



Chapter 6. Cultural Issues

California is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse state in the nation. Therefore, it is important for all professionals involved with the child death investigation process as well as the bereavement process to learn about the cultural beliefs, values and customs of populations within their community.

Because not everyone on the CDR Team is aware of the cultural factors associated with a case, it becomes important for the investigating officer, nurse, social worker or other professionals directly connected to a case to inform the Team about the individual cultural identifiers involved. Team members may also benefit from having a representative on the team who is either from the same culture or who has considerable knowledge of that culture.

Law enforcement and other professionals who are most likely to investigate child deaths need training and resources. Especially in dealing with another language. During the investigative and review process, being trained to understand the role and nuance of language can be crucial in exchanging information. Children should never be expected to act as interpreters. Hence, resources, such as Trained interpreters, may be needed if the family and the professionals do not speak the same language.

It is also necessary for those working with bereaved families from diverse cultures to understand the following:

- The family's customs surrounding death and funerals
- The meaning of death and particularly the death of a child in the cultural group
- Family roles, such as lines of authority
- The role of various family members during periods of grief
- The amount of support available to the family
- The family's expectations and ideas of health professionals during death and periods of grief; and
- The customs, traditions and attitudes about autopsy

The question of autopsy

At times, families may indicate an opposition to an autopsy for various reasons, such as religious and cultural practices involving death. Without compromising the integrity of the investigation, it is important for the Investigators, and later the CDR Team, to be aware of the needs of the family and their adherence to their religion or culture. The Team may recommend that a case manager respond to a family's concerns about an autopsy by helping them understand that the autopsy is a medical examination that provides crucial information that may be useful to the family, the

doctors that cared for the child, and society. Providing the family with information regarding the autopsy process helps ease the opposition. Families must be reassured that conventional viewing will still be possible after the exam.

Local groups or programs that advocate for ethnic and cultural groups may also be of value. This is particularly important for religious groups and poorer minority communities. Some religions have beliefs about the proper care of the body after death. More impoverished communities are over-represented in almost all forms of child death, and may require certain consideration with case management and prevention efforts. The Asian community may be lost in systems that assume English and Spanish satisfies language needs. People with developmental disabilities, mental illness and homelessness will also have unique needs that need to be addressed.