

# Child Death and Homicide Investigation

**Instructor: Dr. Bill Ralston**

Dr. William Ralston is a State Medical Examiner in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the State of Kentucky. Dr. Ralston is a member of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, and National Association of Medical Examiners.

Dr. Ralston has held faculty appointments at the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky and lectures throughout the United States to many local and regional law enforcement agencies.

## **Course Objectives:**

This two-day course is a comprehensive overview of the unique approach utilized in the investigation of injury and deaths involving children. Topics to be covered in depth include natural disease, accidental injuries, and child physical abuse.

The investigator will learn the common presentations and scene findings in cases in sudden natural deaths including infectious diseases and inherited conditions. Sudden Unexplained Death in Infancy will be covered in depth, with emphasis on important interview questions, scene investigations, and autopsy findings. The investigator will learn to differentiate common accidental patterns of injury from injuries inflicted by caregivers. The investigator will be introduced to common patterns of accidental and inflicted injuries unique to the pediatric age group including head injuries, abdominal injuries, and skeletal injuries. Other topics to be covered in depth include neonaticide (the killing of a newborn infant) – in this segment, unique perpetrator characteristics and investigative procedures will be emphasized. Findings in cases of stranger-abduction homicide will be presented. Factitious illness, also known as Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy will be explained and illustrated. Common natural diseases and conditions that may be mistaken for abuse will be illustrated. Common scene findings, victim age ranges and characteristics, and perpetrator characteristics and behaviors for the various age ranges and causes of death will be highlighted and compared. The information will be taught through visual presentation of cases, including scene findings, and autopsy findings.

## **At the conclusion of the course, the investigator will:**

- Know common causes of death in infants, toddlers, and older children
- Be able to differentiate common accidental injury patterns from inflicted injury patterns
- Recognize natural conditions that may be mistaken for abuse
- Be familiar with common victim and perpetrator characteristics in the most common causes of death from inflicted injury
- Recognize “recurring themes” and findings in neonaticide and factitious illness
- Identify scene investigative techniques unique to the pediatric age range
- Be familiar with victim and perpetrator characteristics in the most common causes of death in each unique age group
- Understand the complexity and specificity that pediatric death investigation requires

**This course is taught from medical examiner case material, and as such, is very graphic.** Professionals who may benefit from this in-depth intense study include law enforcement investigators, attorneys involved in criminal investigations involving children, social workers, pediatricians, emergency medical personnel, death investigators, and pathologists.

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## Day 1

8:00 a.m.–8:30 a.m.	Registration
8:30 a.m.–9:30 a.m.	Introduction to child death and forensic pathology
9:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m.	Normal childhood development
10:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Natural death
12:00 p.m.–1:00 p.m.	<b>Lunch (On Your Own)</b>
1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.	Injuries in children
3:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m.	Accidental deaths
4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.	Suicides

## Day 2

8:00 a.m.–9:00 a.m.	Neonaticide
9:00 a.m.–10:00 a.m.	Blunt force abdominal trauma
10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.	Blunt force head trauma
11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	MSBP
12:00 p.m.–1:00 p.m.	<b>Lunch (On Your Own)</b>
1:00 p.m.–2:00 p.m.	History
2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.	Scene Investigation
3:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m.	Outside Agencies
4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.	Case presentation/Courtroom preparation
5:00 p.m.	<b>Certificate Presentation</b>