

INQUESTS – AN INFORMATION PACK FOR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND ADVISORS

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**CAN CAMPAIGNING
HELP?**

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Campaigning can mean meeting with your MP/local councillor, talking to press/media or taking more direct action. INQUEST does not run campaigns, but supports families, and lobbies for change based on the issues arising from its casework.

Sometimes people find it helpful to get involved in campaigns related to the circumstances of their relative's death. Some people find it a comfort to help others who are going through the same experience. Others want to campaign for changes to prevent similar deaths occurring in the future. Some of the most powerful voices for change are those of the people most directly affected by a death. Other people want to move on from the inquest. It is important that you feel comfortable with whatever you decide to do. Not every person wants to be involved in a campaign. Sometimes it can be a comfort to know INQUEST or the other organisations listed will raise the issues arising from the death or the difficulties you encountered with the inquest system in their general campaigning work.

What should I do if I want to campaign about my relative's death?

There are many ways to campaign. It is always advisable to discuss this with your lawyer, particularly if you want to do anything before the inquest. You must be careful not to make allegations about the circumstances of the death that you do not know about. It is not advisable to make accusations about anyone concerned with the death before the inquest. It is better not to disclose personal information about your relative during a campaign.

Can I speak to the press before/during/after the inquest?

Yes but see the section on the press. For many families it can help to speak to the media

about the death but you must be aware that they will not always be sympathetic and/or interested in the death. Speaking to the media can still sometimes be the most important way for families to raise their concerns.

Can my MP help?

In some cases there may be issues arising from the death which are not addressed at the inquest because of its remit. It can help to contact your MP and ask them to raise the issues. Of course not every MP will be able or willing to help.

Dealing with the media

When there is a sudden and unnatural death there is often media interest of some sort. Their interest of course depends on the circumstances of the death and also on what else is in the news.

In many cases there will be interest from the local press immediately after the death. Sometimes families can feel hounded by journalists and it is advisable to get some advice before speaking to them. Others will not want anything reported. This is not possible, as an inquest is a public forum at which the press are as welcome as any member of the public. This can often be distressing because private details about the person who has died may be revealed during the inquest. Statements may be made by witnesses that are attempting to destroy the character of the deceased and these may be reported. That is why it is often a good thing to put out a press release before the inquest which includes details about the deceased which the family wants the public to know, and to have a prepared statement to read to the press at the end of the inquest.

INQUEST advises families to say very general things about the circumstances and the questions the death raises before the inquest. You may be convinced that something has been done that turns out to be untrue or you may say things in anger or hurt that you will later come to regret.

Sometimes the media can be very helpful

and will investigate and raise concerns about the circumstances of a death. It is often a good thing to work with organisations like INQUEST to try to get sympathetic press interest for coverage of the inquest. A word of caution though: for every family who loses someone in controversial circumstances it is the worst outrage that has probably ever happened to them. The media do not view things in the same way. Whilst sometimes they are interested in the death, often they will not cover it unless there is a new problem or a particularly dreadful circumstance. Also they will often cover the news of the inquest and not explore in a more considered way the issues that arise. You may meet sympathetic journalists who are unable to get a story past their editor.

Putting out a press release before the inquest is a good way to generate interest, and also telling the press that you will speak to them at the end of the inquest can help.