

# When should a person's death be reported to a coroner and what is an inquest?



We are the Stop People with a Learning Disability Dying Too Young group.

We are a group of self advocates and family carers in the North East working on a campaign to stop people dying too young.



We are working with a journalist called George Julian and with funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.



We want to help people with a learning disability and family carers to understand what coroners do and what inquests are.



The 2019 Leder Annual Report that came out in July 2020 said that less people with a learning disability had their death reported to a coroner than other people.

Leder is the Learning Disability Mortality Review Programme.



We had some questions about this.

- Which deaths should a coroner investigate?
- What does a coroner do anyway?



We decided to find out the answer to these questions, and to make some Easy Read information about it, to help other people understand.



**So what is a coroner and what do they do?**

A **coroner** is a type of judge who investigates some deaths.



Some deaths should be reported to a coroner.

This is because there are questions about why the person died.



## Which deaths should a coroner investigate?

There are 3 rules to follow for a death to be investigated by a coroner.



1. A coroner should investigate every death where the cause of death is unknown.

This means where no one knows why a person died.



2. A coroner should investigate if anyone thinks that a person did not die of natural causes.

Natural causes means something that was expected to cause a person to die, like a serious medical illness or old age.



3. A coroner should investigate if there is any other reason to be worried about why a person died.

In this case, the coroner would decide if there is a reason for them to investigate.



A coroner can start an **inquest**.

An inquest is an investigation to try to answer 4 questions.

1. Who died?
2. When did they die?
3. Where did they die?
4. What did they die of?

It is to find out the full story of how someone died.



A coroner can ask for a **post mortem** to be done.



A post mortem is when a doctor called a **Pathologist** looks closely at the body of the person who died to find out what they died of.

The Pathologist writes a report for the coroner.



It says what they found out by looking closely at the body.

## What happens at an inquest?

There can be lots of meetings before the final inquest meeting.

These meetings are called **Pre Inquest Review Hearings**.

They are to make sure the final inquest meeting goes well.

They discuss anything that might be important to hear at the final inquest meeting.

The final inquest meeting is called a **Hearing**.

It is where the coroner makes a decision about how a person died.

It happens in court.

The family of the person who died can go to the inquest.





There are witnesses who give evidence. This means they share what they know about the death.

This might be someone like the family doctor (GP), the Pathologist or care workers.



Everyone who gives evidence promises to tell the truth. This is called **swearing an oath**.



The family should have the chance to give evidence to say what they know about what happened.



They can have a **solicitor or a barrister** to speak for them and ask questions.

Or they can speak for themselves.



A solicitor and a barrister are professionals who can give legal advice.



After all the evidence has been heard, the coroner will give a summary of everything that has been said.



The coroner will give their **conclusion**.

This means they will answer the 4 questions that an inquest investigates.



The coroner cannot blame anyone or say who was responsible for the person's death.



They can make recommendations to stop it happening again.



This is called a **Prevention of Future Deaths Report**.



## Where can you find more information?

There is a helpful guide written by Dimensions called Dying To Matter that tells families what to do in this situation



You can download it here <https://www.dimensions-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/Dying-to-Matter-a-guide-for-bereaved-families.pdf>

Inquest is a charity with lots of information on their website and a useful Inquest Handbook



<https://www.inquest.org.uk/>

You can use the Coroner's Society website to find out who your local coroner is and how to contact them



<https://www.coronersociety.org.uk/>

Office of the Chief Coroner



<https://www.judiciary.uk/related-offices-and-bodies/office-chief-coroner/>

Guide to Coroner Services (not Easy Read)



<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-coroner-services-and-coroner-investigations-a-short-guide>