

chapter 7



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Conducting the Doll Reenactment

Concurrent and Retrospective Scene Strategies

Unit 19: Explain Reenactment to Family Member/Caregiver

Unit 20: Have Placer/Finder Demonstrate Infant Positions

Unit 21: Photograph Reenactment



Most death investigators agree that attempting to reintroduce and reposition a decedent's body into a scene for photographic reasons would not be a wise decision. However, the doll reenactment does just that with surprisingly positive results for both the investigator conducting the reenactment and the family member or caregiver performing the reenactment. This chapter details the rationale behind doll reenactments and outlines a performance procedure to follow.

OVERVIEW

This chapter covers the major tasks associated with conducting field-based investigative interviews and the doll reenactment with parents and caregivers. This includes all interactions between the investigator and individuals identified as the placer, LKA, and the finder. Additional emphasis is placed on data-collection methods and instruments.

SUPPORT MATERIALS

In addition to the SUIDI Reporting Form or jurisdictionally approved equivalent, the following tools and equipment are suggested for this chapter:

1. Personal protective equipment (gloves).
2. Doll with movable head, arms, and legs.
3. Digital camera.
4. Family information letter.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

1. Explain reenactment to family member or caregiver.
2. Have placer/finder demonstrate infant positions.
3. Photograph reenactment.
4. Debrief family member or caregiver.

Each task must be performed in a professional and sensitive manner consistent with local laws, statutes, and customs.

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unit

— Explain Reenactment to Family Member/Caregiver



INTRODUCTION

When an infant dies suddenly and unexpectedly, a thorough infant death scene investigation is necessary to accurately determine the cause and manner of death. To achieve the most accurate results, the investigator should explain the reenactment process to the family member or caregiver who will be participating in the reenactment. Many people are not verbally adept enough to describe adequately how an infant was found; thus, the reenactment becomes the visual representation of the infant death scene. This is done in the same way that a medicolegal death investigator would photograph an adult body during an adult death scene investigation.

Explain to the placer/finder that the scene recreation is a critical part of the investigation. An empathetic, nonconfrontational approach is both appropriate and effective. Emphasize that to properly determine the cause and manner of death, those caretakers who have knowledge of the scene must assist the pathologist in his or her determination.

It is critical that this reenactment be performed by the individual who actually found the infant dead or unresponsive or witnessed the found position, as this will ensure that you are documenting the correct infant death scene. Using a scene recreation doll, the placer can show the exact position in which the infant was last placed down to sleep. The found position will then be reenacted in the same manner. Photographic documentation and descriptions of these positions are essential for the complete investigation.

REVIEW REENACTMENT GOALS

The goal of the infant death scene reenactment is be able to depict accurately the sleep environment into which the infant was placed.

The reenactment will visually document the infant's body position (placed/found position; prone/supine; seated; left/right side), head and neck position (directly up/down; right/left; neck flexed to chin; neck extended back), materials found next to or near the body, and whether the infant's airway was obstructed when discovered (nostrils blocked [right/left; both], object covering mouth/nose, objects near face).

To conduct a thorough medicolegal death investigation, an infant death scene investigation must be performed depicting the exact sleep environment in which the infant was last placed down to sleep and the exact sleep environment in which the infant was found. By asking the placer to show you how the infant was last placed down to sleep and recreating the scene by using the scene recreation doll, bedding involved, and any adjacent toys or stuffed animals, you will help the pathologist to visualize the sleep environment.

The found position will then be reenacted. The finder, using the scene recreation doll, will recreate the exact sleep environment in which the infant was found. This is critical for a thorough investigation. The pathologist will be able to review and compare the placed position with the found position before the autopsy. Again, it is critical that this reenactment be performed by the individual who actually found/witnessed the infant. This will ensure that you are documenting the infant's correct position and exact sleep environment.

EXPLAIN IMPORTANCE OF VISUALIZATION BY FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST

If the pathologist is not able to respond to the infant death scene, digitally photographing the infant death scene will enable the pathologist to visualize the exact environment in which the infant was last placed down to sleep and the exact position in which the infant was found unresponsive. This information will help him or her to determine both cause and manner of death and will serve as an essential element of the medicolegal scene investigation.

SHOW THE REENACTMENT DOLL TO THE FAMILY MEMBER/CAREGIVER

Introduce the placer/finder to the scene recreation doll. The reenactment process will allow the investigator and participant to focus on an activity that is essential to the investigation, yet slightly different from the general activities surrounding the scene, thereby serving as an emotional distraction for the family member/caregiver.

It is important to handle the doll with respect but **not** to treat the doll as a living infant. This allows the participant to disassociate the doll from the actual infant. Some methods that have worked for investigators are to:

- Explain that the doll was purchased at a local store and will serve as a prop for the reenactment and photographs.
- Demonstrate (with respect) the articulation of the doll's body, head, arms, and legs. This allows for the positioning of the doll to recreate the exact placed/found position(s).

DESCRIBE THE REENACTMENT PROCEDURE TO THE FAMILY MEMBER/CAREGIVER

Explaining the reenactment procedure to the placer/finder is critical to the success of this task. A brief explanation of the step-by-step procedure, highlighting the placer's/finder's role in the reenactment, helps ensure cooperation throughout the process.

Explain to the placer/finder that this reenactment will be documented by digital photography from a number of angles for the pathologist to review (photographing both placed and found positions). This documentation will be presented to the pathologist before the autopsy and must be as accurate as possible, even though the placer/finder may insist he or she cannot remember exactly how the infant was placed or found.

The investigator must remember that the goal of the infant death scene reenactment is to be

able to accurately depict the sleep environment in which the infant was last placed/found. The following is a suggested procedure to follow during an infant death scene reenactment:

- Verify and document the placer/finder information.
 - Name, age, date of birth.
 - Relationship to the infant.
 - Whether this person is the primary caregiver.
- Ask whether the infant was sleeping alone.
 - If bed-sharing was involved, digitally photograph the sleeping position of the infant in relation to the individual(s)/animal(s) in the sleep environment.
 - The investigator will need to ask the individual(s) involved in the bed-sharing to participate in the reenactment.
 - Verify the sleep position of all individual(s) with the finder, as he or she is the primary source of information regarding the position of the infant and other(s) in the sleep environment (i.e., bed, couch, chair).
- Digitally photograph the infant's two sleeping environments (the last known placement and the infant's found position).
- Thank the placer/finder for his or her cooperation and assistance.
 - Emphasize that the person's cooperation is invaluable and a critical part of the medicolegal death investigation.
 - Express a sincere condolence for the person's loss.
- Ask the family members or caregiver whether they have any other questions.
- Provide the family with a contact name and telephone number where they can obtain additional information.

This explanation is accomplished by instructing the placer/finder to

- Manipulate the doll's head, arms, and legs to simulate the exact placement position.
- Place the doll in the exact position observed when he or she first discovered the infant. Emphasize the importance of ensuring an accurate scene recreation, including the following:
 - Infant's body position.
 - Bed-sharing scenario.
 - Bedding, blankets, pillows, bumper pads.
 - Toys and stuffed animals.
 - Positional supports.



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— Have Placer/Finder Demonstrate Infant Positions

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the infant death scene reenactment is to be able to depict accurately the sleep environment in which the infant was last placed/found. Placement data are as critical for the current investigation as they are for prevention of future infant deaths.

Often the placer and the finder are the same person. However, it is not uncommon to find that the individual who last placed the infant to sleep is NOT the same person who found the infant unresponsive or dead. In this case the investigator must have two reenactments performed to document the events surrounding the death.

HAND THE REENACTMENT DOLL TO THE PARTICIPANT

The importance of positioning the doll's body, head, and face for the reenactment cannot be overemphasized. The doll is to be placed in a position as identical as possible to the one in which the infant was last placed down to sleep, then repositioned to document the position in which the infant was found.

ASK PARTICIPANT TO DEMONSTRATE EXACTLY HOW INFANT WAS PLACED

Instruct the participant to place the doll in the exact position in which he or she last placed the infant down to sleep. Make sure the placer moves the doll's head, arms, and legs to the last known position during the demonstration to ensure correct placement. Ask the placer about additional objects or materials that were in the sleeping environment with the infant at the time of placement (e.g., dolls, pillows, etc.) and ask the person to put these objects into the scene.

Once the participant has placed the doll into position, have the person stand back and view the doll's placement and verify that this is the best representation of the last placed position he or she can recall.

- Ask the participant to focus on the exact position of the infant's body:
 - Prone/supine.
 - Seated.
- Ask the participant to focus on the exact position of the infant's face:
 - Face up/down on surface.
 - Face to right/left.
- Ask the participant to focus on the position of the infant's neck:
 - Hyper-extended (head back).
 - Flexed (chin to chest).
 - Neutral.

At this point, the investigator should begin photographing the placed position. Once the photographs have been taken and checked (digitally viewed to ensure quality), the investigator must focus on the found position.

ASK PARTICIPANT TO DEMONSTRATE EXACTLY HOW INFANT WAS FOUND

Instruct the participant to place the doll in the exact position in which he or she found the infant. Make sure the person moves the doll's head, arms, and legs into position during the demonstration to ensure correct documentation of the discovery. Ask about additional objects/materials that were in the sleeping environment with the infant at the time of discovery (e.g., dolls, pillows, etc.), and ask the person to put the objects/materials into the scene. Note anything that might have been blocking the infant's nose and/or mouth.

Once the participant has placed the doll into position, have the person stand back and view the placement and verify that this is the best representation of what he or she saw when the infant was found.

Ask the participant to focus on obstructions that may have been in contact with the infant's nose and/or mouth. If there were objects in contact with the infant's face, instruct the finder to demonstrate what items were obstructing the infant's nose/mouth. Items that are typically cited are:

- Bumper pads.
- Infant pillows.
- Positional supports.
- Stuffed animals/toys.
- Bedding (e.g., comforters, sheets, blankets, etc.).

Next, the investigator should ask the participant to focus on any items that were, or might have been, within the infant's reach. These typically include such things as:

- Stuffed animals/toys.
- Pillows.
- Pacifier.
- Blankets/comforters.

At this point, the investigator should begin photographing the position in which the infant was found. Once the photographs have been taken and checked (digitally viewed to ensure quality), the investigator must focus on verifying the sleep environment. Any pets and other animals that might have been present in the sleep environment should be documented as well.



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Photograph Reenactment

INTRODUCTION

Photographing the infant death scene will ensure a thorough death scene evaluation and correct documentation of the infant sleep environment. If the pathologist is not able to attend the death scene recreation, the digital photographs will enable him or her to visualize the sleeping environment before conducting the forensic autopsy. Before taking the doll reenactment photographs, the investigator must make sure that he or she has photographed an overview of the entire scene.

PHOTOGRAPH DOLL IN POSITIONS

Photograph the last placed position and found position in relation to items in the sleep environment. This documentation will allow others who were not able to attend the reenactment to visualize the infant's last known placed sleep environment, as well as the infant's found sleep environment.

Photograph Doll in Placed Position.

Once the placer has finished placing the doll in the location and position that he or she remembers, the investigator should immediately photograph the doll. Ask the placer if that is the exact position of the face and mouth, let him or her readjust, and take photos. Remember to note the sequence of your photos; it is extremely easy to mix-up photos and not know which ones are the "final" placed photos.

Photograph Doll in Found Position

The same procedure should be followed with the finder. If there are two different finders, remember to explain the procedure to each individually. In all the confusion and the additional stress of the situation, it is easy to forget who you've told what, and when. Again, it is critical that the reenactment be performed by the individual who actually found the infant unresponsive. This will ensure proper documentation of the found position.

Photograph to show:

- Body position (prone/supine, seated, left/right side).
- Head and neck position (directly up/down, right/left, neck flexed to chin, neck extended back).
- Nostrils blocked (right/left, both).
- Materials found next to or near the body, (objects covering mouth/nose/face).

PHOTOGRAPH BED AND BEDDING

Layer-by-Layer Photography of Bedding

The pathologist wants to see the bedding that may have been under the infant, on top of the infant, and wrapped around the infant (swaddled). The shape, size, material, and general condition of the bedding may be important and should be documented. If necessary, bedding can be collected and taken to the medical examiner/coroner facility for examination.

Photograph Sleeping Surface or Bed, Showing Size Relationships

The infant's bed, crib, mattress, or sleeping surface (blankets on floor, couch, car seat, swing, etc.) must be photographed and described for evaluation by the forensic pathologist. In addition, the fit of the mattress to the crib or bed frame should be checked and measured if necessary. Any pockets or voids between the mattress and frame or bed and wall can be an unsafe sleeping condition for infants who are developed enough to "scoot." It may be important to note the age and weight and developmental abilities of the child when conducting this evaluation.

TRANSMIT PHOTOGRAPHS TO THE PATHOLOGIST

It is not uncommon for the body to be in-route to or at the forensic autopsy facility before the scene investigation is completed. Regardless, photographs of the placed and found positions are essential to the forensic pathologist and may be critical pieces of evidence in the determination of cause and manner of death. Forensic autopsies require the reviewing of scene findings before the autopsy procedure begins (Forensic Autopsy Performance Standards, 2005); therefore, the investigator must make every effort to transmit the reenactment photographs and descriptions to the forensic pathologist as soon as possible.



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Debrief Family Members/Caregiver

INTRODUCTION

The infant death investigator's final task at the infant death scene is assisting the family before leaving the scene. He or she should express sincere condolences for their loss and thank the family member/caregiver for cooperation and assistance at this difficult time.

HIGHLIGHT THE PERSONAL DIFFICULTY OF PERFORMING A REENACTMENT

The medicolegal death investigator must be sincere when addressing the difficult task of performing a scene reenactment. This is one of the most difficult tasks an individual will ever perform. The investigator's empathy and compassion can provide a sense of comfort to the participants during the reenactment.

REINFORCE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE REENACTMENT

The reenactment provides a visualization of the sleep environment for the pathologist before autopsy. By having the placed/found position(s) digitally photographed, the pathologist can compare the two different sleep positions and the overall sleep environment. Thank these individuals for their cooperation. The digitally photographed documentation is a critical part of a thorough infant death scene investigation.

PROVIDE AN INFORMATION SHEET EXPLAINING WHAT TAKES PLACE AT THIS POINT

It is important for the investigator to express genuine concern in answering any questions the family members/caregivers have at this time. During the reenactment of an infant death scene, the family members/caregivers are emotional, under extreme stress, and experiencing feelings ranging from confusion to disbelief.

The investigator should have an information sheet to leave with the family members outlining the death investigation process, the family's responsibility, how they can obtain a copy of the final medical examiner/coroner report and certified copies of the death certificate, and a reasonable estimate of the length of time that this process will take.

Inform the family of their responsibility at this time.

- Example: The family's responsibility at this time is to choose a funeral home and let the funeral home know their loved one's death is in the care of the medical examiner's/coroner's office.

Inform family member/caregiver of the medical examiner's/coroner's investigation process.

- Tell the family that the body will be transported to the medical examiner's/coroner's office for the pathologist to examine.
- Inform the family that state law authorizes the medical examiner/coroner to perform these examinations.
- Provide information to the family on how they can obtain a copy of the medical examiner's/coroner's report when it is available.
- Explain to the family how they can obtain a certified copy of the death certificate.

PROVIDE TIMETABLE FOR RELEASE OF OFFICIAL REPORTS

The timetable for releasing the finalized report may differ significantly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. It is important to provide the family with an estimate of how long it will take to produce a medical examiner's/coroner's report. This timetable should be included in the family information letter provided by the medicolegal death investigator at the infant death scene.

PROVIDE FAMILY MEMBER/CAREGIVER WITH OFFICE CONTACT NUMBERS

During this emotional time, family member(s)/caregiver(s) might have many questions after the investigator leaves the scene. Provide the family members with the name of a contact person and a telephone number they can call if they have more questions for the medical examiner/coroner or the medicolegal death investigator after the scene evaluation.

EXPRESS UNDERSTANDING AS TO THE OVERWHELMING NATURE OF THE EVENT

Before leaving the family, you should express your understanding of the overwhelming nature of this event. Participating in an infant death scene reenactment will be difficult for these individuals. Being empathetic and nonconfrontational will provide them with support and comfort. Before leaving, thank them again for their cooperation.

ENCOURAGE THE FAMILY MEMBERS/CAREGIVERS TO ASK QUESTIONS

Encourage the family members/caregivers to ask questions and attempt to comfort them by stressing that the goal of the reenactment is to be able to provide the family with an explanation of what happened to the infant. By performing this reenactment, they are cooperating with the investigation and assisting in establishing both the cause and manner of death.

Sample Family Information Letter Provided to Family Members/Caregivers

On behalf the Medical Examiner's Office, we offer our deepest sympathy to you for your loss.

This letter is designed to help answer some of the questions you might have at this time. The Medical Examiner's Office is required by the laws of the state to conduct an investigation regarding any sudden, suspicious, violent, or unexpected deaths or deaths that might be threats to public health and safety.

INVESTIGATION:

- I. The infant will be transported to the Medical Examiner's Office for an examination. The extent of the examination is determined by the forensic pathologist as necessary to determine the cause and manner of death. The laws of the state authorize the Medical Examiner to make these examinations.
- II. Even though the examination takes place at this location, all inquiries need to be directed to the County Medical Examiner Office at 555-555-1212.

FAMILY'S RESPONSIBILITY:

The family will need to contact the funeral home of their choice. The funeral director will make the necessary arrangements for the family.

MEDICAL EXAMINER REPORT & DEATH CERTIFICATE:

- I. It generally takes four to six weeks for our autopsy report to be finalized and the death certificate to be signed. In rare cases, it may be longer.
- II. To obtain a copy of this report, please contact our office at 555-555-1212, Monday through Friday, between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM. (There is a fee for our report.)
- III. Reports of homicides will not be released through our office but through the Prosecuting Attorney.
- IV. The death certificate will be issued through the County Bureau of Vital Statistics. Inform your funeral director of the number of copies you will need. The funeral director will order them for you.

If you have any questions concerning the death investigation, please do not hesitate to contact our office at 555-555-1212.

Once again, please accept our deepest sympathy for your loss.

Katie L. Hargrave, F-ABMDI
Chief Investigator

Summary

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is an infant death scene recreation important to the overall death investigation?
2. Discuss the step-by-step procedure involved in an infant death scene reenactment. Highlight the importance of each participant's role (placer/finder).
3. Why it is important to explain the doll's role to the family members/caregivers?
4. Identify what support materials, tools, and/or equipment a medicolegal death investigator will need in order to complete a thorough death scene investigation.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. The goal of the infant death scene recreation is to document
 - A. The last known sleep environment.
 - B. The finder information.
 - C. The placer information.
 - D. The sleep environment in which the infant was last placed/found.
2. When conducting the infant death scene reenactment, whom should the investigator ask to demonstrate the last known placement?
 - A. The mother.
 - B. The placer.
 - C. The finder.
 - D. The father.
3. How many reenactments are required in an infant death scene investigation?
 - A. One, documenting the infant's last known sleep position.
 - B. One, documenting the infant's found position.
 - C. The investigator must have two reenactments performed in order to document the events surrounding the death.
 - D. No reenactment is required. A verbal description is adequate for a thorough investigation.
4. During the infant death scene reenactment, whom should the investigator ask to demonstrate the infant's found position?
 - A. The mother.
 - B. The placer.
 - C. The finder.
 - D. The father.
5. Which ONE of the following would be considered the MOST IMPORTANT question for the investigator to ask the finder?
 - A. When was the infant last fed?
 - B. Was the infant sleeping alone?
 - C. When was the infant placed down to sleep?
 - D. When was the infant found unresponsive?