

Death Notification

I. Introduction

It is **not** the responsibility of a lay citizen helper to provide an initial death notification to immediate family members after a sudden death. That is the responsibility of public safety officials. However, once a public safety official provides a death notification to the next of kin, it's the responsibility of others – family members, friends, coworkers – to tell others about the death.

You may find yourself in the position of having to notify others about a death. It may be as a family member notifying other family members; as a boss notifying your employees; as a teacher notifying your students; or as a neighbor telling another neighbor. To be effective in your role of “bearer of bad news” we believe you should know the general principles of providing an effective and caring death notification.

II. General Principles of Delivering an Effective and Caring Death Notification

- a. Try not to notify others by phone.
- b. Try not to notify others while they are driving or in a very vulnerable position (critically ill, for example). Think of the safety of those you are notifying. However, don't “overprotect”.
- c. Notify those close to the deceased about the death as soon as possible. Don't delay unless it's a health or safety issue.
- d. Use the “d” word – death/died. Using words like “*passed away*”, “*we lost him*” or “*he's no longer with us*” can be confusing and can be misinterpreted.
- e. Get right to the point. Don't provide a lot of information before notifying the other that death has occurred.
- f. Be prepared before the notification with as much information as possible – how, why, where, and when the death occurred. Those close to the deceased will want as much information as possible. Be prepared to repeat the information.
- g. Be honest.
- h. In summary, death notifications should be done . . .
 - . . . With a caring attitude.
 - . . . By a person knowledgeable about the death.
 - . . . In person.
 - . . . As soon as possible while considering the health and safety of the person being notified.
 - . . . Honestly.
 - . . . Quickly and to the point.
 - . . . Using the word “died” or “dead”.