

**PURPOSE:** To assist all officers in becoming familiar with procedures to be used to provide next-of-kin and other family members with adequate information and support when notifying them of the death or serious injury of a family member.

**POLICY:** Death or serious injury notification will be accomplished in a manner consistent with professionally accepted crisis intervention techniques.

**PROCEDURES:**

I. GATHERING OF INFORMATION AND PREPARING FOR NOTIFICATION ASSIGNMENT

- A. All death and serious injury notifications made by this Department will be made in person, with the exception of a serious injury notification where the delay in notification might prevent the family from arriving at the hospital before the injured person's death.
  - 1. Where possible, the Department Chaplain(s) shall assist the officer assigned to a death or serious injury notification.
  - 2. Officers shall be prepared to spend as much time as necessary with survivors to provide assistance.
  - 3. Prior to contacting next-of-kin, notification officers shall gather and become familiar with essential details concerning the deceased or seriously injured person, to include full name, age, race and home address. The notification officers shall be well informed as to the details of the death or serious injury, location of the body/personal effects and any other pertinent information.
- B. Next-of-Kin Notification:
  - 1. Notification officers shall establish the identity of the next-of-kin of the deceased or seriously injured person for purposes of notification.
  - 2. The order of priority for notification will be the spouse, followed by parents, brothers and/or sisters, then any children. Where time permits parents should be notified after notification of spouse. Such order should be followed except in circumstances such as:
    - a. Where substantial delays would be required to make contact with next-of-kin should other family members be contacted; and
    - b. Notification officers should contact the Shift Supervisor for guidance when in doubt concerning next-of-kin or any delay/problems in notification.
  - 3. When another Agency must be contacted to notify the next-of-kin, officers should:
    - a. Request that the notification be made in person, and
    - b. Request immediate verification when notification has been accomplished.
- C. Notification officers should gather available information concerning the survivors that may aid in notification. This information would include whether survivors are elderly, disabled, visually or hearing impaired, have medical problems or may not speak English. If possible, obtain the names of the survivor's closest relative, friend, family doctor, and clergy. Notification officers should request the assistance of a local minister, preferably the survivor's minister, where feasible.
- D. Officers will not use the name of the deceased or seriously injured person over the radio and will not release name to news media until assured that next-of-kin notification has been made.

- E. Personal effects of the deceased will not be delivered to survivors at the time of death notification.

## II. MAKING NOTIFICATION

- A. Upon arrival at the residence or place of business, the notification officers will:
  - 1. Check the accuracy of the location;
  - 2. Request to speak to the next-of-kin;
  - 3. Identify themselves by name and Department;
  - 4. Verify the relationship of the next-of-kin to the deceased or seriously injured person; and
  - 5. Ask permission to enter the residence or in the case of a business or other location move to a place of privacy.
- B. Every reasonable effort shall be made to make the death or serious injury notification in the privacy of the next-of-kin's home or in another location away from public scrutiny.
- C. Prior to making notification, officers should, where possible, bring members of the family together if they are immediately available.
- D. Notification officers should address the next-of-kin in a straight-forward manner and use easy to understand language to briefly explain the circumstances of the incident and the fact that the individual is seriously injured or dead.
  - 1. Officers should not use the words such as "passed on" or "no longer with us" in order to avoid using the term "dead" as those words may create confusion or false hope.
  - 2. Officers should avoid graphic aspects of the incident and use of law enforcement jargon.
  - 3. Officers should refer to the deceased or seriously injured person using his first name or in terms reflecting the deceased's or seriously injured person's relationship to the next-of-kin (i.e. husband, wife, son, daughter, etc.).
- E. Officers should be prepared for unexpected responses from survivors to include hysteria and possible verbal or physical attack.
- F. Officers should provide survivors with sufficient time to regain composure before proceeding. Avoid attempts in the interim to provide comfort by using phrases as "I know how you feel" or "I know how hard this is for you."

## III. PROVIDING ASSISTANCE AND REFERRAL

- A. Notification officers shall not leave upon completion of the notification until reasonable assured that the next-of-kin has adequate personal control and/or family or close friend(s) readily available to provide support. In gauging the need for assistance, notification officers shall also consider the following:
  - 1. The emotional reaction and the physical condition of the next-of-kin;
  - 2. The availability of other adults in the home;
  - 3. Responsibility for infants or small children;
  - 4. Home environment (i.e., evidence of excessive alcohol or drug use, lack of means of financial support, shortage of food, problem with shelter, etc.); and
  - 5. Availability of a support system (i.e. including friends, family, close neighbors, access to clergy, means of transportation, etc.).
- B. Officers should provide any additional information of a fatal incident requested by survivors. While graphic details may not be necessary, officers should provide information if asked specifically concerning the cause of death, condition of the body or other details of the fatality.
- C. Officers should remain alert to the possible need for medical assistance. When officers are aware of serious medical conditions in advance of notification, they should place a local medical response unit on alert.
- D. Officers should be aware of confusion on the part of survivors. Speak slowly and deliberately,

and write down any pertinent information that the survivor may need. This includes such matters as the following:

1. Disposition of the body;
  2. Location of personal effects;
  3. Identification requirements/procedures; and
  4. Notification officers' names, Department and telephone numbers.
- E. Notification officers should not leave a lone survivor unattended until all reasonable efforts have been made to obtain first-hand support from the survivor's family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, family clergy or counselors.
- F. Notification officers should conduct a follow-up within twenty-four (24) hours with any survivor when there is a concern for the survivor's well being.



Brett C. Hibbs  
Chief of Police