



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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The National Center on Child Fatality Review

by John Langstaff and Tish Sleeper

Approximately 50,000 children die in the United States each year. Infants die primarily of problems associated with prematurity; adolescents die largely of trauma following violence or injury, most commonly motor vehicle injury. An estimated 2,000 children in the United States die of child abuse and neglect each year; approximately 40 percent of them are younger than a year old, and the majority are younger than 5 years.

To help prevent severe and fatal child abuse and neglect and bring offenders to justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) supports the National Center on Child Fatality Review (NCFR) in El Monte, CA. NCFR assists the field in collecting full and accurate information about child fatalities to support the investigation of these important cases. As a national clearinghouse, the center collects and disseminates information and resources to teams across the country that review child fatalities and to other concerned agencies and individuals. Most teams have expanded to review all forms of intentional and preventable deaths, including child suicides, accidents, and deaths from natural and undetermined causes. A national advisory board of professionals from related fields provides program direction.

Historically, responsibility for preventing and examining child fatalities fell on law enforcement, public safety, and public health agencies working in isolation. However, in recent years, as sensitivity to child abuse and other violence against children has grown among the public and policymakers, these agencies have begun to explore ways to work together as a team to share resources and information. In 1978, under the leadership of Michael Durfee, M.D., the Los Angeles County Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) established the first multiagency team to review child fatalities in the United States. In 1982, other California counties began forming review teams and, in 1988, the California Legislature passed legislation that encouraged other counties in the State to set up their own child fatality review teams. Today, 57 of California's 58 counties have

their own review teams. In 1985 and 1986, Oregon, South Carolina, and Missouri created child fatality review teams. By 1990, 12 States had established similar teams and, today, there are child death review teams in all 50 States, Australia, and Canada. In 1996, ICAN was designated as the National Center on Child Fatality Review. Dr. Durfee serves as Chief Consultant to the NCFR.

Local Review Teams

Local child death review teams tend to be similar in structure and process. Core membership generally includes representatives from the coroner's office, law enforcement, prosecutorial agencies, child protective services, and public health agencies. The teams examine all child fatalities, especially those deaths in which a coroner's services are involved. Systematic multiagency reviews consist of agencies sharing information to improve case management, promote child health and safety policies, increase criminal convictions of perpetrators, and protect surviving siblings. Statistics generated by different review teams may vary based on definitions used, levels of investigation, methods of data collection, and quality of interagency communication. As teams mature, they collect data more systematically, publish reports, and create systems to aid multiagency intervention and prevention. Working relationships that develop among participating agencies help investigators of nonfatal cases and aid in injury prevention. State teams support local teams.

NCFR assists teams and individuals through a Web site with directories, a listserv, links to sites posted by State teams, and training materials. Much of NCFR's work is done by computer communication, personal contact, and distribution of NCFR or local team documents. NCFR brings interested parties together or connects them to other available resources. The national system primarily functions as a peer support group, with NCFR as the host responsible for maintaining current resources and information. NCFR components are listed below.

Internet Communications

- ◆ **Directories:** The NCFR Web site offers a searchable, regularly updated directory of child fatality review contacts by State, national association, Federal agency, or international contact.
- ◆ **Listservs:** E-mail groups, known as listservs, allow for easy, direct communication among professionals and others interested in child fatality review. Members may post questions, report and request data, and alert others to upcoming events.
- ◆ **Links:** Regularly updated links to dozens of Web sites dealing with child fatality review are available. There are links to child fatality and child welfare Web sites in all 50 States. A free computer disk with links to child fatality and child welfare sites is also available.
- ◆ **Data:** A national data system includes information on infant homicide, as coded by law enforcement and coroners, that is matched against infant data on fatal child abuse or neglect. This "triple data set" provides a foundation for a single national data system.

Video Materials

In March 2000, NCFR conducted a nationally broadcast child death review team training. From this broadcast, three training videos were developed:

- ◆ A 70-minute video that follows death review team professionals as they discuss a fictitious case.
- ◆ A second 70-minute video in which the team discusses a different fictitious case.
- ◆ A 7-minute informational video that provides a concise overview of the key elements of a systematic review of child death.

These videos are available free of charge. To request a training video, contact NCFR via e-mail at pclick@co.la.ca.us or via telephone at 626-455-4585.

Written Materials and Presentations

- ◆ ICAN has published a manual on how to develop and manage child death review teams.
- ◆ A library of reports, studies, and protocols created by State and local teams from around the world is available. Some of these materials are accessible on the Web. Others are scheduled to be added to the NCFR Web site in 2001.
- ◆ *Unified Response*, the NCFR newsletter, is published twice yearly and contains articles by leading professionals, highlights about local teams, and information on upcoming events.
- ◆ NCFR has presented at national conferences and forums and at the Child Death Review Team training conducted by ICAN throughout the State of California.

For Further Information

To request assistance or available training or informational material, contact

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The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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