



Norwich Police Department Standard Operating Procedure

Subject:	Death Notification	
Distribution:	All Officers & H.Q.	
Approved / By order of:	Jennifer Frank, Chief of Police	
I. PURPOSE:	<p>The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure is to provide Norwich Police Department officers with guidelines for notifying next of kin of the death of a family member, to protect the dignity of persons who have died, and to lessen the effects of the death on members of the decedent's family.</p> <p>This Standard Operating Procedure becomes effective August 25, 2020, and rescinds all previous rules and regulations pertaining to the subject.</p>	
II. POLICY:	<p>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 Norwich Police Department requires that all officers become familiar with concepts and procedures set forth in this SOP so as to provide surviving family members with sufficient useful information and support, and to ensure that notification is conducted in a prompt, professional and courteous manner.</p>	
III. DEFINITIONS:	<p>A. <u>Next of Kin</u>: The closest relative of the deceased: spouse, parents, brothers or sisters, and children.</p>	
IV. PROCEDURES:	<p>A. <u>Information Gathering and Preparation</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Prior to making any death notification, Norwich Police officers should make effort to verify the accuracy of the information, and log the requesting parties name and contact information. Officers should not make any notifications as requested by parties whose identity	

	<p>cannot be otherwise confirmed, without approval from a supervisor.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. All death notifications that are the responsibility of the Norwich Police Department should be delivered in person unless the exigency of circumstances or location of the next of kin demand telephonic notification. The Norwich Police department recognizes and understands that the loss of a loved one or family member is an extraordinarily tragic and traumatic event in the lives of people. For this reason, all death notifications shall be done with the level of compassion, sensitivity and support that such situations require.3. NPD officers shall be prepared to spend the necessary time with survivors to provide assistance as authorized by this SOP.4. Prior to contacting next of kin, notifying officers shall gather and familiarize themselves with essential details concerning the deceased, to include full name, age and home address, as well as details of the death, location of the body/personal effects and other pertinent information.5. 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, and children.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Only where substantial delays, or no other next of kin contact information is known, should other relatives be contacted. NPD officers should contact a supervisor for guidance when in doubt concerning next of kin or delays in notification.b. In any instance when it may become necessary to communicate a death notification to persons residing outside of the area for a decedent who died within the Norwich Police Department jurisdiction, notification shall be made to a police department having jurisdiction in the area where the person to be notified resides. At that time, a strong request should be made that an in-person notification be made by that particular department. In providing for delivery of such death messages by another police department, the involved officer from this department should specify a contact telephone number where he or she may be reached should the family member who was notified have any additional questions. Again, as in "in-person"
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	<p>notifications, all such telephone communications with family members shall be direct, helpful, and with a level of compassion consistent with the needs of the situation. NPD officers should request immediate verification when out of jurisdiction notification have been accomplished.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Officers should, wherever reasonably possible, avoid using the name of the deceased over the radio prior to notification of immediate surviving relatives.7. Personal effects of the deceased shall not be delivered to survivors at the time of death notification. <p>B. <u>Making Notification</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Upon arrival at the residence or place of business, officers shall do the following:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Check the accuracy of the location;b. Request to speak to the immediate survivor;c. Identify themselves by name, rank and departmental affiliation;d. Verify the relationship of the survivor to the deceased; ande. 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 a private 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. In the delivery of any death notification, officers are encouraged to be direct and non-evasive in providing information available concerning the death and the circumstances surrounding the death. All officers shall be expected to maintain a helpful and supportive attitude in providing immediate assistance to persons receiving such notifications, including the need to notify additional family members, the disposition of the body and the handling of any property belonging to the deceased that may remain in the possession of the department<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. 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. Officers should not use euphemisms—such as “passed on” or “no longer with us”—in order to avoid
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	<p>using the term “dead” as these may create confusion or false hope.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Officers should be prepared for unexpected responses from survivors to include hysteria and possible verbal or physical attack. 6. Whenever necessary, especially if the person notified is alone at the time of notification, the officer should make an attempt to contact other family members, neighbors, or anyone else with an association to the person notified to monitor the well-being after the officer has gone. 7. If an NPD Officer responds to a death of a foreign national within the jurisdiction of the Town of Norwich, a supervisor will notify the consulate or embassy of the deceased's country as soon as possible. <p>C. <u>Providing Assistance and Referral</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before leaving, officers should evaluate whether the survivor has adequate personal control and/or family or close friend(s) readily available to provide physical and emotional support. In gauging the need for assistance, officers shall also consider the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 use or drug use, lack of means of financial support, shortage of food, problem with shelter, etc.); 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 be aware of confusion on the part of survivors; speak slowly and deliberately, and if requested to do so, write down any pertinent information that the survivor may need. This includes such matters as the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Disposition of the body; b. Location of personal effects; c. Identification requirements/procedures; and
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">d. Notifying officers' names, agency and telephone numbers.4. 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:<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Is the survivor thinking clearly? Does the individual:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Seem to be aware of your presence?- Have some grasp of place and time?- Demonstrate a progressive ability to express himself/herself?- 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 for the survivor.
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