


<p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRATFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT</b></p> 	Type of Directive: <b>Policy and Procedure</b>	Updated: <b>06-19-2020</b>
	Title: <b>Death Notification</b>	No. <b>10.4</b>
	Issuing Authority: <b>Chief Joseph McNeil</b>	Issued: <b>03-06-2018</b>
	Reference:	

**PURPOSE:**

It is the purpose of this policy to provide officers with procedures to be followed for notifying next of kin of the death of a family member.

**POLICY:**

It shall be the policy of the Stratford Police Department that all officers become familiar with concepts and procedures set forth in this policy.

**DEFINITIONS:**

Next of Kin - For purposes of this policy the closest relative of the deceased (spouse, parents, brothers or sisters, and children.)

**PROCEDURE:**

**Information Gathering and Preparation**

All death notifications that are the responsibility of the Stratford Police Department shall be delivered in person unless the exigency of circumstances demands telephonic notification. Officers shall be prepared to and shall be provided adequate discretion to spend the necessary time with survivors to provide assistance as authorized by this policy.

Prior to contacting next of kin, notifying officers shall 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/personal effects and other pertinent information. Officers shall identify the next of kin of the deceased for purposes of notification. Particular effort should be made to locate the closest relative starting with a spouse and followed by parents, brothers, or sisters, then children. Only when substantial delays would be required to make contact with next of kin should other relatives be contacted. Officers will contact a supervisor for guidance when in doubt concerning next of kin or delays in notification.

Where another agency must be contacted to notify the next of kin, officers should request that the notification be made in person, and request immediate verification when notification has been

accomplished. Wherever possible, officers should gather available information concerning the survivors that may aid in the notification. This includes but is not limited to 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 friend, relative, family doctor and clergyman.

Officers shall ensure that they have on hand a list of referral agencies that may be helpful and should leave this with survivors.

Officers should, whenever reasonably possible, avoid using the name of the deceased over the radio prior to notification of immediate surviving relatives.

Where possible, two officers (preferably a male and female team) should be assigned to a death notification. Officers should request the assistance of the agency Chaplain or local crisis intervention specialist where feasible.

Personal effects of the deceased shall not be delivered to the survivors at the time of death notification.

### **Making Notification**

Upon arrival at the residence or place of business, officers shall do the following:

- Check the accuracy of the location
- Request to speak to the immediate survivor
- Identify themselves by name, rank and department affiliation
- Verify the relationship of the survivor to the deceased
- Ask permission to enter the residence or in the case of a business or other location move to a place of privacy

Every reasonable effort shall be made to make the death notification in the privacy of the survivor's home or in another location away from public scrutiny. Prior to making notification, officers should, where possible, bring members of the family together who may be in the house or otherwise on hand. Officers should 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 individual is dead.

Officers should not use euphemisms such as "passed on" or "no longer with us" in order to avoid using the term "dead" as these may create confusion or false hope. Officers should avoid graphic aspects of the incident and the use of police jargon. Officers should refer to the deceased using his/her first name or terms reflecting the deceased's relationship to the survivor (i.e. son, daughter, etc.)

Officers should be prepared for unexpected responses from survivors to include hysteria and possible verbal or physical attack. Officer should provide survivors with sufficient time to regain composure before proceeding.

## **Providing Assistance and Referral**

Officers shall not leave upon completion of the notification until reasonably assured that the survivor has adequate personal control and/or family or close friend(s) readily available to provide support . In gauging their need for assistance, officers shall also consider the following:

- The emotional reaction and physical condition of the survivor
- The availability of other adults in the home
- Responsibility for infants or small children
- Home environment (i.e. evidence of excessive alcohol use or drug use, lack of means of financial support, shortage of food, problem with shelter, etc.)
- Availability of a support system (i.e. friend, family, close neighbors, access to clergy, means of transportation, etc.)

Officers should provide any additional information on the 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. 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. Officers should be aware of confusion on the part of survivors; speak slowly and deliberately; and write down any pertinent information that the survivors may need. This includes such matters as the following:

- Disposition of the body
- Location of personal effects
- Identification requirements/procedures
- Notifying officers' names, agency, and telephone number

Officers should assess the physical and emotional well being of the survivor before departing. Officers should be reasonably assured that survivors can take care of themselves and those for whom they may be responsible.

In addition to concerns noted above officers should be able to answer "yes" to the following types of questions:

- Is the survivor thinking clearly?
- Does the individual seem to be aware of your presence?
- Does the individual have some grasp of place and time?
- Does the individual demonstrate a progressive ability to express himself/herself, begin to demonstrate some grasp of the reality of the death?

- Does the survivor have reasonable control over his/her emotions?
- Does the individual display shock (no apparent emotion), furious hostility, or the desire to commit suicide?
- Can the survivor cope physically?
- Has the individual fainted, displayed debilitating weakness or emotional collapse, and does the survivor have an adequate support system that can be relied on?

Officers should not leave a lone survivor unattended until all reasonable efforts have been made to garner first hand support from the survivor's family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, family clergy, crisis counselors or other community social service agency. Notifying officers should conduct a follow up within 24 hours with any survivor when there is concern for the survivor's well being.

Officers will notify the Desk Sergeant/Patrol Sergeant of all progress of notification.

Desk/Patrol Sergeant will notify Shift Commander of progress reported by officers on all notifications.

### **Dealing with Property**

- Property in the possession of a deceased at the time of death should not be turned over to family or household members at the time of the notification. An agency property report should be completed and all property should be accounted for and entered into storage at the law enforcement unit. Arrangements should be made for the next-of-kin to obtain the property in a dignified manner carefully accounting for all property passing through the care of the police department.
- Officers should inquire about the need to secure any property of the deceased in the absence of a family member taking responsibility. For example, the person notified may not be able to also secure a deceased's residence and related property. All reasonable efforts must be made to arrange for appropriate security of such property.
- If any property of a deceased, or of a person seriously ill or injured, is to be brought to any family or household member, or secured from them for safe keeping, the use of any "garbage bags" or similar containers is to be avoided. Property to be returned should be folded (e.g., clothing) or otherwise appropriately presented. A list of what is to be turned over to family should be given and discussed prior to its presentation since it may include items that are damaged, stained, ripped, or those that have been cut off a person.