Local Child Fatality Review Team: Role of the Pathologist

Child Fatality Review (CFR) is a multidisciplinary process to help us better understand why children in our community die and to help us identify how we can prevent future deaths. The child fatality review program in Indiana was redefined in 2012 pursuant to IC 31-33-24-6, which mandates that the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) establish a multidisciplinary child fatality review team in each of the eighteen DCS geographical regions.

Each team will meet with varying frequency to review sudden, unexpected, and unexplained deaths, deaths investigated by DCS, and those deaths classified as homicide, suicide, or accident, for all children under the age of eighteen. Team members will share case information on child deaths that occur in their region with the goal of preventing future deaths. In order for this team to be successful, all agencies involved in the safety, health, and protection of children must be involved.

The death of a child is a tragic event. Reviewing the circumstances involved in every death is part of our job as professionals and requires our time and commitment. Only then can we truly understand how to better protect our children and prevent future deaths from occurring.

- The pathologist can provide the team with information on:
  - An explanation of the cause and manner death determination from the autopsy
  - The autopsy report and other records such as toxicology reports, scene investigation information, and medical history records

- The pathologist can provide the team with expertise by:
  - Educating the team on autopsy elements and procedures
  - Educating the team on causes of child death and nature of child injuries to aid investigators

- The pathologist can support the team with assistance by:
  - Providing the team with records, such as the autopsy report and child’s medical records accessed by the pathologist
  - Providing access to and information from other pathologists

- The pathologist can help build bridges by:
  - Learning about the policies and practices of other agencies through team participation
  - Acting as liaison between the CFR team and other pathologists, or medical professionals who conduct autopsies, to improve coordination