

*ONONDAGA COUNTY  
Child Fatality  
Review Team*



*Together, Keeping Kids Safe*

Annual Report  
2021

# **Onondaga County Child Fatality Review Team**

## **Annual Report**

**2021**

### **Our Mission**

To conduct a comprehensive, multidisciplinary review of unexpected child deaths in Onondaga county:

- Better understand how and why children die
- Analyze the patterns of child deaths
- Use findings to take action to prevent other child deaths, illness and injury
- Keep children healthy, safe and protected

### **Introduction**

The Onondaga County Child Fatality Review Team (CFRT) reviews cases of Onondaga County children/adolescents 17 years of age and younger who have died unexpectedly, and have been referred to the Medical Examiner's office or were in the custody of the Onondaga County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFC). In 2021, we reviewed seven child deaths. The year of review may not be the year of death. Cases that have criminal charges or investigations pending cannot be reviewed until the criminal case has been disposed of.

The Manner of Death include Natural, Suicide, Accidental, Undetermined and Homicide.

Five of the seven deaths had a report filed with the NYS State Central Registry at the time of the death. One of the cases were already open to Children and Family Services (CPS or Foster Care) or preventive services.

The CFRT did not write any independent reports during 2021.

The CFRT, which is facilitated by the Coordinator, held eight meetings during the 2021 review year. Mandatory team members include Onondaga County or local agency representatives from:

- Child Protective Services/Children and Family Services
- County Law Department
- County Health Department
- County Mental Health Department\*
- District Attorney's Office
- Emergency Management Services
- Medical Examiner's Office
- NYS Police
- Office of Children and Family Services
- Onondaga County Sheriff's Department
- Pediatricians with Child Abuse Certification
- Syracuse Police Department
- Syracuse Fire Department EMS

Permissive Members (case specific meeting)

Crouse Hospital  
St. Joseph's Hospital  
Syracuse Community Health Center  
SUNY Golisano Children's Hospital  
The Perinatal Center  
McMahon/Ryan Child Advocacy Center

\*Mental Health – the team decided to have mental health at all meetings.

At each meeting, there is a review of new cases and possibly an update on a case previously reviewed. There is also a discussion of old/new business, and an update on future trainings.

## **Manner and Cause of Child/Adolescent Deaths**

### **Natural Causes**

One child, between the ages of birth and 18 years died of Natural causes.

- Anoxic Brain Injury

### **Accidental Deaths**

Two children, between the ages of birth and 5-years died of accidental causes.

- Drowning. Contributory : febrile viral infection and congenital cardiac anomaly
- Asphyxia due to smothering (unsafe sleep environment)

### **Suicide Deaths**

Two teens died by Suicide, both by Hanging

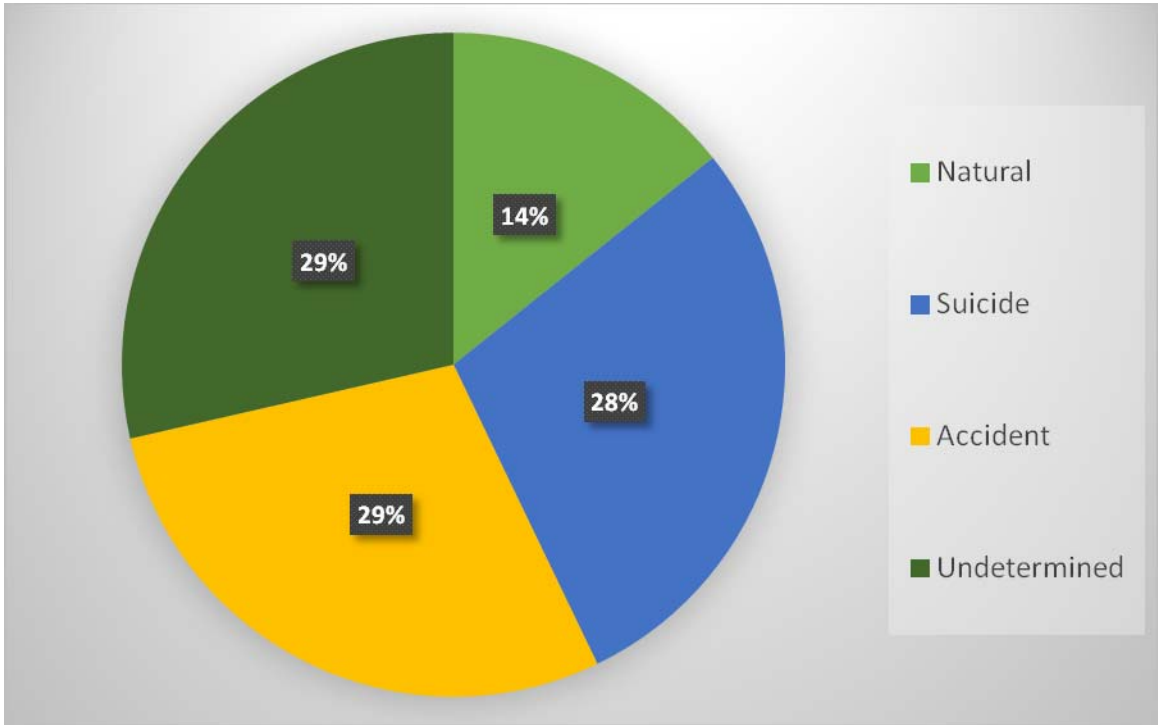
### **Undetermined Deaths**

Two infants between the ages of birth and 12-months death was:

- Sudden Unexpected Infant Death: Intrinsic and Extrinsic factors (co-sleeping contributory)
- Undetermined: Undetermined. Found in an unsafe sleep environment.

### **Homicide Deaths**

None



### **Summary of all deaths**

Natural deaths were 14% or 1

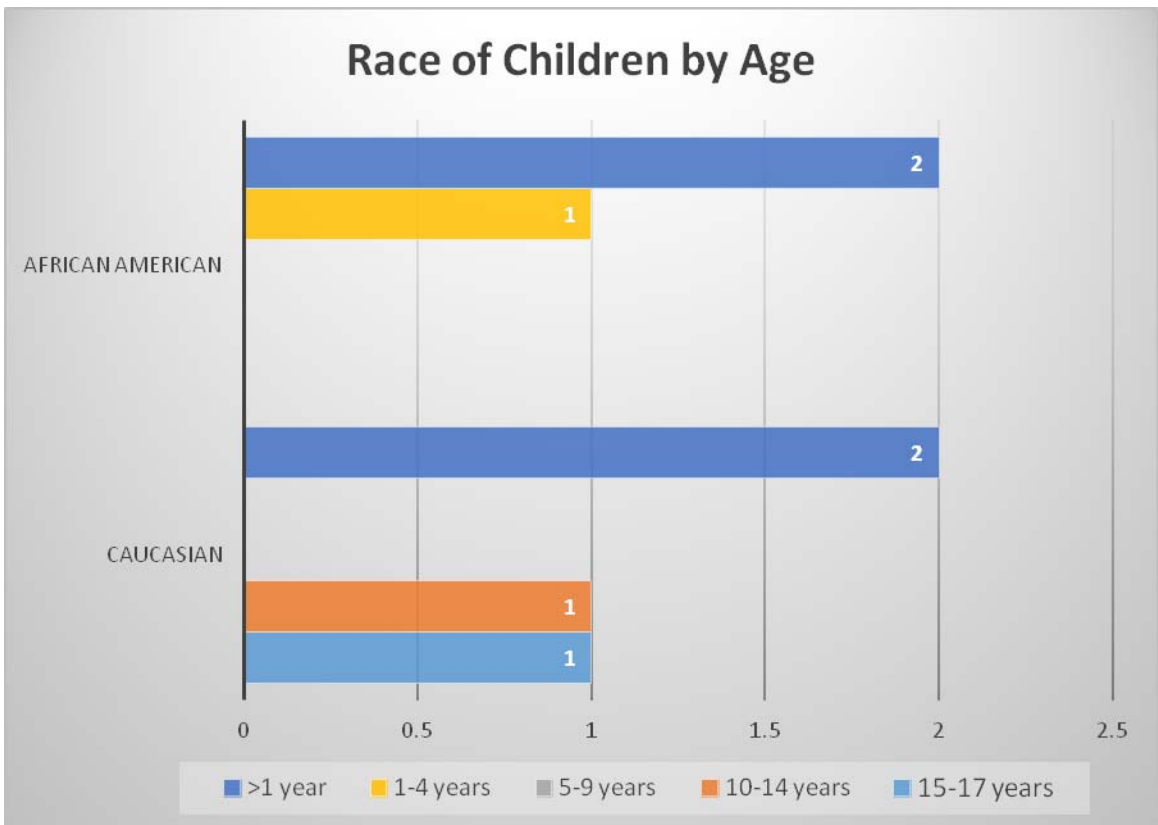
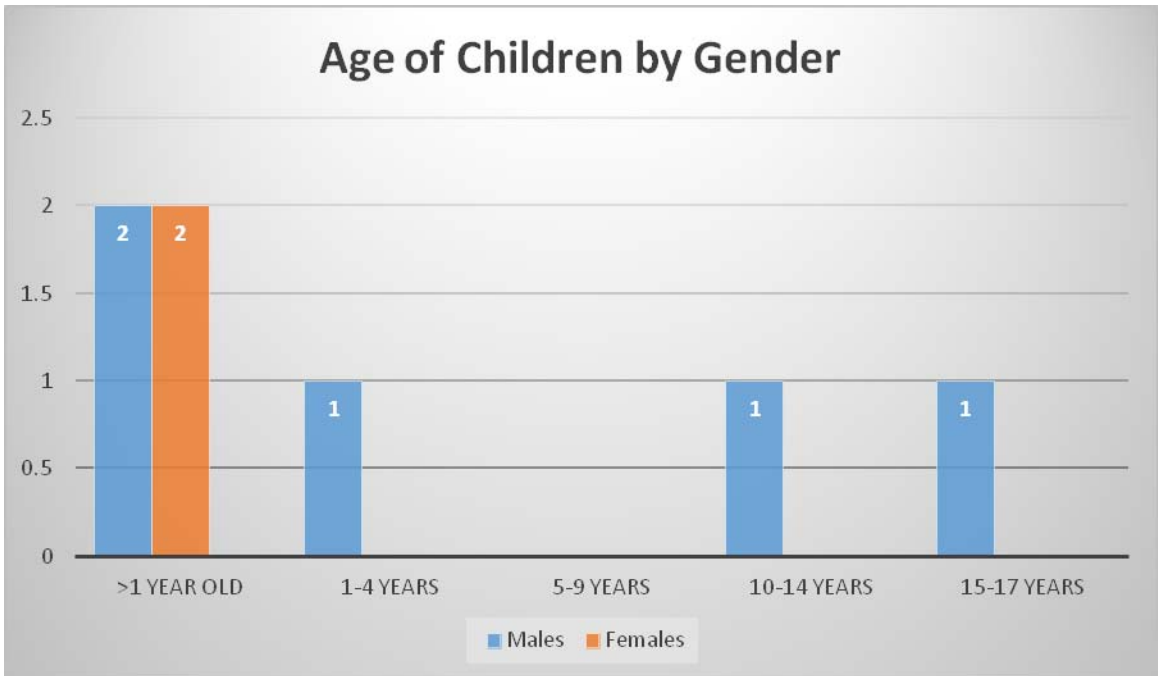
Suicide deaths were 28% or 2

Accidental deaths were 29% or 2

Undetermined deaths were 29% or 2.

Homicide deaths were 0%

Three of the deaths had an unsafe sleep environment as a factor.



## **Unsafe Infant Sleep Environment Deaths**

Unsafe sleep environment is still the leading cause or contributing factor in the deaths of infants reviewed by our team. As these are often preventable deaths, we focus much of our prevention efforts on educating the community about what a safe infant sleep looks like and the hidden dangers in an unsafe sleep environment

Infants (a child before their first birthday) dying either directly as a result of an unsafe sleep environment or the unsafe sleep environment is a contributing factor in the deaths of 59 infants since 2010 to 2021 in this county. Our reviews reveal that parents/caregivers have been given the information many times and most often have a safe sleep space available in their homes, but not being used for the infant.

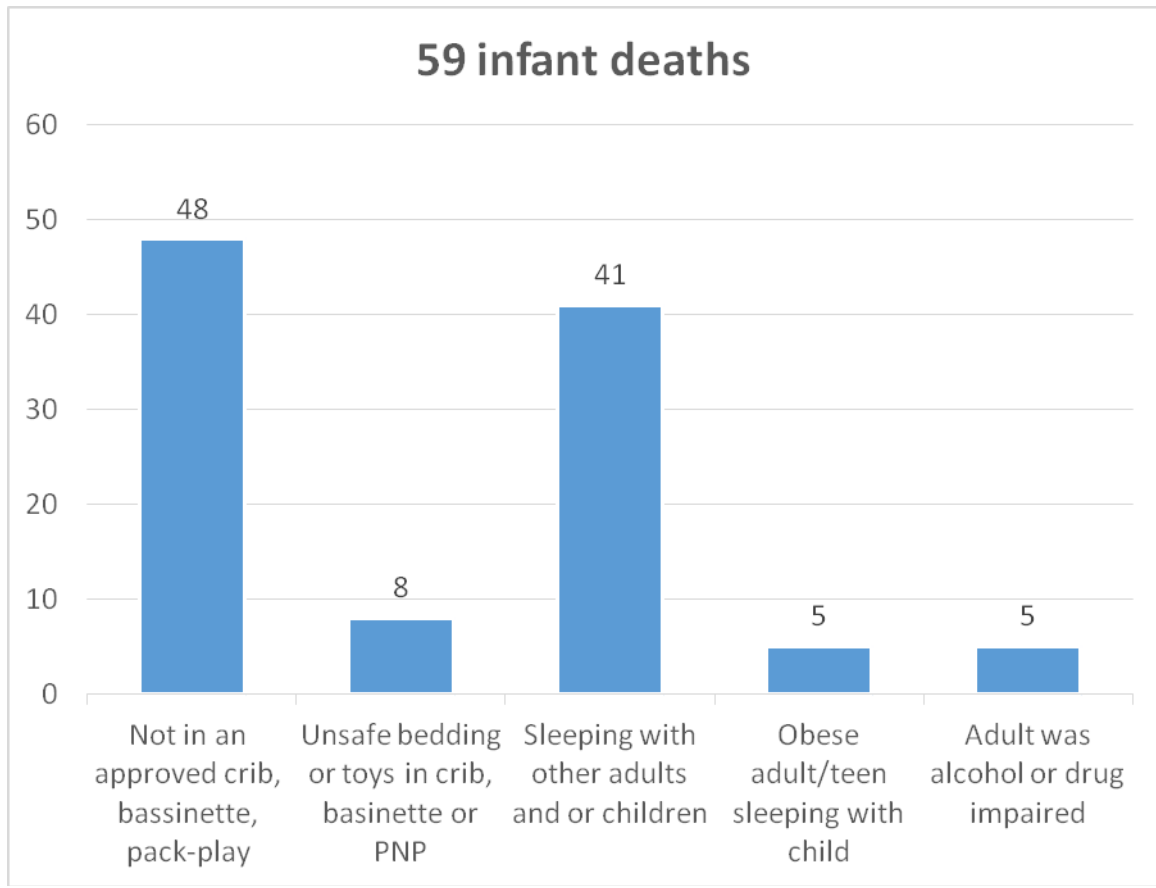
The American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines recommends:

- ✓ *all babies sleep on their back,*
- ✓ *on a flat, firm, separate sleep surface such as a bassinet, play yard or crib*
- ✓ *and to keep the baby's sleep space free of blankets, bumpers, toys or other objects*

These guidelines are for every sleep. Parents often start out putting the infant in their safe space and then take the infant into their bed to feed, which is fine, but they need to place the infant back into their sleep space once feeding is complete. Naps too should be in their own sleep space.

Below is a chart of the infants whose deaths we have reviewed in the last 12 years. Unfortunately, this is not unique to our county but is a problem across the country.

## Factors Involved in Sleep Related Deaths from 2010 thru 2021 Onondaga County





## **Team Activities**

Due to the pandemic, most of our community activities were put on hold, meetings and community education classes were done via Zoom where allowed.

In an effort to promote health, wellness and safety to the children of our county, the following prevention measures were undertaken by members of our team:

- **Child Fatality Review Team Web-site:**

The Onondaga County Child Fatality Review Team website has resources for parents/caregivers and professionals. Prevention information on topics such as Bullying, Firearm Safety, Water Safety and Safe Infant Sleep are just a few. Links will take you directly to the sites. Bereavement resources are also included.

Site visits for the 2021 review year:

26,780 visits with 41,804 pages viewed

<http://www.onondagachildfatalityreview.com/>

- **Suicide Prevention:**

- CFRT is an active partner in with the *Onondaga County Suicide Prevention Coalition*. Monthly meetings were virtual this year.
- The CFRT's *Team Hope* walked and raised money for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention on October 9th.

The Onondaga Suicide Fatality Review Team virtually reviewed Onondaga County deaths (both adults and youth) and looked at trends, risk factors and prevention measures. The CFRT has two members on this team.

- **Safe Kids Upstate:** Safe Kids Upstate is a partner with the Hospital Safe Sleep team.
- **The Upstate Golisano Children' Hospital Safe Sleep team:** A virtual meeting was held to update and plan for the hospital recertification for 2022
- **NYS Children's Justice Task Force:**
  - The Coordinator is a representative of the NYS Child Fatality Review teams.

- **Statewide Child Fatality Review team**
  - A new Statewide CFRT was established this year. The CFRT Coordinator and the team Child Abuse Pediatrician are members of this team.
  
- **Safe Sleep Syracuse- Just for Men Facebook page:**

Information on safe sleep tips as well as other infant safety measures are posted on average of twice a month. 23 posts reached 4,968 individuals.
  
- **Justice Center Infant Safe Sleep Education for female inmates: no activity this year.**
  
- **High Schools Health & Child Development Classes:**

Safe Infant Sleep Education has been accepted in four of our five Syracuse City high schools and Liverpool and Cicero North Syracuse High School. Due to COVID, many scheduled presentations were cancelled.

  - 76 Liverpool High School students in Child Development classes received in person education. They also were quizzed and graded on the topic.
  
- **Community Collaborations and safe sleep education:**

In spite of COVID, we were able to connect with some community agencies around education for their staff or clients virtually. We were also a resource for them for the distribution of pack-n-plays for families in need.

  - Family Planning of Syracuse – 6 staff educated
  - Help Me Grow -
  - Onondaga County ACCESS School Liaison Program – 19 staff educated
  - Onondaga County CDFS Foster/Kinship Care Program – 103 new F/K parents educated
  - Huntington Family Center Parenting Program – 16 parents educated
  - PEACE, Inc. Early Head Start/Head Start
  - New Hope Family Services

- The Mary Nelson Youth Center/Back to School Event (Tabling for SS and Grief)
  - OCM BOCES Adult Health Fair
- LeMoyne College Student Marketing Group gave us a grant and staff to develop an Instagram TikTok and Twitter social media accounts for safe infant sleep messages. Still developing materials
  - The Syracuse Fire Department EMS Unit now carries safe sleep education materials with them in their rigs for distribution to the families they respond to if appropriate.
  - The Golisano Children's Hospital Pediatric Emergency Department has agreed to have a safe sleep message/image included in their discharge paperwork for all families with a child under 1 who is seen at their facility
  - PEACE, Inc. has agreed to add safe sleep literature to their intake packets
  - The Mary Nelson (Community Center) has agreed to have literature and education at their Center once it is open again. We had a tabling event at their Back to School event
  - After a Morbidity and Mortality review at Pediatric Ground Rounds at the Golisano Children's Hospital, where approximately 65 pediatricians attended, some changes were recommended concerning the safe sleep message to parents.
  - The Onondaga County OB Project was one of those recommendations. The CFRT sent laminated flyers of the NIH one page Safe Sleep message along with information about the serious issue of unsafe sleep deaths in our community to 20 practices with the offer of more literature. Two practices called back within days of receiving them and asked for more literature that they could include for their patient's intake packets.

- **Pack and Play Crib Distribution/Community Displays:**

Thanks to the NYS Office of Children and Family Services PNPs are available to our team. We have made partner agencies aware that we have PNPs available for their clients when needed. We know from experience that many families who have lost an infant in an unsafe sleep environment have a safe sleep space in their home, but is not being used for infant sleep. The person delivering the PNP is responsible to set up the crib with a fitted sheet (and a spare) and provide the parent/caregiver with education and literature around safe sleep and the dangers of an unsafe sleep environment.

During the shutdown in our county, collaboration between the CFRT, the County Health Department, County CPS, County Probation and REACH CNY made sure that service providers, etc. knew how to make pack-n-plays available to members of our community who needed them.

- The McMahon Ryan CAC has a safe sleep/pack and play display in their lobby with literature for parents. People do take information that is replenished regularly.
- The Syracuse Community Health Center has a safe sleep/pack and play display in their Pediatric Waiting Room along with literature. Dr. Chionuma who is the Chief of Service and a member of the CFRT gives out Charlie's Kids book "Safe and Snug" to all parents with an infant. The CFRT provides the books to her.
- Pack-n-plays were delivered, set up and education provided to the families by the CFRT Coordinator, the MDT/CPS caseworker and the CAC Trafficking Advocate (8 total)

- **Safe Sleep Ambassadors**

The McMahon Ryan Child Advocacy Center's Outreach Team and Family Advocates are Safe Sleep Ambassadors through the Cribs for Kids certification program. The Outreach Team always include safe infant sleep education in their community presentations and at tabling events.

**Advertising/Unsafe Sleep Messaging:**

Our team members and community members are very aware of the damage that an unsafe sleep message in the media or advertising can do by confusing parents on what is actually safe.

We try to respond to those issues and make a request for a change or the messages removed with an explanation of why it is so important. This year we reached out to Abbott Industries about a TV Ad/video they produced entitled '*Dignity, Not Effortless Nor Easy*' that showed a mother laying down to sleep on the couch with her infant. They removed the image from one of their videos but the one that is on YouTube cannot be changed and they say not deleted. They also kept it in one video but now the baby is facing out from the mother's chest not face down. They are at least now aware of the issue.

We contacted the Consumer Product Safety Commission regarding two items that were questionable. They were not aware of the items and did investigate. They could not state that the items were unsafe but were pleased that we paying attention to these issues.

#### **Media Exposure:**

- *Many Incidents of SUID can be prevented*; article by team member Kathleen Dermady was published in the November issue of “In Good Health”. There was no room in the October issue for SIDS awareness month and was published in the November issue.
- [\*Safe sleep for babies: 2 pediatricians explain how / HealthLink On Air / SUNY Upstate Medical University – radio interview\*](#)

#### **Collaborative Safety**

##### **Safety Science applied to Child Welfare**

[www.Casey.org/safety-science-child-welfare/](http://www.Casey.org/safety-science-child-welfare/)

Onondaga County CFRT is one of two counties in NYS with a CFRT that was asked to pilot Safety Science in our reviews.

Using the Safety Science method of review will enhance the team’s ability to learn other ways of looking at prevention and systemic changes that, will hopefully, create measures that will support Child Welfare staff in their jobs and reduce child fatalities.

#### **Recommendations:**

*Due to the pandemic, the plans for the year 2021 had to be curtailed in some instances until it was safe to move forward.*

- The **Medicaid Doula Project** may be one way that we can reach expecting moms/dads and educate them on safe infant sleep that will influence a change in their behaviors. Doulas develop relationships with their clients well before the infant is born, and they stay involved with them through and after the infant’s birth. This project is funded in only two NYS counties and would need the approval of the County Executive of each county to fund this program through Medicaid. The majority of the moms in our county who have lost an infant to an unsafe sleep death are on Medicaid. Increasing this funding to pay for the cost of the

training and provide it through Medicaid could increase the availability of a Doula to more pregnant women. The one-on-one education could really help women and men understand the risks of death with unsafe sleep practices and prevent future fatalities.

[https://www.health.ny.gov/health\\_care/medicaid/redesign/doulapilot/pilot.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/redesign/doulapilot/pilot.htm)

- Continue a safe sleep campaign with community agencies and medical providers to try to decrease the number of infant deaths due to co-sleeping and/or unsafe sleeping environments.
- We made a suggestion to the NYS Office of Children and Family Services that if parents are educated on the safety issue and have a safe sleep space (pack and play, crib, bassinet) and continue to place their infant in an unsafe sleeping environment, that a report could be called into the State Central Registry for Inadequate Guardianship of the infant. It is under consideration.
- Increase physical displays of a safe sleep environment in our community
- Increase our social media messaging to reach a younger and larger audience.
- Continue working with the Suicide Prevention Coalitions to get messaging out to youth especially African American males whose suicide rates have risen significantly in the last few years.

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June 9, 2022