

**Procedure  
3.15**

**EFFECTIVE  
DATE  
7-15-99**

**Eugene  
Police Department**



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## **Death Notification**

### **3.15.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

It is the purpose of this policy to provide you with guidelines for making death notifications so as to provide survivors with sufficient useful information and support in a manner consistent with professionally accepted crisis intervention techniques. In some cases, it may be appropriate for CAHOOTS to make, or assist with, a death notification.

#### **PART I - Responsibilities and Procedures for All Personnel**

- A. Information gathering and preparation
- B. Making notification
- C. Providing assistance and referral

### **3.15.2 RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES FOR ALL PERSONNEL**

#### **A. Information gathering and preparation**

1. Deliver the death notification in person, unless the exigency of the circumstances demands a telephonic notification.
2. Gather and familiarize yourself with essential details:
  - full name, age, race, home address of the deceased
  - details of the death
  - location of the body and personal effects
3. Identify the next of kin (closest relative) for purposes of notification, in this order:
  - spouse or significant other
  - parents
  - brother or sister
  - children

4. Only where substantial delays would be required to make notification of the next of kin should you contact other relatives instead.
5. If another agency must be contacted to notify the next of kin, request that:
  - a. the notification be made in person, and
  - b. the agency notify us as soon as the notification has been made.
6. Attempt to gather relevant information about survivors (e.g., medical conditions, vision/hearing impairment, non-English speaking.)

**B. Making Notification**

1. Assign two officers (preferably a male/female team) when possible.
2. Do not deliver personal effects to survivors at the time of the notification.
3. Upon arrival at the location:
  - a. verify the accuracy of the location;
  - b. request to speak to the immediate survivor;
  - c. identify yourself by name and department;
  - d. verify the relationship of the survivor to the deceased; and
  - e. ask permission to enter the residence or (in the case of a business or other location) move to a place of privacy.
4. Where possible, prior to making the notification, bring other family members together who may be at the location.
5. Try to prepare the person by saying something like: "I have some extremely upsetting news to share with you. Would you like to sit down?" Allow the person to have some control in the situation.
6. Address the survivor(s) in a straightforward manner, and use easy-to-understand language to briefly explain the circumstances of the incident and the fact that the person is dead.
  - a. Avoid using euphemisms such as "passed on" or "no longer with us", as these may create confusion or false hope.
  - b. Avoid graphic aspects of the incident, and avoid police jargon.
  - c. Refer to the deceased by his/her first name or terms reflecting the deceased's relationship to the person you are talking to (e.g., son, daughter).

- d. You may need to repeat some of the information more than once, as it is normal for people to shut out some of the information.
7. Be prepared for any of a wide variety of responses, including hysteria, numbness, and possible verbal or physical attack.
8. Provide survivors with sufficient time to regain composure before proceeding. Allow silence, if that is what occurs. Avoid attempts in the interim to provide comfort with simple platitudes or trite phrases (e.g., "I know how you feel"). Actively listen to what the person does say, and you may want to paraphrase it back to the person.

**C. Providing assistance and referral**

1. Take whatever time is reasonably needed. Do not leave until you are reasonably assured that the survivor has adequate personal control and/or support people readily available. Consider:
  - emotional reaction and physical condition of the survivor
  - availability (and condition) of other adults in the home
  - responsibility for infants or small children
  - home environment (e.g. Indications of excessive alcohol/drug use, lack of means of financial support)
  - availability of a support system.
2. Ask the person if there is something you can do right away, such as making a phone call or getting him/her a glass of water.
3. Provide any additional information requested by the survivors, such as cause of death, condition of the body, or other details (omitting unnecessary graphic details.)
4. Be alert to the possible need for medical assistance.
5. Be aware of confusion on the part of survivors. Write down any pertinent information the survivor might need, such as:
  - Disposition of the body
  - Location of personal effects
  - Identification requirements/procedures, and
  - Your name(s), agency, and telephone number.
6. Do not leave a lone survivor unattended until you have made all reasonable efforts to get one or more support persons to the location. Victim's Assistance can be contacted on a 25-hour basis to help if other resources

are unavailable.