

CHAPTER 03

17 IN THIS VOLUME

The Wider Circle.

DEATH NOTIFICATION TEAM

After the Chief's team has reached the immediate family, the second wave of notifications begins — extended family, close friends, in-home caregivers — in the order the spouse has approved.

The Death Notification Team is the working group — led by a sergeant or above and typically including a chaplain, a peer-support officer, and the Family Liaison — that carries notifications beyond the immediate family. Their other job is to protect the family from the chaos that follows: locking down the incident facts, coordinating with the hospital or scene, and making sure the first public release of information is controlled by the department, not a bystander's livestream.

Every notification ends with the person cared for, not alone. A neighbor, a pastor, a sister agency, a chaplain, another officer — someone stays. And the team documents the time, the person, and who was present, because the family will want to know weeks later exactly when and how each relative learned.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE — FROM AGENCIES WHO HAVE DONE THIS

- 01 Never notify faster than the facts.** The wrong name, the wrong department, the wrong hospital cannot be taken back. Confirm with Incident Command and the Chief's office before moving.
- 02 Send pairs, not singles.** One officer talks, one officer watches, drives, and catches the person who is about to fall. Always both, even if the person is "only" a sibling or a friend.
- 03 Tell the oldest first — unless the family says otherwise.** Older relatives hear before siblings and cousins, so they can help the rest of the family through the next hours. The spouse's preferences override every convention.
- 04 Leave somebody behind.** Every notification should end with the person cared for, not alone. A neighbor, a pastor, a sister agency, a chaplain, another officer — someone stays.
- 05 Document the time, the person, and who was present.** The family will want to know, weeks later, exactly when and how each relative learned. Written notes protect everyone.
- 06 Watch for the person who will fall apart later.** Calm reception at the door is often shock, not strength. Make sure the second visit — next day, next week — happens.

MODERN CONSIDERATIONS • 2026

- **Social-media watch.** PIO monitoring for leaks before all notifications are complete. One officer alerts the Chief immediately if the story breaks prematurely.
- **Encrypted group comms.** Signal or agency-issued secure messenger for the team. No sensitive details on SMS or open email.
- **Officer's cell phone treatment.** Photograph incoming-call lock screens so the Family Liaison can later reach those contacts.
- **International notifications.** American Red Cross Emergency Communications Service for deployed or overseas family members.
- **Scam / fraud alert.** Within 24 hours, advise family of likely scam calls, phishing emails, and fraudulent GoFundMe pages.

TURN THE PAGE FOR THE CHECKLIST →

CHECKLIST 03 • HONORING THE FALLEN

Death Notification Team checklist.

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

FIRST 90 MINUTES

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|--|---|
| ☐ Confirm Chief's team has reached the immediate family. | ☐ Obtain from Chief / IC the single authorized incident summary. |
| ☐ List facts NOT to be shared (open investigation, suspect identity). | ☐ Confirm identity and current location of each person on the secondary list. |
| ☐ Divide list among two-officer pairs; assign chaplain/peer-support to high-risk notifications. | ☐ Establish encrypted group channel with real-time status updates. |
| ☐ Coordinate with PIO on timing of first public release. | ☐ Make contact with sister agencies for any out-of-jurisdiction notifications. |

PER NOTIFICATION PAIR

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Carry the exact authorized summary on paper. | ☐ In-person whenever possible; phone only when distance demands. |
| ☐ Move the person to privacy before delivering the news. | ☐ Speak plainly. Avoid euphemisms. |
| ☐ Stay until a trusted person can take over. | ☐ Log time, person notified, and who was present. |
| ☐ Report back to the team channel: "notified, family member stable." | |

SPECIAL-CASE FLAGS

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Elderly with cardiac or cognitive conditions — chaplain + EMT on standby. | ☐ Minor children not with surviving spouse — school counselor + SRO loop-in. |
| ☐ Out-of-state — sister agency pre-notified and standing by. | ☐ Deployed / overseas — Red Cross Emergency Communication. |
| ☐ Hearing / language / cognitive accessibility needs accommodated. | ☐ Estranged / high-conflict relationships — spouse's guidance documented. |