

**Lower Providence Township Police Department  
Eagleville, Pennsylvania**

General Order ☒  
Special Order ☐  
Personnel Order ☐

**ORDER NUMBER**

**411**

**Subject**

**Death Notification Policy**

**Date of Issue**

**January 29, 2020**

**Effective Date**

**January 29, 2020**

**Expiration Date**

**Until Amended or  
Rescinded**

**Issued by:**

**Michael Jackson, Chief of Police**

**Amends**

**Rescinds**

**All Previous Orders**

**Standard Number:**

**Distribution**

- 1. General Order Manuals**
- 2. Records Manual**
- 3. Reading Verification to all Personnel**

## **I. POLICY**

It is the purpose of this policy to provide officers with guidelines for notifying next of kin of the death of a family member.

## **II. POLICY**

Notification of next of kin of the death of a family member is a difficult task even for experienced officers. There is a natural hesitancy to deal with this subject and the risk exists that, without guidance, inappropriate methods, comments or remarks may unnecessarily exacerbate the mental distress of survivors. Therefore, the Lower Providence Township 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 the purposes of this policy, the closest relative of the deceased (spouse, parents, brothers, sisters and/or children).

## **IV. REGULATION**

### **A. Information Gathering and Preparation**

1. All death notifications that are the responsibility of this department shall be delivered in person unless the exigency of circumstances demands notification by other means (telephone).

2. Officers shall be prepared to and shall be provided adequate discretion to spend the necessary time with survivors 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 full name, age, race and home address, as well as details of the death, location of the body, personal effects and other pertinent information.
  4. Officers shall identify the next of kin of the deceased for the purposes of notification. Particular effort should be made to locate the closest relative starting with a spouse and followed by parents, brothers or sisters and the children.
    - a. Only where substantial delays would be required to make contact with next of kin should other relatives be contacted.
    - b. Officers should contact a Shift Supervisor or OIC for guidance when in doubt concerning next of kin or delays in notification.
  5. 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.
  6. Whenever 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 name of the survivor's closest relative, friend, family doctor and clergyman.
  7. Officers shall ensure that they have on hand a list of referral agencies that may be helpful and should leave this information with the survivors.
  8. Officers should, wherever reasonably possible, avoid using the name of the deceased over the radio prior to notification of immediate surviving relatives.
  9. Where possible, two officers should be assigned to a death notification.
  10. Officers should request the assistance of the agency chaplain or local crisis intervention specialist where feasible.
  11. Personal effects of the deceased shall not be delivered to survivors at the time of the 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 Lower Providence Township Police Department;
    - d. Verify the relationship of the survivor to the deceased; and
    - e. Ask permission to enter the residence or (in the case of a business) 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 straightforward manner and use easy-to-understand language to briefly explain the circumstances of the incident and the fact that the individual is dead.
    - 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 may create confusion or false hope.
    - b. Officers should avoid graphic aspects of the incident and the use of police-type jargon.
    - c. 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).
  5. Officers should be prepared for unexpected responses from survivors to include hysteria and possible verbal or physical attack.
  6. 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 (e.g. "I know how you feel." - "I know how hard this is for you.")
- C. 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;
  - 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 (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 an ambulance on alert.
4. Officers should be aware of confusion on the part of survivors. Speak slowly and deliberately, and write down any pertinent information 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. Notifying officers' names, agency and telephone numbers.
5. Officers should assess the physical and emotional wellbeing 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 in item C-1 above, officers should be able to answer "yes" to the following 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?
    - \* And/or begin to demonstrate some grasp of the reality of the 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 social service agencies.
7. Notifying officers should conduct a follow-up within 24 hours with any survivor where there is concern for the survivor's wellbeing.

*Michael Jackson*

Michael Jackson  
Chief of Police