

The background of the top section features a large, faint, light blue seal of the Fraternal Order of Police. The seal is circular with a yellow border and contains a yellow star at the top, a yellow key in the center, and a yellow shield at the bottom. The text is overlaid on this seal.

# Line of Duty Death Manual

Provided by the,  
**Critical Incident Response  
Service**

**Fraternal Order of Police, State Lodge of Ohio**

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## **I. Purpose:**

The purpose of this manual is to establish procedures that will ensure the proper support and emotional care for an officer's family, co-workers, and the department following a line of duty death.

## **II. Objective:**

It is the objective of this procedure to provide assistance to the immediate survivors of any member who dies in the line of duty. This assistance will be provided whether the death was either unlawful or accidental while the member was performing a police-related function, either on or off duty and while the member was in active status with the department. Portions of this manual may be instituted in the case of a member's natural death.

## **III. Responsibilities:**

Coordination of events following a line of duty death is complex. There is no set course of action or predictable outcome. However, the degree of compassion and professionalism shown by a department meeting this challenge will have a direct affect on the healing process of survivors and the police family. Specific tasks may be assigned to members of the department. Their titles are:

- A. Notification Team
- B. Hospital Liaison
- C. Family Liaison
- D. Department Liaison
- E. Benefits Coordinator

Note: Depending upon the size of a department, a member may be called on to fill more than one of these roles. It is important that there be contingency in case the deceased is one of these designees or the designated member is so emotionally debilitated by the loss that he/she cannot perform the role.

### **A. Notification Team:**

Proper notification of survivors can make a major difference in how a family eventually begins to deal with the unexpected loss of a loved one.

In Person: Notification must always be in person and **never** over the telephone. The human presence will convey a certain degree of compassion that is needed in this most stressful time. A team that is present can also help if the survivor has a dangerous shock reaction. If it

is known ahead of time that a survivor has a particular medical condition, i.e., pregnancy or heart condition, EMS could be put on standby. The team can also assist if multiple family members and children are present and need assistance. The team should be prepared to assist adult survivors notifying children. If survivors live out of the area, the team should contact the police department in that area to make notification.

In Pairs: The team should consist of two or three people. Separate vehicles should be driven. The team never knows what it will encounter. One may drive a spouse to the hospital while another stays to watch children, or help contact family and friends for support. Ideally the team should consist of an officer in uniform, and perhaps a clergy member or counselor. -The makeup of the team depends upon the culture of the department and the family. A line of duty death information sheet could provide assistance in choosing team members, but don't waste time assembling a team. The media certainly won't waste time reporting the death.

In Plain Language: Once at the location, the team should attempt to move the notification inside, not on the doorstep. The presence of the team already has alerted the survivor of a problem. Identify yourself, move inside, and make sure you have the right person, then relate the message in plain language. Vague expressions such as "passed away" or "lost" do not help. State clearly "your husband was shot today and he died", or "your daughter was in a car crash and she was killed." Use the name of the victim if possible.

Notification may not always occur at the home. The survivors may be at work or school. Request a private room or location. The survivor's boss or co-workers do not need to be told your purpose. Release of information to them should be with the survivor's permission only.

If notification takes place at the hospital, the team should coordinate with hospital officials. A private room should be provided and if possible, have the doctor present in clean clothing, to answer questions.

The survivor should be allowed to view the body if that is their wish. However, they should be advised as to the condition of the body and any forensic concerns if the death was unlawful. Be honest regarding the disposition of the body and any need for an autopsy.

Response: The team should be prepared for a wide range of responses from the survivors. Responses can vary from violent, lashing out to a numb almost non-response.

The team should remain with the survivors until a support structure of family and friends is in place. The team needs to be aware that they cannot "fix" this problem, they cannot make it all better. Their presence and compassion are the most important resources they provide to the survivor. The team should coordinate with the survivor the follow-up contact that will be made the next day.

Debriefing: Once clear of the family, the team should discuss the follow-up tasks. They should critique the notification for future improvements. The team needs to be frank and honest in discussion of their own feelings and concerns and they need to support each other.

B. Hospital Liaison:

The hospital liaison coordinates the activities of the hospital personnel, the member's family, police officers, and the press.

- i.) Waiting area for family and notification team. Room should be quiet and secluded.
- ii.) Waiting area for police and friends. Access to family should be at the family's request only.
- iii.) Establish a separate staging area for the media. If known, advise them as to when and who will brief them. .
- iv.) Ensure information regarding the officer's condition goes to the family first, before general release.
- v.) Notify the hospital that medical bills relating to the deceased officer should be directed to the department or municipality. The family should not receive any bills at their residence.

C. Family Liaison:

Each member of the department will make the selection of a personal family liaison when they complete a line of duty death information packet. The officer and his/her family can select a fellow officer or supervisor for this role. This is not a decision making position. The liaison acts as the family's advocate when dealing with the department on matters involving benefits, funeral arrangements, etc.

- i.) The family liaison ensures that the needs and wishes of the family come before those of the department. The family may not want an elaborate police funeral. If they do, the liaison can brief them on the procedures.
- ii.) The family liaison will keep the family apprised of investigations and accompany the family to court proceeding if they choose to go.
- iii.) Provide assistance overseeing travel and lodging arrangements for out-of-town family members, arrange for food for the family and help meet childcare needs.
- iv.) The family liaison can expect to work closely with the department liaison and the benefits coordinator.
- v.) Should clean out the officer's locker and deliver items to the next of kin. This could avoid added pain for family, should unexpected items be found in a locker.
- vi.) Assist survivors with banking, insurance and safe deposit box matters using the line of duty death information sheet previously filled out by the officer.

D. Department Liaison:

- i.) Due to the coordination of resources, it is preferable that a supervisor holds this position.
- ii.) Handle the media during the incident. If the family chooses to accept an interview, the liaison should attempt to screen questions for appropriateness and those that may jeopardize subsequent legal proceedings.
- iii.) Meet with the following to coordinate funeral activities and itinerary:
  - a.) Family Liaison
  - b.) Chief of Police
  - c.) Funeral Director
  - d.) Family Clergy
  - e.) Special Services, i.e. honor guard, piper, bugler, etc.

- iv.) Direct funeral activities according to the wishes of the family.
- v.) Issue a teletype message to include the following:
  - a.) Name of deceased.
  - b.) Date and time of death.
  - c.) Circumstances of death.
  - d.) Funeral arrangements.
  - e.) Uniform of the day.
  - f.) Expressions in lieu of flowers.
  - g.) Name and phone number of contact person for visiting departments.
- vi.) If the family desires a burial in uniform, have the family liaison obtain uniform and all accouterments for the funeral home. (Make arrangements to recover these items before burial).
- vii.) Some funeral reminders:
  - a.) A flag for the coffin should be obtained. Determine who will present it to the family, and to which family member.
  - b.) Assign members of the department to serve as ushers and honor guard to stand post during viewing.
  - c.) Brief staff and Chief of Police regarding arrangements.
  - d.) Ensure that all surviving family are recognized and placed for funeral.
  - e.) Coordinate traffic management and manpower with other departments during viewing, funeral and procession
  - f.) Maintain roster of visiting and assisting departments for later acknowledgement.
  - g.) Assign a marked unit to remain at the officer's residence during viewing and funeral proceedings.

h.) Arrange for regular checks of the survivor's residence by patrol units for several weeks following the funeral.

viii.) Prepare a briefing as soon as possible for the department. Citing information at roll call will help with rumor control.

E. Benefits Coordinator:

i.) Shall gather and maintain information on all benefits available to families experiencing a line of duty death, so that the most up to date information is readily at hand.

ii.) Shall file appropriate paperwork for benefits, including workers' compensation and victims of crime compensation on behalf of the family. Will follow through with family to ensure benefits are being received.

iii.) Contact appropriate agencies to ensure death and retirement benefits, remaining paychecks, payment for remaining vacation and compensatory time or any other type of benefits, are paid to the family.

iv.) Set up trust funds or educational funds.

v.) Contact organizations such as the Fraternal Order of Police, the Attorney General's Office, the Blue Coats, and Concerns of Police Survivors for additional benefits information that may be available to the family of the officer.

vi.) Meet with the family a few days after the funeral. Supply in writing a list of benefits/funeral payments to which the family may be entitled. Assist with collection of these benefits.

vii.) If there are surviving children from a former marriage, the guardian of those children should also receive a list of qualifying benefits.

viii.) Schedule follow-ups to ensure that benefits are being received.

IV. Continued Support:

All members of the department must remain sensitive to the needs of the survivors long after the officer's death. The grief process has no timetable and the experience may be complicated. More than half of the surviving spouses can be expected to develop a post-traumatic stress reaction to the tragedy.

Survivors should continue to feel a part of the "police family". They should be invited to department activities. Members should be encouraged to keep in touch with them. Arrange to visit the family at home. So long as the family expresses a desire for these contacts, they should continue.

The Chief of Police should observe the anniversary of the officer's death with a short note to the family and offer to accompany them to place flowers on the grave.

Holidays may be an especially difficult time for the family, particularly if children are involved. Increased contact and support are important at these times.

The family liaison acts as a long-term contact with the surviving family. The family liaison should continue to ensure the family's needs are met, and if the death was unlawful, keep them informed of proceedings, accompany them to court and arrange for them to speak with investigators after the trial. The family liaison should also inform the family of future parole proceedings.

## **V. Officer Support:**

A line of duty death is one of the most tragic critical incidents that a department will face. It is also one of the few where a critical incidents stress management is recommended to be made mandatory instead of voluntary. These services can be easily obtained, often without cost. For information on how to contact an independent critical incident stress management team in your area, contact the Fraternal Order of Police, Critical Incident Response Service at 1-800-367-6524.