



# RETURNING TO WORK

Employer Guide On Employees Returning to Work

Scottish  
**COT DEATH**  
Trust

## Introduction:

You have been given this information leaflet because your employee's child has died suddenly and unexpectedly.

The information provided was written mainly for employees of parents whose child has died. Grandparents, older siblings of work age, and other close family relatives may be affected greatly by the sudden unexpected death of a baby and may wish you to have this information.

Your employee has provided you with this so that you can have some more detailed information on what happens following a sudden unexpected death in infancy. Other names which can also be commonly used are Cot Death and SIDS which stands for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Cot Death used to be a registered medical cause of death. The term is now medically called Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI - pronounced SOO DEE). The term Sudden Unexpected Death in Childhood is used when the child who died was aged over one year.

If you have been provided with this leaflet, your employee will also have received information to help them on their return to work. They too will receive the leaflet explaining the rights and benefits they are entitled to.

## What is sudden unexpected death in infancy?

"The sudden unexpected death of a previously healthy baby where there was no known pre-existing medical condition which may have caused the death and for which after post-mortem examination and investigation of the area the baby was discovered, no cause can be determined."

A healthy baby is placed for a sleep without any suspicion that anything is wrong other than perhaps a slight cold or tummy upset. When next checked the child is found to have died or is in a state of collapse but, despite resuscitation attempts, is later pronounced dead.

Often the baby is found after many hours but sometimes they are checked after minutes and have died. Babies have been witnessed to die in a carer's arms.

## What happens after a cot death?

All sudden unexpected deaths must be reported to the Procurator Fiscal and the police will gather information on their behalf. This is required by law and does not imply that there is any suspicion of foul play.

## What happens next?

Following a SUDI there must by law be a post-mortem examination of the child. Many additional tests are carried out to check for different medical problems such as; cardiac arrhythmia, genetic disorders, viruses or bacterial infection.

It can and does take many months for these results to come back which is extremely difficult for the family. Families will not have results before 3 months. Typically it can take as long as 6 months. It is not uncommon for it to take as long as 12 months for the families to get all of the post-mortem results back.

Some families may be given a final cause of death but most (60%) will not and the reason why their healthy baby died will remain unexplained. The term Sudden Unexplained Death in Infancy or Sudden Unexpected Death in Childhood will be given on the final death certificate.

The upset of having to wait this long can be difficult for those who haven't experienced it to imagine. When there are other siblings or where the parents may be expecting another baby when their child dies, they are undoubtedly worried that there could be an underlying genetic disorder.

When a baby dies suddenly and unexpectedly, many of the baby's belongings, such as the cot or Moses basket, bedding and any soft toys that were with baby, will be taken by the police. These belongings form part of the investigation and whilst waiting on the final post-mortem results, this investigation into the child's death is on-going. This means that items which parents hold dear to their child cannot be returned to them for many months.

## Returning to work:

Your employee may return to work quite quickly after the death of their son or daughter. They may be on maternity/paternity leave and wish to take their remaining leave before coming back to work. They may take additional leave as sick leave or you may have a comprehensive bereavement policy in place which provides a period of time off for compassionate leave. No matter the length of time off an employee has had, they may not be ready to fully return to their original role straight away. For some parents they will not feel able to return to the role they had before their baby died. This may be the case where a parent works with babies or young children.

A phased return or a gradual building up to previous working hours may be requested. An employee may request a revised working pattern either temporarily or permanently.

## Things to consider about your employees wellbeing long term

When a healthy child dies suddenly and for parents to not know why it has happened, is a pain they bear each and every day. Parents show incredible resilience and strength and do many things as they once did before their child died. It is true that all parents are changed when their child has died. They cannot be the same person they were.

Some parents will take a long time to return to a routine similar to what they had before. It is not uncommon for parents to need additional support to help them during their grief, both in the short and longer term. As an employer you can help by trying to accommodate your employee's needs and wishes as well as you can in your workplace.



### Counselling / meetings:

Employees may request time off work to attend counselling. This is an individual choice. Some parents wish this and others do not.

Parents may request time off to speak with professionals such as a Paediatrician, Pathologist or the Procurator Fiscal. These meetings may take place quite some time after the death of the child. Parents do not find these meetings easy and may require to take the entire day off, not just enough time to attend a meeting. Try where possible to support this without requesting that parents use annual leave.

## Significant dates:

Significant dates are also times where parents may want/need to have time off work. Their son/daughter's birthday and the anniversary of their death are always going to be significant for the family – not just the first birthday and anniversary after the child dies.

Other important milestones such as when a child would have been starting nursery/primary school/secondary school are other examples of when an employee might be feeling in need of additional support or time off (this may be a request for time off or maybe just a time when they would benefit from not having additional duties).

## Having another baby:

Parents may decide to have another baby or may already be expecting at the time their child died. Parents are extremely anxious about subsequent pregnancies following a SUDI. They may have additional appointments to attend to make sure the new baby is growing well and appears to be healthy. They may also have some follow-up appointments after baby is born, even when the new baby is perfectly healthy. This is common and helps reassure parents.

## The health of other children:

Children all have common ailments which for the most part do not require parents to take significant periods of time off work. Often a child with a cold would attend nursery or school with appropriate medication if it were required.

Most parents who have experienced the sudden unexpected death of their healthy child are not reassured that childhood ailments are nothing to worry about and are part and parcel of childhood. It may be that an employee requests a carer's day for something which would for others appear insignificant. Having an insight into why your employee may request this time off may be helpful in supporting them.

When older siblings were present when their brother or sister died, they have often witnessed resuscitation attempts, been present when paramedics and police attended the home and may not have been able to be in their own home with familiar surroundings and their own toys, in the earliest days of the investigation. This is traumatic for the child/ren but also impacts greatly on the newly bereaved parents who are grieving the loss of their child but are worrying about their other child/ren. Siblings may attend appointments for therapy too. They are not unwell but they too need additional support in their grief. This may be another reason why parents request time off work.

## Further information:

The Scottish Cot Death Trust is Scotland's only charity dedicated to sudden unexpected death in infancy and young children. We understand that the medico-legal processes following a sudden unexpected death are complex. People often worry about saying the wrong thing and so prefer to say nothing. This only adds to parents' feelings of isolation and that people do not understand what they are going through or what they have experienced.

If you would like any further information about SUDI and what happens afterwards, or for more information about the research into the cause(s), please contact us in any of the following ways:

By telephone 0141 357 3946

By email [contact@scottishcotdeathtrust.org](mailto:contact@scottishcotdeathtrust.org)

By post  
Scottish Cot Death Trust  
5th Floor  
West Glasgow Ambulatory Care Hospital  
Dalnair Street  
Glasgow  
G3 8SJ

Our website is [www.scottishcotdeathtrust.org](http://www.scottishcotdeathtrust.org)