
	<p style="text-align: center;">GROTON POLICE DEPARTMENT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">POLICY AND PROCEDURE GENERAL ORDER</p>	Distribution	General Order Number
		ALL PERSONNEL	<b>6.16</b>
		Original Issue Date	Reissue/Effective Date
		04/29/19	11/19/19 / 11/27/19
Order Title:  <b>DEATH NOTIFICATIONS</b>	Accreditation Standard:		Section
	POSTC: 3.4.16		6
		Section Title INVESTIGATIVE FUNCTIONS	
Rescinds:	 <b>Louis J. Fusaro, Jr., Chief of Police</b>		

*This General Order is for departmental use only and does not apply in any criminal or civil proceeding. This General Order should not be construed as creation of a higher legal standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense with respect to third party claims. Violations of this General Order will only form the basis for departmental administrative sanctions. Violations of law will form the basis for civil and criminal sanctions in a recognized judicial setting*

**I. PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to establish a written directive that provides guidelines to the Groton Police Department related to death notifications to the next-of-kin.

**II. POLICY:**

The notification of next-of-kin of deceased, seriously injured, or seriously ill persons will be carried out promptly and in a considerate manner. The Groton Police Department requires that all officers become familiar with 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 - spouse, parents, brothers or sisters, and children.

**IV. PROCEDURE**

**A. Information Gathering and Preparation**

1. Officers should request the assistance of the agency chaplain, local clergy member, or local crisis intervention specialist where feasible.
2. Officers shall be prepared to provide assistance, and shall be provided adequate discretion to provide assistance as authorized by this policy.
3. Prior to contacting next of kin, notifying officers shall gather and familiarize themselves with essential details concerning the deceased, to include:

- a. full name
  - b. age
  - c. race
  - d. home address
  - e. details of the death
  - f. location of the body/personal effects
  - g. other pertinent information.
4. 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.
  5. Only where substantial delays would be required to make contact with next of kin should other relatives be contacted.
  6. Officers should contact a supervisor for guidance when in doubt concerning next of kin or delays in notification.
  7. 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 relative, friend, family doctor, and clergyman.
  8. Officers shall ensure that they have on hand a list of referral agencies that may be helpful and should leave this with the survivors.
  9. Officers should, wherever reasonably possible, avoid using the name of the deceased over the radio prior to notification of immediate surviving relatives.
  10. Where possible, two officers should be assigned to a death notification.
  11. All death notifications that are the responsibility of this agency shall be delivered in person unless the exigency of circumstances demand telephonic notification.
  12. Where 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.
  13. Personal effects of the deceased shall not be delivered to survivors at the time of death notification.

## **B. Making Notification**

1. Upon arrival at the residence or place of business, officers shall do the following:
  - a. check the accuracy of the location;
  - b. request to speak to the immediate survivor;
  - c. identify themselves by name, rank, and departmental affiliation; and
  - d. ask permission to enter the residence or (in the case of a business or other location) move to a place of privacy.
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.
3. Prior to making notification, officers should, where possible, bring members of the family together who may be in the house or otherwise on hand.
4. Officers should address the survivor(s) 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 dead.
5. Officers should not use euphemisms - such as "passed on" or "no longer with us" - in order to avoid using the term "dead" - as they may create confusion or false hope.
6. Officers should avoid graphic aspects of the incident and the use of police jargon.
7. 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.).
8. Officers should be prepared for unexpected responses from survivors to include hysteria and possible verbal or physical attack.
9. Officers should provide survivors with sufficient time to regain composure before proceeding. Avoid attempts in the interim to provide comfort by using simple platitudes or trite phrases (i.e. "I know how you feel," "I know how hard this is for you.")
10. In instances where the officer is performing a "locate and notify" assignment (the death event is not the officer's case or is in another jurisdiction), the officer should verify any telephone contact numbers prior to the notification to ensure that the first active contact attempt by the family is successful.
11. Any unsuccessful attempt to make an in-person contact with a family member also requires sensitivity in handling. Officers shall not leave impersonal notes or forwarding messages at a contact location: any messages left should ask that the family member contact the officer leaving the note, by name, rather than directing the person to call any other person (e.g., at a hospital or in another jurisdiction).

12. Occasionally, continuing investigations delay the release of a victim's body and the family or household member must be told that they cannot move to claim it immediately. In such cases, officers must inform family members of:
  - a. How details will continue to become known to them
  - b. What further is happening that yet needs to be accomplished
  - c. Who is in charge of the event and its aftermath
  - d. What the family member should do while waiting.

**C. Translating**

1. If the family or household member does not speak English, the officer will need a translator. Occasionally, it will appear necessary to use a child in the household to assist but that should be avoided. Children should not be expected or requested to assume the psychological burden of translating a death notification and officers should not rely on children to accurately translate this type of critical information. Instead, the officer should ask the child to recommend a nearby adult who also speaks English and can be of assistance.

**D. Providing Assistance and Referral**

1. 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 the need for assistance, officers shall also consider the following:
  - 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
  - d. availability of a support system (e.g. including friends, family, close neighbors, access to clergy, means of transportation, etc.)
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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:
  - a. disposition of the body;

- b. location of personal effects;
  - c. identification requirements/procedures; and
  - d. providing officers' names, agency and telephone numbers.
5. 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:
- a. Is the survivor thinking clearly? That is, does the individual seem to be aware of your presence? Have some grasp of place and time? Demonstrate a progressive ability to express himself/herself? Begin to demonstrate some grasp of the reality of death?
  - b. Does the survivor have reasonable control over his/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, displayed debilitating weakness or emotional collapse, and does the survivor have an adequate support system that can be relied upon?
6. 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, crisis counselors or other community social service agency.