

Identification and Seeing the Body

After someone has died, they are taken to a hospital mortuary or to a local authority mortuary. The next step is a post-mortem examination to establish the cause of death.

Before the post-mortem can take place, the deceased person must be identified by two people who knew them. It is not essential that these are nearest relatives.

What to Expect

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to go to the mortuary and to view the body. As there may be important forensic evidence, you may not be able to touch the body.

The police may be able to tell you the nature of the injuries, but they will not normally be able to discuss them in any detail. This means that the body may show signs of injuries that you were not expecting.

The identification will be attended by police officers and specialist doctors called pathologists. You will be asked to confirm to the police officers and pathologists the identity of the person.

Identification can sometimes be done using a video link. Family members who did not identify the body, can still choose whether or not to see the person at a later time. You can discuss this with your Family Liaison Officer (FLO).

There are times when, because of the injuries sustained by the person, the police cannot positively identify them. In these cases, identification is made by other methods such as dental records, fingerprints and DNA from, for example, a hair brush or toothbrush. In some cases DNA samples taken from mouth swabs of blood relatives might be required.

Seeing the body

Family members who did not identify the body, can still choose whether or not to see the person at a later time. You can discuss this with your Family Liaison Officer (FLO) who will advise you about making arrangements to do so.

The police may be able to tell you the nature of the injuries, but they will not normally be able to discuss them in any detail. This means that the body may show signs of injuries that you were not expecting.

You may not be able to see the body until after a post-mortem has been carried out. This is because forensic evidence is often found on the clothes and from the body during the post-mortem. This may help to identify and convict a suspect so it is important that the evidence is preserved.

In some cases, it may not be possible to view or to touch the body. Your Family Liaison Officer will explain why you can or cannot see the body, and whether you will be able to touch the body or not.