

# Glossary

**Accidental strangulation:** A type of suffocation resulting from a constricted airway or the windpipe often caused by strings, ties, and cords on toys, clothing, and household appliances.

**Active listening:** Listening attentively to what a person is saying by providing undivided attention and giving feedback by repeating or paraphrasing what the speaker has said.

**Algor mortis:** The gradual cooling of the body following death.

**Apnea:** Temporary absence or cessation of breathing.

**Asphyxia:** A condition in which an extreme decrease in the amount of oxygen in the body accompanied by an increase of carbon dioxide leads to loss of consciousness or death.

**Aspiration:** 1. The sucking of fluid or a foreign body into the airway when drawing breath.  
2. The taking of foreign matter into the lungs with the respiratory current.

**Autopsy:** A medicolegal (forensic) autopsy is ordered by the coroner or medical examiner as authorized by law with the statutory purpose of establishing the cause and manner of death and answering other medicolegal questions. (See Postmortem.)

**Birth mother:** The individual who actually gave birth to the infant. Also referred to as the biological mother.

**Blue sclerae:** When the tough whites of the eyes (the fibrous outer envelope of tissue covering all of the eyeball except the cornea) have a bluish tint.

**Bradycardia:** Slowing of the heart rate.

**CAD:** Computer-aided dispatch.

**Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR):** A procedure whereby a victim who is not breathing or has no pulse receives mouth-to-mouth breaths and chest compressions so that blood flow and oxygen exchange are maintained.

**Caregiver:** Any person who is responsible for the care of the infant (e.g., a babysitter, a child care custodian, or the mother).

**Cause (of SIDS):** A condition or event directly responsible for the death of an individual infant.

**Cause of death:** The underlying disease or injury responsible for setting in motion a series of physiological events culminating in death.

**Child:** A child (plural: children) is a young human. Depending on context, it may mean someone who is not yet an adult or someone who has not yet reached puberty.

**Choking:** The interruption of breathing due to something stuck in an infant's airway passages. Food, toys, and other small objects that are easily lodged in a child's small airway can cause choking.

**Congenital anomalies:** An abnormality that is present at birth (i.e., a birth defect).

**Coroner:** A coroner may be a public official, appointed or elected, serving the population of a particular geographic jurisdiction. His or her official duty is to make inquiry into deaths in certain categories as dictated by state statute. About 25 percent of the U.S. population is served by elected coroners.

**CPR** (cardiopulmonary resuscitation): A procedure whereby a victim who is not breathing or has no pulse receives mouth-to-mouth breaths and chest compressions so that blood flow and oxygen exchange are maintained.

**CPS:** Child Protective Services.

**Creptance:** This is the crackling or grating sound heard when broken bones are moved over each other.

**Crib/cot death:** Synonyms for SIDS.

**Cutaneous petechiae:** Small pinpoint hemorrhages on body surfaces or in the conjunctivae (linings) of the eyes.

**Cyanosis:** A bluish discoloration of the skin and mucous membranes resulting from inadequate oxygenation of the blood.

**DC:** Death certificate.

**Decedent:** A person that has died (i.e., the deceased person).

**Developmental milestone:** A set of functional skills or age-specific tasks that most children can do within a certain age range.

**Diagnosis of exclusion:** SIDS is known as a diagnosis of exclusion because it is reported as the cause of death only as a last resort, when all other causes have been eliminated from consideration.

**DOA:** Dead on arrival.

**DOB:** Date of birth.

**Drowning:** Immersion in water that prevents the breathing in of oxygenated air because the lungs and airway passages are engulfed in water or other fluids.

**Electrocution:** Deaths caused by electrical shock.

**EMS:** Emergency medical services.

**EMS caller:** The person who first called for emergency medical services, including an ambulance service, the police, or the fire department rescue team.

**EMS responder:** The person who first responded on behalf of the emergency medical service agency.

**Entry phase:** The portion of an interview when you establish rapport by making the informant comfortable and building his or her trust.

**Enzyme(s):** Any of numerous complex proteins that are produced by living cells and catalyze specific biochemical reactions.

**Escape phase (or exit phase):** Termination point of the interview; usually includes a final question that sends a clear message that the interview is officially over. Important to end on a positive note and to thank the interviewee during this phase.

**Etiology:** 1. Assignment of a cause, an origin, or a reason for something. 2. The science and study of the causes or origins of disease.

**Event phase:** The portion of an interview which is intended to gather more detailed information; typically using 3 key investigative techniques (1. active and passive listening, 2. using open-ended questions, 3. using nonjudgmental questions).

**Failure-to-thrive (FTT):** A sign of unexplained weight loss or poor weight gain in an infant or child.

**Father:** The person serving as the father at the time of the incident.

**Finder:** The person who discovered the infant dead, unresponsive, or in distress.

**Fine motor skills:** The ability to move and control small muscles of the body (e.g., muscles in the hands, fingers, and eyes).

**First responder(s):** The initial responding law enforcement officer(s) and/or other public safety official(s) or service provider(s) arriving at the scene prior to the arrival of the investigator(s) in charge. The first professional(s) who attempted to render aid when the unresponsive infant was found dead, unresponsive, or in distress.

**Florid retinal hemorrhages:** Bleeding on the surface of the retina (visual receptor of the eye), which usually results from extremely violent force to the head.

**Forensic autopsy:** An autopsy performed pursuant to statute, by or under the order of a medical examiner or coroner.

**Forensic pathologist:** A physician who is certified in forensic pathology by the American Board of Pathology (ABP), or who, prior to 2006, has completed a training program in forensic pathology that is accredited by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education or its international equivalent or has been officially “qualified for examination” in forensic pathology by the ABP.

**Four-Domain Model:** A model of detecting deception by describing domains or clusters of behaviors rather than attaching a specific meaning to a single nonverbal or verbal display. The four categories are: 1. comfort/discomfort, 2. emphasis, 3. synchrony, 4. perception management.

**Galactosemia:** An inherited metabolic disorder characterized by the deficiency of an enzyme that is necessary for the metabolism of galactose. The disorder results in elevated levels of galactose in the blood and, if untreated, can lead to mental retardation and eye and liver abnormalities.

**Gestation:** The period of fetal development from conception until birth (i.e., pregnancy).

**G6PD deficiency (glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase deficiency):**

A hereditary metabolic disorder affecting red blood cells, characterized by a deficiency of glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase conferring marked susceptibility to hemolytic anemia, which may be chronic, episodic, or induced by certain foods (as broad beans) or drugs (as primaquine), and that occurs especially

in individuals of Mediterranean or African descent.

**Gross motor skills:** The ability to move and control large muscles or groups of muscles (e.g., muscles in the arms, legs, torso, neck and head).

**Growth monitoring:** Documenting and tracking an infant's weight, length, and head circumference over time.

**Height:** A measurement taken in children older than 12 months with the child standing upright.

**Hepatobiliary disease:** Disease pertaining to the liver, bile, or bile ducts.

**HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act):** Federal law passed in 1996 to protect the privacy of personal health information and improve the efficiency of the healthcare system.

**Homeostatic control mechanisms:** Innate behaviors of an infant to automatically regulate body conditions, such as temperature, oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the blood, or heart rate.

**Hyperthermia:** Unusually high body temperature.

**Hypostasis:** The settling of blood in the lower part of an organ or the body as a result of decreased blood flow.

**Hypothermia:** Abnormally low body temperature.

**Hypoxia:** A deficiency of oxygen reaching the tissues of the body.

**Iatrogenic:** Induced in a patient by a physician's activity, manner, or therapy.

**Infant:** A child who is 0 to 12 months of age.

**Initial responding officer(s):** The first law enforcement officer(s) to arrive at the scene.

**International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision (ICD-9) and 10th Revision (ICD10):** This is a guide for the classification of morbidity and mortality information for statistical purposes published by the World Health Organization.

**Interrogation:** A "controlled conversation" designed to elicit information from individuals who may have an interest in being untruthful. The purpose is to obtain information from an individual to determine whether he or she was responsible for, or involved in, the matter under investigation.

**Interview:** A "planned conversation" with a specific goal in mind, where information is gathered from a person who generally has no interest or motive in providing inaccurate information.

**Intraosseous:** Situated within, occurring within, or administered by entering a bone.

**Investigator(s) in charge:** The official(s) responsible for the crime scene investigation.

**IV:** Intravenous.

**Jaundice:** Yellowish discoloration of the whites of the eyes, skin, and mucous membranes.

**Jurisdiction:** The limits or territory within which authority may be exercised.

**Kinesic:** The study of nonlinguistic bodily movements, such as gestures and facial expressions, as a systematic mode of communication.

**Language skills:** The ability to understand language and to vocalize, babble, and ultimately say words.

**Last caregiver:** The person who was last responsible for the care of the infant when he or she was discovered dead, unresponsive, or in distress (e.g., a babysitter, a child care custodian, or the mother).

**Last witness:** The person who last observed the infant alive or presumably alive in or near the area where he or she was discovered dead, unresponsive, or in distress.

**Length:** A measurement taken with the infant lying down from the top of the head to the bottom of the heel of the foot.

**LKA (last known alive):** The person who last observed the infant alive or presumably alive in or near the area where he or she was discovered dead, unresponsive, or in distress.

**Lividity:** Following death, a large pooling of blood in parts of the body resulting in discoloration.

**Livor mortis:** Hypostasis of the blood following death, which causes a purplish-red discoloration of the skin.

**Long QT Syndrome:** Abnormality of the heart that can cause the heart to race and can lead to sudden death.

**Manner of death:** A simple system for classifying deaths based in large part on the presence or absence of intent to harm or violence, the purpose of which is to guide vital statistics nosologists to the correct external causation code in the International Classification of Diseases. The choices are natural, accident, homicide, suicide, undetermined, and, in some registration districts for vital statistics, unclassified.

**Malnutrition:** Poor nutrition, which can result from an insufficient, excessive, or unbalanced diet or from inability to absorb foods.

**Maple syrup urine disease (MSUD):** An inherited disorder of metabolism in which the urine has an odor characteristic of maple syrup; if untreated, it can lead to mental retardation and death in early childhood.

**ME/C:** Medical examiner or coroner.

**Medical examiner:** A medical examiner is typically a physician; hence the title. When acting in an official duty, the medical examiner is charged, within a particular jurisdiction (typically at the county level), with the investigation and examination of persons dying a sudden, unexplained, or violent death. The role of a medical examiner differs from that of nonphysician coroners in that the medical examiner is expected to bring medical expertise to the evaluation of the medical history and physical examination of the deceased.

**Medicolegal death investigator:** An individual who is employed by a medicolegal death investigation system to conduct investigations into the circumstances of deaths in a jurisdiction.

**Medium chain acyl-CoA dehydrogenase deficiency (MCADD):** A rare hereditary disease that is caused by the lack of an enzyme required to convert fat to energy.

**Metaphyseal fractures:** Fractures of the metaphysis (the growing part of a long bone).

**Motor skill:** An action that involves the movement and control of muscles in a person's body.

**NCIC (National Crime Information Center):** A computerized index of criminal justice information.

**Neck compression:** Compression of the neck can be brought about by any object or can result from an unusual position such as may occur when a premature baby is placed in a car seat with poor neck support.

**Nonjudgmental questions:** Questions that do not infer judgment in their tone or wording.

**NOK:** Next of kin.

**Nonorganic FTT:** Growth failure due to environmental neglect (e.g., lack of food) or other psychosocial factors.

**Normal birth weight:** An infant's weight at birth is five pounds, eight ounces or more, or greater or equal to 2,500 grams.

**Occlude:** 1. To cause to become closed; obstruct. 2. To prevent the passage of.

**Open-ended questions:** Questions that encourage people to tell a story in their own words; the opposite of close-ended (i.e., yes/no) questions.

**Organic FTT:** Growth failure that is due to an acute or chronic disorder known to interfere with normal nutrient intake, absorption, metabolism, or excretion.

**Osteogenesis imperfecta:** A hereditary disease marked by extreme brittleness of the long bones and a bluish color of the whites of the eyes.

**OTC:** Over-the-counter medication.

**Other responders:** Individuals who are involved in an aspect of the crime scene, such as perimeter security, traffic control, media management, scene processing, and technical support, as well as prosecutors, medical personnel, medical examiners, coroners, forensic examiners, evidence technicians, and fire and rescue officers.

**Overlaying:** Accidental suffocation in bed typically caused when the mother (or some other caregiver or sibling) sleeps in the same bed as the infant and accidentally suffocates the infant by turning over onto the baby while sleeping. The infant suffocates because he or she is unable to breathe through his or her nose and/or mouth.

**Passive listening:** Listening that is mechanical or effortless and does not provide feedback (e.g., listening to the radio).

**Pathologist:** A specialist in pathology; a physician who interprets and diagnoses the changes caused by disease in tissues and body fluids.

**Percentiles:** Percent of the reference population the infant's weight or length would be less than, equal to, or exceed. For example, an infant whose weight is at the 5th percentile for age weighs the same or more than 5% of infants his or her age and weighs less than 95% of infants his or her age.

**Petechiae:** Pinpoint hemorrhages or bruises. Petechiae are a frequent finding in autopsies of SIDS victims.

**Placer:** The person who last placed the infant in or near the area where he or she was found dead.

**Poisoning:** Poisoning or intoxication is the inhalation or ingestion of poison or toxic substances or gases such as carbon monoxide, noxious gases, chemicals, sprays, medications, and illicit drugs, which can cause a blockage of the respiratory tract resulting in death.

**Postmortem examination:** An examination of the body after death, usually with such dissection as will expose the vital organs for determining the cause of death or the character and extent of changes produced by disease; an autopsy.

**Preterm:** Infants born before the end of the 37th week of pregnancy.

**Primitive reflexes:** Movements that we are born with and that we cannot control (e.g., startle reflex). These reflexes go away in time and are replaced by movements that we can control.

**Prone (sleep position):** Sleeping on stomach. Evidence suggests that prone sleeping increases the risk of SIDS.

**Proxemics:** Refers to intimate, personal, social, and public distances at which people stand or sit in relation to another person(s).

**Pyloric stenosis:** Pyloric stenosis is a narrowing of the pylorus, the lower part of the stomach through which food and other stomach contents pass to enter the small intestine. When an infant has pyloric stenosis, the muscles in the pylorus have become enlarged to the point where food is prevented from emptying out of the stomach.

**Rebreathing:** The partial or complete inhalation of previously exhaled gases. The rebreathing of exhaled gases is thought to occur when infants lay face down or prone (on stomach). A popular theory is that stomach sleeping can increase an infant's risk of "rebreathing" his or her own exhaled air, particularly if the infant is sleeping on a soft mattress or with bedding, stuffed toys, or a pillow near his or her face.

**Respiratory arrest:** A condition in which breathing has stopped.

**Respiratory distress:** A condition in which breathing is difficult.

**Resuscitative efforts:** Any actions performed in an effort to resuscitate an infant.

**Rigor mortis:** Temporary rigidity of muscles occurring after death.

**Rx:** Prescription medication.

**Sharing sleep surface:** This practice involves a baby sleeping with others on the same sleep surface, such as in the adult bed or on a couch. The term *bedsharing* should not be used interchangeably with the term *co-sleeping*; the latter term should be avoided.

**SIDS:** Sudden infant death syndrome.

**Social skills:** The ability to interact with your environment and people around you.

**SS#:** Social security number.

**Subdural hemorrhage** (Synonymous with subdural hematoma): A collection of blood on the surface of the brain that lies beneath the outer covering (the dura) of the brain and the brain's surface.

**Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS):** The death of an infant less than one year of age that remains unexplained after a thorough investigation of the death scene(s), complete forensic autopsy, and review of the clinical history (i.e., a diagnosis of exclusion).

**Supine (sleep position):** Sleeping on back. Evidence suggests that supine sleeping reduces the risk of SIDS.

**Tachycardia:** Heart rate that is more rapid than normal.

**Term:** Infants born at or after the end of the 37th week of pregnancy.

**Thorax:** The part of the human body between the neck and the diaphragm, partially encased by the ribs and containing the heart and lungs; the chest.

**Undernutrition:** What happens when a person's body does not get the nutrients it needs for good health or cannot use the nutrients it gets.

**Unk:** Unknown.

**Usual caregiver:** The person responsible for providing the usual, ongoing care for the infant (e.g., changing diapers and feeding).

**Very low birth weight:** An infant's weight at birth is less than three pounds, five ounces or 1,500 grams.

**Voluntary motor control:** Movement that we can control.

**Wedging:** A form of asphyxia that occurs when the face or thorax is compressed, preventing respiration, typically because of entrapment between two objects.