

CHAPTER 01

17 IN THIS VOLUME

The First Knock.

CHIEF'S NOTIFICATION TEAM

Nothing about this event is recoverable if it is done poorly. The family's memory of the department will be formed in the first ten minutes.

The Chief's Notification Team is the small group — almost always the Chief or designee, a chaplain, a peer-support officer, and the assigned Family Liaison — that carries the first message to the family. The team arrives with every piece of information needed, moves in the right sequence, and protects the family from the second wave of harm — social media, news helicopters, scammers, and well-meaning friends — that now arrives within minutes of any public notification.

Speed matters, but accuracy matters far more. The wrong name, the wrong department, the wrong hospital — any of it — cannot be taken back. Confirm with Incident Command and the Chief's office before the team rolls.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE – FROM AGENCIES WHO HAVE DONE THIS

- 01 **Move faster than the news cycle, but never faster than the facts.** The first thirty minutes decide whether the family learns from you or from Facebook. Blackout first, notify second, confirm publicly third.
- 02 **Notify in person. Always.** No phone calls, no texts, no video. If distance makes in-person impossible in the window, arrange a sister agency to do it on your behalf rather than shortcutting.
- 03 **Bring two vehicles and one extra officer.** The family will need to travel – to the hospital, to relatives, to be with the children – and the first officer at the door should not also be driving.
- 04 **Say the words plainly.** "I have very bad news. [Officer] was killed today." Euphemisms cause confusion in shock. Be honest, be slow, be present.
- 05 **Protect the phone.** The officer's personal cell will start buzzing within minutes as colleagues learn what happened. Take custody gently and keep it out of earshot until the family is ready.
- 06 **Plan for the second wave.** Media, scammers, fraudulent GoFundMe pages, and well-meaning neighbors will all arrive within hours. Assign an officer to the door, an officer to the phone, and a PIO to the gate.
- 07 **Do not leave until you are relieved.** Someone from the department should be with the family continuously until the Family Liaison formally takes over. That is the standard. Hold to it.

MODERN CONSIDERATIONS • 2026

- **Department-wide communications blackout.** No radio traffic by name, no social-media posts, no group texts, no livestream. PIO controls timing of first public release.
- **Officer's personal cell phone secured.** Do not power off; silence ringer. Photograph the lock screen of incoming calls so the Family Liaison can later reach back out.
- **BWC, dashcam, CCTV, Ring, and livestream footage held.** All releases coordinated through Legal and PIO before any public access; family reviews first if they wish.
- **Cybersecurity for the family.** Credit freezes (Equifax, Experian, TransUnion) on the officer's file. Family warned about scam calls and fraudulent fundraising pages within 24 hours.

TURN THE PAGE FOR THE CHECKLIST →

CHECKLIST 01 • HONORING THE FALLEN

Chief's Notification Team checklist.

A working one-page reference. Begin at first assignment; complete through service close.

FIRST 60 MINUTES

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| ☐ Confirm the death in person with the on-scene supervisor or attending physician. | ☐ Confirm next-of-kin of record from the department HR file. |
| ☐ Impose department-wide communications blackout. | ☐ Locate and secure the officer's personal cell phone. |
| ☐ Activate the Notification Team and confirm 30-minute roll-out. | ☐ Pre-brief the team on facts, what is confirmed vs. unconfirmed, exact words at the door. |
| ☐ Pause release of all BWC, dashcam, and CCTV footage. | ☐ Alert Funeral Coordinator, Employee Assistance, and Peer Support. |

AT THE DOOR

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| ☐ Two-officer pair, plus chaplain or peer support if family circumstance warrants. | ☐ Move the family to privacy before delivering the news. |
| ☐ Speak plainly. "I have very bad news. [Officer] was killed today." | ☐ Confirm who tells the children, when, and how. |
| ☐ Decide together with the spouse who will be notified next, in what order. | ☐ Place one officer at the residence for presence, privacy, and door-answering. |
| ☐ Remain until formally relieved by the Family Liaison. | |

RESOURCES & FOLLOW-UP

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| ☐ Chaplain on standby; mental-health professional named. | ☐ Peer Support Program representative dispatched. |
| ☐ Pre-designated department representative confirmed. | ☐ Family Liaison Officer named and approved by the family. |
| ☐ Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS) regional rep notified. | ☐ PSOB benefits coordinator alerted; estate attorney referred. |
| ☐ Credit alerts placed on the officer's credit file (3 bureaus). | ☐ Secondary notification list prepared for the Death Notification Team. |