


**Department of Public Safety**  
**Police Division**  
**Policies and Procedures**

<u>Title</u>  <b>Death, Serious Injury and Serious Illness                  Notifications</b>	<u>SOP Number</u>  <b>13.3.400</b>
<b>Approval Signature</b> 	
<b>James L Whalen</b>	
<b>Reviewed/Revised by</b>	<b>Pages</b> <b>5</b>
<b>Last Revision Date</b>  <b>May 18, 2021</b>	<b>Effective Date</b>  <b>April 18, 2019</b>

## ***Death, Serious Injury and Serious Illness Notifications***

- I. **Purpose:** It is the purpose of this policy to provide University of Cincinnati Police Division (UCPD) officers with guidelines for notifying next of kin of the death, serious injury or illness of a family member when requested.
- II. **Policy:** UCPD requires that all officers become familiar with the concepts and procedures set forth in this policy so as to provide surviving family members with sufficient useful information and support in a manner consistent with professionally accepted crisis intervention techniques.

### **III. Definitions:**

**Next of Kin.** For purposes of this policy, the closest relative of the deceased, injured or ill—for example, spouse, parents, siblings, significant others, and children.

**Serious Injury or Illness:** Any injury or illness requiring admission into a medical facility. Injuries and illness not included are those requiring treatment and release from a medical facility.

### **IV. Procedure:**

- A. UCPD will assist with a death, serious injury or illness notification when requested when related to a UC student, faculty, staff or current visitor.
- B. Information Gathering and Preparation
  1. Patrol supervisors should contact the Field Operations Commander for guidance on who will make the next of kin notification.
  2. UCPD will generally make the notification for next of kin in the tristate area, however that decision will be made by the Field Operations Commander.
  3. All death notifications that are the responsibility of UCPD shall be delivered in person except, in rare circumstances, when exigency or other factors dictate notification by telephone. The reason for any telephonic notifications shall be explained in the case file or incident report.
  4. When the death occurs in the hospital and the next of kin or other family members are already present, it is the responsibility of the attending physician or other hospital designee to deliver the death notification. Officers should be available to provide basic information regarding the circumstances surrounding the death
  5. Prior to contacting next of kin, notifying officers shall;
    - a. 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, injury or illness, location of the body, personal effects and other pertinent information;
    - b. ensure that the deceased has been positively identified; and
    - c. identify the next of kin of the deceased for purposes of notification, giving specific care to locate the closest relative starting with a spouse and followed by parents, siblings, and then children.

## ***Death, Serious Injury and Serious Illness Notifications***

- 1) Generally, next of kin and emergency contact information can be obtained from resources such as Student Affairs and Human Resources.
  - 2) Whenever reasonably possible, officers should gather readily 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 do not speak English, in which case a translator or officer who speaks the particular language should be provided. If possible, officers should obtain the names of the survivor's closest relative, friend, family doctor, and clergy.
  6. When next of kin are located in another state or locality, the Field Operations Commander or designee should contact the appropriate police department and request that they conduct the notification in person and provide timely verification when the notification has been completed.
  7. When UCPD is requested to make a death, injury or illness notification by another agency or person, the information will be verified through the local law enforcement agency prior to any notification.
  8. Officers should not use the police radio to convey information concerning the deceased or related information about the incident or circumstances surrounding the death, injury or illness. Such information shall be conveyed by a secure means of communication, such as cellular phone or landline, and only to those with a need and a right to know.
  9. The name of the victim shall not be released to the media or other outside sources until the next of kin is notified. If the media has already obtained information related to the death, injury or illness, they should be asked to withhold the information until after the notifications have been completed.
  10. Where possible, at least two officers (preferably a male and female team) should be assigned to conduct the death, injury or illness notification.
  11. Assigned officers should also request the assistance of the Victim Services Coordinator, clergy or local crisis intervention specialist where feasible.
  12. Prior to making the notification, assigned officers should ensure that each is familiar with all pertinent information and decide who will be the primary spokesperson.
  13. Personal effects of the deceased shall not be delivered to survivors at the time of death notification.
- C. Making Notification
1. Upon arrival at the residence or place of business, officers shall
    - a. check the accuracy of the location;
    - b. identify themselves by name, rank, and departmental affiliation;
    - c. ask permission to enter the residence or, in the case of a business or other location, move to a place of privacy;
    - d. request to speak to the immediate survivor; and
    - e. verify the relationship of the survivor to the deceased.
  2. 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.

## ***Death, Serious Injury and Serious Illness Notifications***

3. Prior to making notification, officers should determine if other members of the family are in the residence. Officers may wish to bring them together for the notification, but should defer to the wishes of the immediate survivor.
  4. 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 deceased, injured or ill.
    - a. Officers should not use euphemisms such as “passed away” or “no longer with us” in order to avoid using the term “dead,” as these expressions may create confusion or false hope.
    - b. Officers should not provide graphic aspects of the incident or the individual’s death or injury. Police jargon should be avoided.
    - c. Officers should refer to the deceased, injured or ill in terms reflecting the deceased’s relationship to the survivor (e.g., son, daughter).
  5. Officers should be prepared for unexpected responses from survivors to include fainting, hysteria, and possible verbal or physical assault.
  6. Officers should provide survivors with sufficient time to regain composure following delivery of the death, injury or ill notice. Officers should avoid attempts in the interim to provide comfort by using simple platitudes or trite phrases (e.g., “I know how you feel” and “I know how hard this is for you”).
  7. Survivors should be informed that other law enforcement officers may need to question them at a future time. If it is imperative that the survivors be questioned immediately after notification, questioning should be conducted compassionately.
- D. Providing Assistance and Referral
1. Officers and or the Victim Services Coordinator shall be prepared and are granted liberal discretion to determine the amount of time necessary to provide survivors with assistance as authorized by this policy.
  2. Officers shall not leave upon completion of the notification until reasonably assured that the survivor has adequate personal control, family or close friend(s) readily available to provide support, or both. In gauging the need for assistance, officers shall also consider:
    - a. the emotional reaction and physical condition of the survivor;
    - b. the availability of other adults in the home;
    - c. responsibility for infants or small children and the elderly or infirm;
    - d. home environment (e.g., evidence of excessive alcohol or drug use, lack of means of financial support, shortage of food, problem with shelter); and
    - e. availability of a support system, including friends, family, close neighbors, access to clergy, means of transportation, etc.
  3. Officers should provide any additional information on the incident requested by survivors. While graphic details are not appropriate, officers should provide information if asked specifically concerning the cause of death, injury or illness, or other general details of the incident.
  4. Officers should remain alert to the possible need for medical assistance. When officers are aware of serious medical conditions in advance of notification, if possible they should place a local medical response unit on alert.

## ***Death, Serious Injury and Serious Illness Notifications***

5. Officers should be aware of confusion on the part of survivors and should therefore speak slowly and deliberately and write down any pertinent information that the survivor may need. This includes the following:
  - a. Disposition of the body
  - b. Location of personal effects and process for their retrieval
  - c. Identification requirements/procedures
  - d. Notifying officers' names, agency, and telephone numbers
6. Officers should assess the physical and emotional well-being of the survivors 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 in item C-2 above, officers should be able to answer "yes" to the following types of questions:
  - a. Is the survivor thinking clearly? That is, does the individual:
    - (1) seem to be aware of the officers' presence?
    - (2) have some grasp of place and time?
    - (3) demonstrate a progressive ability to express himself or herself? and
    - (4) begin to demonstrate some grasp of the reality of the death, injury or illness?
  - b. Does the survivor have reasonable control over his or her emotions; or does the individual display shock, no apparent emotion, furious hostility, or the desire to commit suicide?
  - c. Can the survivor cope physically? For example, has the survivor fainted or displayed debilitating weakness or emotional collapse?
  - d. Does the survivor have an adequate support system that can be relied upon?
7. 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, co-workers, neighbors, family clergy, chaplains, crisis counselors, or other community social service agency. Officers should provide or arrange for transportation of essential individuals where necessary.
8. The UCPD shall make available a list of [community referral agencies](#) that may be helpful to provide to the survivors.