



## Joint Agency Communication Protocol in the event of an unexpected Child Death

Receiving the news that a child has died is inevitably challenging and emotive for the professionals responsible for co-ordinating an effective and sensitive response.

Events can be fast paced and information often received in a fragmented way. Swift and smooth inter agency communication ensures facts are accurately represented and action plans co-ordinated and communicated appropriately.

Whilst Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and Working Together 2018 set out the statutory responsibilities and procedural steps agencies need to take, in order to minimise any potential distress or misunderstanding to those who knew the child, agencies' communications should be agreed and co-ordinated.

Taking into account that each situation is unique, the following principles should underpin the spirit and delivery of any communications:

- **Compassion** – tone and wording must reflect compassion for the individuals and networks involved with that child. This can include family, friends, professionals, schools, community groups etc. Consideration needs to be given to potential impacts on specific local communities and groups. Encourage parents and communities to use private messaging groups to communicate rather than open forums which may compromise confidentiality.
- **Consistency** - Use of a consistent message and broad structure by all agencies.
- **Confirmation** of the child's name at the earliest opportunity. This minimises inaccuracies and speculation and reduces the risk of prolonged press interest. Agreement to release the name will be given by Thames Valley Police (TVP), all agencies to be advised of planned timings of information release into the public domain. Ensure the name is only shared in any communications when TVP agreement has been obtained.

### Steps to take:

- Press interest should be pre-empted.

- As soon as notification of death is received, plans should be made to develop an agreed press statement. This should be a jointly prepared statement, for partial or complete use by all involved agencies.
- Ordinarily this will be led by Oxfordshire County Council Communications Team in collaboration with TVP Communications Team, Coroner's Office, any other local agencies and the child's school, if applicable.
- Schools will often draft a letter to parents and students. The OCC Education Safeguarding Advisory Team (ESAT) will offer support and co-ordination with this. The contents of these should be consistent with any press release.
- TVP and OCC colleagues (Communications, Coroner's Office and Education Safeguarding Advisory team) should liaise to agree appropriate timing of the release.

Useful links:

- <https://www.samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide>
- <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>
- <http://www.seesaw.org.uk/>