquest, it may be difficult to focus on the happier memories of our child's life. In time, these better memories will return to comfort us. An inquest only looks at the facts of our child's death; his or her life was so much more.

This Factsheet was produced by The Compassionate Friends, a nationwide organisation of bereaved parents and their families offering support after a child dies.

TCF publishes a range of leaflets on a variety of topics. Find out more by contacting us:

- General Enquiries (for local contacts and groups): **0345 120 3785**
- Website and online forum: www.tcf.org.uk
- TCF UK Helpline: **0345 123 2304**

