**SAMPLE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**Death Notifications**

NOTE: This document is for internal use only. It does not establish a legal duty or standard of care for civil liability or enlarge an employee’s civil or criminal liability in any way. A violation of this policy may only form the basis for internal discipline by this agency and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

1. **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for death notifications to family members and death notifications to law enforcement family members.

1. **POLICY**

This department requires that all officers become familiar with the procedures set forth herein to provide notification and related information regarding the death of a family member to survivors.

1. **PROCEDURE**
2. Death Notification to Family Members
   * 1. Notification to the family member(s) of the deceased person shall be made in person by two (2) assigned officers. If the family member(s) live in another jurisdiction, a law enforcement official from that jurisdiction shall be requested to make the notification in person and provide timely verification when the notification has been completed.
     2. The name of the deceased shall not be released to the media or other outside sources until the immediate family has been notified. If the media has already obtained information related to the death, they should be asked to withhold the information until after the notifications have been completed.
     3. Prior to notifying a family member(s) of a deceased person, assigned officers should:
3. Ensure that the deceased has been positively identified.
4. Gather and familiarize themselves with essential details concerning the deceased, to include full name, age, race and home address, as well as details of the death, location of the body and personal effects, and other pertinent information.
5. Identify family members of the deceased for purposes of notification, specifically the closest relative starting with a spouse and followed by parents, siblings, and then children.
6. In the event a request for a death notification is received from another jurisdiction, the assigned officers delivering the notification to local family members may need to contact the requesting agency to obtain sufficient information as outlined above.
7. Officers should obtain contact information of any agencies, businesses, and/or individuals that family members may need to contact. **EXAMPLE:** If the Dallas, Texas Police Department is investigating a death, obtain the name and phone number of the investigator.
8. Attempt to find out basic information about the survivors such as medical information, heart disease, hypertension, etc. Be aware of and prepared for severe physical reactions.
9. Assigned officers should also request the assistance of the department chaplain, other clergy member, or crisis intervention specialist, when feasible.
10. Upon arrival at the family member’s home the officer shall:
11. Introduce themselves and if in plain clothes, provide appropriate identification.
12. Ask to speak to a parent or adult if child answers the door. Confirm the adult is a close relative of the deceased and attempt to determine if this is the appropriate relative to speak with. If both husband and wife are at home, request that both are in the room prior to giving the notification.
13. Once inside, look for dangerous objects such as scissors, knives, etc., and if present attempt to move to a safe area of the room before giving the notification.
14. Tell the family member(s) simply and directly “I have some very bad news for you.” (**EXAMPLE:** “[Name of Deceased] has been killed in an automobile accident.”) Do not build up to the idea of death. Do not let anxiety grow. Do not use words like passed away or expired. Such words may confuse the message. Leave no room for doubt or false hope.
15. Be prepared for a variety of responses by family member(s) such as hysteria, anger, physical violence, fainting, etc. If needed, notify EMS.
16. Answer any questions tactfully, but directly. If you don’t know the answer to a question, tell them so; but try to have a name and phone number of someone that can give them the answer, i.e. contact names and phone numbers for the investigating law enforcement agency, coroner, hospital and/or funeral home.
17. Offer to help with the immediate needs of the family member(s) until such time that other family or friends arrive.
18. Offer to help the family member(s) contact other family, friends, or to contact clergy if requested.
19. Stay until someone arrives to be with the family member(s). If for some reason you are unable to locate anyone to stay with a lone family member, try to get a neighbor to stay with them, but never leave a family member alone if at all possible.
20. Show concern for the family member(s). Try to assess their feelings and react as positively as possible.
21. Before leaving, officers should provide the family members with their names and phone numbers and advise them to contact them for further assistance.

3. Unless no other alternatives exist, officers shall not:

1. Make notification by telephone.
2. Make notification alone. Two officers should deliver the notification. While one officer gives the message, the other officer can watch for responses and possible crisis reactions.
3. Do not take any personnel items of the victim to the residence for the death notification. This will only add emotional fuel to the tragedy. Personal items can be retrieved and returned at a later time.
4. Notification to Family of Law Enforcement Officer
5. In the event a family must be notified of the death of a law enforcement officer, the following protocol will be adhered to:
   * + 1. Notification to the family member(s) of the deceased law enforcement officer shall be made in person by the Chief of Police and Assistant Chief, or in their absence, the next two highest-ranking police officials.
       2. Obtain as much information on the death as possible, and follow the general guidelines outlined above.
       3. If the officer is not deceased, but in serious or critical condition, the on-duty supervisor will provide immediate transportation of the family to the hospital.
6. Upon death of an officer:
7. An officer will be assigned to the family and will remain available for their needs until after the funeral and for a period of time afterward as designated by the Chief of Police.
8. This department will offer to assist the family with making funeral arrangements, filing of insurance and benefits, or similar tasks.
9. The assigned officer will visit the family periodically for a period of time as designated by the Chief.
10. All members of the department shall wear black mourning bands across their badge as a symbol of mourning for a period of seven (7) days.

APPROVED: CHIEF OF POLICE DATE

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS ORDER

SIGNATURE OF OFFICER DATE

***DISCLAIMER***

***NOTE****: These documents are being provided to you from the AMIC/MWCF Loss Control Division and are not intended to be legal advice. They do not identify all the issues surrounding a particular topic. Laws and “Best Practices” change and policies must be continually reviewed and updated as needed. Public agencies are encouraged to review their procedures with an expert or an attorney who is knowledgeable about the topic. Reliance on this information is at the sole risk of the user.*