

SAMPLE

Basic Death Notification Procedures

Whenever possible;

- Always make death notification in person --not by telephone.
- Only notify over the phone if there is no other choice.
- Provide notification as soon as possible
- Provide notifications in a team; advocate/officer; doctor/advocate; coroner/advocate
- Decide who will speak, what will be said, how much can be said.
- Clearly identify yourself, present credentials and ask to go in.
- Do not make the notification at the doorstep.
- Get the survivor(s) seated in the privacy of the home or location.
- Be sure you are speaking to the right person.
- Relate the message directly and in plain language. (Dead or died)
 - Examples of plain language include:
 - Your daughter was in an car crash and she was killed
 - Your father had a heart attack at his work place and he died
- Call the victim by name
- Patiently answer any questions about the cause of death, the location of the deceased's body, how the deceased's body will be released and transported to a funeral home, and whether an autopsy will be performed. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say so. Offer to get back to the survivor when more information is available, and be sure to follow through.
- There are few consoling words that survivors find helpful --but it is always appropriate to say, "I am sorry this happened."
- Remember: Your presence and compassion are the most important resources you bring to death notification.
- Accept the survivor's emotions and your own. Never try to "talk survivors out of their grief" or offer false hope. Be careful not to impose your own religious beliefs.
- Many survivors have reported later that statements like these were not helpful to them: "It was God's will," "She led a full life," and "I understand what you are going through"
- Plan to take time to provide information, support, and direction. Never simply notify and leave.
- Survivors bear the burden of inevitable responsibilities. You can help them begin to move through the mourning and grieving process by providing immediate direction in dealing with the death.
- Offer to call a friend or family member who will come to support the survivor -and stay until the support person arrives.
- Offer to help contact others who must be notified (until a support person arrives to help with this duty.)
- Survivors may have a hard time remembering what is done and said, so write down for them the names of all who are contacted.
- Always leave a name and phone number with survivors.
- Plan to make a follow-up contact with the survivor the next day.
- Most survivors are confused and some might feel abandoned after the initial notification. Many will want clarifications or may need more direction on arrangements that are necessary.
- The notification team should be sure there are clear follow-up assignments they need to carry out.