

What happens next when someone close to you dies on the railway



BRITISH
TRANSPORT
POLICE

What happens next when someone close to you dies on the railway

To view this booklet in Welsh, visit
I weld y llyfryn hwn yn Gymraeg, ewch i
btp.police.uk/profedigaeth

Edition 2

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Our commitment to you

We will

- Treat the person who has died with dignity and respect.
- Provide you with a professional, empathetic and timely service, giving you information as soon as it is available.
- Return items belonging to the person who has died as quickly as possible.
- Keep in contact with you and provide you with the lead investigator's contact details. We will contact you to discuss what is happening within eight hours of first speaking with you, and at least weekly until after the inquiry is concluded (unless we agree a different timeframe with you).
- Explain the investigative process and support you through it. We will also support you through the Inquest or Fatal Accident Inquiry. In some circumstances, a Family Liaison Officer may also provide you with support.
- Seek facts from you about the person who has died to establish relevant lines of inquiry and discuss any concerns you may have.
- Conduct a thorough and professional investigation that seeks to explain how the person who has died met their death, and establish whether anyone or any corporation may be culpable.

Introduction

This booklet has been designed to help you understand what happens after someone close to you dies on the railway. We hope you will find this helpful at this difficult and distressing time.

You and your family may be dealing with the death of someone close to you for the first time. It can be difficult to cope with all the arrangements and understand the processes that are particular to a death on the railway.

As processes are different in Scotland to those in England and Wales, please read the sections that are relevant to the place of death.

Our charter for the bereaved outlines what can be expected from British Transport Police after someone dies on the railway. As part of this, we make a number of commitments to support those close to the person who has died.

You can see this on our website at btp.police.uk/bereavement

Why is British Transport Police involved?

All deaths on Britain's railways are investigated by British Transport Police (BTP). We are the national police force responsible for policing the railways. We aim to treat everyone we come into contact with fairly, professionally and with respect and dignity.

In England and Wales, all deaths on the railway have to be reported to the Coroner for the area where the death occurred. An inquest will always be held. Each Coroner operates to the same principles, but the way they apply those principles may vary.

In Scotland, all deaths on the railway have to be reported to the Procurator Fiscal for the area where the death occurred, and it is possible that a Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI) could be held.

We investigate deaths on the railway on behalf of the Coroner and the Procurator Fiscal, and our investigation may be directed by them.

We classify deaths on the railway using the following criteria:

- **Non-suspicious** – we believe there were no suspicious factors contributing to the death.
- **Unexplained** – we are not in a position to say whether or not another factor was involved in the death at this time.
- **Suspicious** – we are investigating the possibility of another factor being involved in the death.
- **Work-related** – a death resulting from an incident arising out of, or in connection with, work.
- **Sudden death** – where the death is not suspicious and does not involve an unnatural occurrence, such as a death through illness on a station platform or concourse.

The officer discussing the death with you may be able to tell you under what criteria it is being investigated. Please bear in mind that, as the investigation progresses, it may be re-classified from one category to another.

Identification

We may ask someone to make a formal identification. This should be done by the person's legal next of kin. However, with the agreement of the next of kin and the Coroner, a partner or close friend may be able to do this.

Identifying someone in these circumstances can be a difficult thing to do. If you are asked, you might find it helpful to take someone with you.

We may need to take a statement from you saying you have made a formal identification. We will also need an 'antecedent' statement from you or a close family member. A police officer or member of police staff will contact you and help you with preparing this statement. Often, this statement will be done at your home. If you would prefer it to be done somewhere else, we will do our best to accommodate this.

The statement is a history of your loved one's life and includes some or all of the following:

- their name, age and date of birth
- family make-up, for example siblings or children
- their childhood and schooling
- any illnesses or injuries they were suffering from
- their job
- whether their behaviour had changed before their death
- what they did on the day of their death and in the weeks before
- their medical history
- when they were last seen alive and how they seemed
- anything else that may help to establish why they died

This list is not exhaustive. If there is anything else you want to tell us, please do.

The person who takes this statement will be:

- a police officer or trained member of police staff
- a Family Liaison Officer (FLO), if one has been appointed
- the Coroner's Officer or Coroner's Enquiry Coordinator (England and Wales)
- a Liaison Officer (Scotland)

Why might I be asked for personal items belonging to the person who has died?

Following a death on the railway, we have to confirm the identity of the person who has died.

We may need to examine personal items for DNA or fingerprints to help us with identification. This may be done by specially-trained staff, known as Crime Scene Examiners, who are experts at fingerprint taking and analysis.

It would help us if you don't touch anything that the person who has died may have recently handled. If they have their own room or private space, please leave it as undisturbed as possible until a police officer or member of police staff has been in touch.

While we will make every effort to safeguard any items removed for examination, some processes we need to undertake to obtain fingerprints or DNA samples may result in damage.

Any property the person who has died had with them when they died can normally only be given back with the permission of the Coroner or Procurator Fiscal. This is usually given to their next of kin. It may take some considerable time for permission to be granted and arrangements made to hand back the items. Please bear in mind that any items returned to you may not be in the same condition as when you last saw them.

Can I see the person who has died?

You may wish to see the person who has died. We will do what we can to help you with this. This will need arranging through the Coroner's office and could take some time.

The injuries a person suffers when they die on the railway can be very severe. If you want to know what injuries they suffered, we will tell you what we know, but as police officers we are not medically qualified and can only tell you what we have seen.

Being told what injuries someone close to you has suffered is likely to be very distressing and disturbing. If their injuries are severe you may need to think carefully about going to see them. It may help to take someone else with you. Each case is different and this will be discussed with you.

Can I see where they died?

If you wish, we will also do what we can to help if you want to visit the place where they died. This will be done through the police officer or member of police staff who has been appointed to your case.

The railway can be a very dangerous place and, both for your safety and the safety of others, we will not take you onto any operational railway line. We will take you as close as we safely can. Such a visit will need to be planned in advance and could take a day or two to organise.

Flowers and tributes should not be left anywhere on the railway or at stations as these can cause safety issues or concerns for other people, for this reason any items that are left may be removed by staff. If you would like to leave a tribute and are not sure where might be appropriate please speak to us and we may be able to offer advice.

Post mortem examination

Following a death on the railway, the Coroner or Procurator Fiscal is informed. One of the things they will order is a post mortem examination. A post mortem examination is held to establish the cause of death.

The need for a post mortem examination is compulsory in law and can only be stopped in exceptional circumstances.

If you have any religious or cultural objections to a post mortem examination being carried out please tell the Coroner's Officer or Coroner's Enquiry Coordinator (England and Wales) or Liaison Officer (Scotland).

A post mortem examination may include taking samples for analysis for alcohol, drugs or other intoxicants that may have been a contributory factor in their death. It may also help to establish if there are any injuries that did not result from the incident.

You can ask for a copy of the post mortem examination report but they are normally written in formal, impersonal language and can be distressing to read.

Who needs to know about the death?

There are various people or organisations you will need to tell in due course.

These can include:

- family, friends, acquaintances and neighbours
- employers
- doctors
- utility companies – eg. gas/electric/water
- banks/credit/mortgage companies
- government agencies – eg. DVLA/DWP
- solicitors
- insurance companies – eg. life/car

This is not an exhaustive list and much will depend on individual circumstances. Your local council, GP, solicitor and funeral director may also be able to help.

The **gov.uk** website is also a good source of useful information.

Dealing with the press and social media

When a person dies on the railway, there is often public interest in what has happened, and sometimes the local media will contact British Transport Police for more information.

We have a media relations team and their job is to manage this interest and release information to the public. When a death has happened, they will normally release brief details of what has happened.

This will include when and where the death occurred and, once the next of kin have been informed, their gender, age and area of residence.

The media relations team will not release the name of the person who has died to the media.

However, it is important to know that once the coroner has opened an inquest, the name of the person becomes a matter of public record and the media are able to ask for the name from them. They are then able to report this.

Sometimes reporters may find out the address of the person through publicly available information, such as the electoral roll or social media profiles. They may visit their home or yours and ask to speak to you about the person. It is your choice if you want to speak to them or not.

Some families like to release a public tribute to their loved one, or a picture they would like the media and community to have. The media relations team are available to help you put together wording and advise on the best way to release this information. Sometimes this can also help if you feel you wouldn't like to speak to reporters directly but want to pay a public tribute in some way.

It is also worth bearing in mind that sometimes the media may use public social media posts to form a tribute article. Friends and acquaintances of the person who died often want to pay tribute to them by posting on sites like Facebook. If their posts can be seen publicly, the media may use what they have said in their reporting of what has happened.

Our media relations team are available for any advice, to help you put together a tribute or deal with media enquiries on your behalf if you don't want to do this in person. Please speak to the officer or police staff member appointed to your case, who will make arrangements for this.

What happens next...

- England and Wales
- Scotland

People you may come into contact with

Family Liaison Officer

Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) are not usually appointed to deal with deaths on the railway, however the circumstances surrounding the death or the subsequent investigation may make the appointment of an FLO necessary.

They are specially-trained police officers who volunteer for the role. Their role is:

- to help the investigating officer
- to be a single point of contact for you

Coroner, Coroner's Officer and Coroner's Enquiry Coordinator

In England and Wales the local Coroner has to be notified of all unexpected, unexplained or suspicious deaths. You may have contact with either a Coroner's Officer or Coroner's Enquiry Coordinator or, on occasions, both. The differences between the two are:

- Coroner's Officers are employed directly by the Coroner. They act on their behalf and report directly to them.
- Coroner's Enquiry Coordinators are employed by BTP and act as a liaison between the Coroner and BTP.

Exactly who will contact you will depend on local arrangements. If there is no Coroner's Enquiry Coordinator available, you may be contacted by an investigating officer instead.

The role of a Coroner's Officer or Coroner's Enquiry Coordinator is to help in the investigation into the circumstances of a death on behalf of the Coroner. If a death results in a criminal investigation, they will work alongside the police investigation team.

Inquest

In most cases, an inquest into a death on the railway will be opened within a few days of the death by the Coroner.

An inquest is held to establish the following:

- who died
- where they died
- when they died
- the circumstances surrounding their death

All inquests in England and Wales are held at a Coroner's court for the area where the death occurred. Inquests are not held to establish blame. They may be held in a courtroom, which we can arrange for you to visit beforehand, if it helps to prepare you. Occasionally, a jury will be present at the inquest.

You may or may not need to attend the opening of the inquest but the Coroner's Enquiry Coordinator or Coroner's Officer will tell you. If you wish to attend you can, regardless of whether or not you have been asked to. You can ask for copies of any statements that you make to the police in case you wish to refer to them at the time of the inquest.

Following the opening of the inquest, it will be adjourned to enable a date to be set for the full inquest. This date could be in several months' time.

Once the inquest has been opened and adjourned, the Coroner will issue an interim death certificate. This allows you to make arrangements for the funeral. You will need to let the Coroner know what type of funeral you are arranging.

You can also use this certificate to tell organisations about the death and apply for probate.

Funeral directors are used to dealing with these types of certificate and the arrangements for them. They will be able to provide you with further advice.

Once the inquest comes to an end, the Coroner, or jury, if one is present, will come to a conclusion. The conclusion can be one of several, including:

- **'open'** (the Coroner or jury is unable to come to a decision as to why the person died)
- **'accidental'**
- **'suicide'**
- **'narrative'** (this is where the Coroner or jury writes a short factual statement outlining the circumstances of the death)

This is not a complete list of possible conclusions. The conclusion reached in each case will depend on all of the factors that led to the death.

Witnesses may be called to give evidence. These can include:

- police officers
- pathologists
- railway staff (including train drivers)
- doctors
- eye witnesses
- family members
- anyone else the Coroner thinks may help the inquest reach a conclusion

The Coroner will ask questions of witnesses. Anyone who has a proper interest (such as a parent, spouse, partner or child of the person who has died) can ask questions of a witness during the inquest. If there is a jury, they can also ask questions of witnesses.

It is also possible the Coroner may ask for your loved one's injuries to be described during the inquest. If you do not wish to hear these details, tell the Coroner's Officer at the inquest, and the inquest will normally be stopped to allow you to leave whilst this is done.

At the conclusion, a death certificate will be issued. If there were any notes or messages left by your loved one and they are addressed to you, you can ask to have them along with any personal effects that were kept for the inquest.

Inquests are held in public and journalists may be present. Whether or not you choose to speak to a journalist is a matter for you. If you do not wish to speak to them, tell them. If an FLO has been appointed to the investigation, they will be able to give you advice on dealing with the media and seek support for you from our press office, which deals with media enquiries.

People you may come into contact with

Family Liaison Officer

Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) are not usually appointed to deal with deaths on the railway, however the circumstances surrounding the death or the subsequent investigation may make the appointment of an FLO necessary.

They are specially-trained police officers who volunteer for the role. Their role is:

- to help the investigating officer
- to be a single point of contact for you

Procurator Fiscal

In Scotland, the Procurator Fiscal has a duty to investigate all sudden and unexplained deaths, including any deemed to be suspicious. To do this they may direct that a police report is prepared. This does not automatically mean a criminal investigation is taking place just that we are acting as agents of the Procurator Fiscal.

The Procurator Fiscal will, on receipt of the initial report of a person's death, decide what investigations are required and direct us accordingly. Once the police inquiry has been completed and all statements have been seen by the Procurator Fiscal they will then decide:

- if there is a need for a criminal investigation
- if there is a need for a Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI)
- that neither an investigation or an FAI is required
- to send their findings to the Crown Office

The Crown Office is based in Edinburgh. It is staffed by qualified advocates who will assess the evidence and direct the Procurator Fiscal appropriately.

Liaison Officer

A Liaison Officer will contact you and help explain the various processes to you in more detail. Please do not contact the Procurator Fiscal directly. Use your Liaison Officer – they are there to help you.

Following a post mortem examination, the pathologist will issue a death certificate. This is given to the police and then handed to you with the agreement of the Procurator Fiscal. You must keep this safe as it will be needed for registering the death.

Once the death certificate has been issued, the police will tell the Procurator Fiscal. It is the Procurator Fiscal's responsibility to decide when to release the body so funeral arrangements can be made. They will do this if they are satisfied that all relevant inquiries have been carried out and that the release of the body will not hinder the investigation.

You should speak with your Liaison Officer about when to make funeral arrangements. The timing of the funeral will depend on the inquiries surrounding the death.

If you wish to have a cremation rather than a burial, you need written permission (form E1) from the Procurator Fiscal. This is generally a formality and your Liaison Officer or funeral director will be able to help you with this.

Before a funeral or cremation can take place, you must have registered the death with the Registrar. This must be done within eight days of the death occurring. A death must normally be registered by a family member or next of kin. Whoever does it will need to take the death certificate, birth certificate and marriage lines (if applicable) with them.

Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI)

Following a death there may be a need to hold a Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI). These can be held for various reasons and, depending on the circumstances, such an inquiry may be mandatory, whilst in others it may be discretionary. FAIs are not held to establish blame, nor are they criminal inquiries.

They are held to establish these facts:

- who died
- when they died
- where they died
- what reasonable precautions could have been taken to prevent the death
- identify any unsafe working practices
- any other facts that may be connected to the death

Your Liaison Officer will be able to tell you if an application to hold an FAI is being made to the relevant Sheriff.

FAIs are held in public, and journalists may be present. Whether or not you choose to speak to them is a matter for you. If you do not wish to speak to them, tell them. If an FLO has been appointed to the investigation, they will be able to give you advice on dealing with the media and seek support for you from our press office, which deals with media enquiries.

Help, advice and contacts

People and organisations that may be able to help you through this time

Getting help

Grief can manifest itself in many ways. To what extent depends on many factors, including your relationship with the person who has died and the way they died. In a traumatic death, such as losing a loved one, those feelings of grief can be magnified.

Public Health England provide a booklet called 'Help is at Hand', although the contents of this booklet focuses on those bereaved by suicide, it includes practical and emotional guidance for anyone dealing with bereavement. If this is not provided to you at the same time as this booklet, you can find it at **brtr.pl/helpisathand**.

You may also find it helps to talk to family or friends, or you may find some of the organisations below of help to you.

Who can help

- General Practitioner
- Solicitor
- Funeral director
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- National Rail Chaplaincy Service
- Religious and community leaders

Practical advice

gov.uk/after-a-death/overview

Advice and information from the Government about what to do when someone dies.

nrcs-uk.org.uk

The National Rail Chaplaincy Service provides pastoral care across the UK mainland rail network regardless of status, lifestyle, race or religion.

0845 269 1881

office@railwaychaplain.net

childbereavementuk.org

Supports families when a child dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement.

0800 028 8840

support@childbereavementuk.org

childdeathhelpline.org.uk

For those affected by the death of a child.

0800 28 29 86 or **0808 800 6019**

contact@childdeathhelpline.org

cruse.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care promotes the wellbeing of bereaved people and to enable anyone who is bereaved to understand their grief and cope with their loss. Providing counselling and support and information and advice.

0808 808 1677

helpline@cruse.org.uk

crusescotland.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland offers a free confidential bereavement counselling service to people of all ages.

0845 600 2227

support@crusescotland.org.uk

hopeagain.org.uk

Hope Again is designed for young people by young people. It is part of Cruse Bereavement Care, and supports young people after the death of someone close to them.

0808 808 1677

helpline@cruse.org.uk

muchloved.com

A charity that helps you establish an online memorial to your loved one. It also has its own community that shares ideas on how to deal with bereavement.

samaritans.org

There for people to talk any time about whatever is getting to them.

116 123

jo@samaritans.org

supportaftersuicide.org.uk

This is a partnership of organisations that provide bereavement support in the UK

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (uk-sobs.org.uk)

A charitable organisation that offers support and advice to those bereaved by suicide. Many of the volunteers have suffered this type of bereavement.

0300 111 5065

sobs.support@hotmail.com

ifucareshare.co.uk

If You Care Share Foundation is there to help you through the difficult times. They provide emotional and practical support for prevention, intervention and support after suicide.

0191 387 5661

share@ifucareshare.co.uk

winstonswish.org.uk

A charity that offers support to young people, children and families who have experienced bereavement.

08452 03 04 05

info@winstonswish.org.uk



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**0800 40 50 40
text 61016
btp.police.uk**