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## Five Principles of Notification

### In Person

- Always do the notification in person, never by phone!
- For family members living out of the local area, arrange for authorities in that area to make the notification in person.
- Immediately find the firefighter's emergency contact information to know who needs to be notified in person. Usually, the spouse (or unmarried partner) and parents of the firefighter should be the first priority.

### In Time and with Certainty

- Before making notification, have positive identification of the deceased firefighter. Obviously, errors in identity can cause extreme trauma.
- Never discuss a fatality over the radio. This may result in a family member receiving the news before you can notify them in person.
- Quickly gather as much information about the incident as possible before making the notification. Survivors will likely have questions.
- Get to the survivors quickly. Don't let the media notify them first.

### In Pairs

- Have two people present to make the notification. Survivors may experience severe emotional or physical reactions when they learn of the death.
- Use the employee's emergency contact information to identify a uniformed member of the fire service to accompany the department's representative. It is helpful to have the department chaplain or a friend of the family, too.
- Take two vehicles, if possible. This will allow one of you to take a survivor to the hospital, if necessary, while the second person stays with other survivors.
- Before you arrive, decide who will speak and what that person will say.
- Rehearse what you are going to say. Consider writing it down.



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## In Plain Language

- Clearly identify yourself and present identification; ask to come in.
- Notification should take place in a private setting.
- If you don't know the family member, make sure you are talking to the right person.
- Begin with "I have very bad news," or "I'm so sorry to have to tell you this."
- Use the words "dies" and "dead" rather than terms such as "passed away" so the message is clear. Speak slowly. Get to the point quickly.
- Calmly answer questions. It is fine to say, "I don't know" if you don't.
- Use his or her name when referring to the firefighter, rather than saying "the body."

## With Compassion

- Allow survivors to express emotions. Don't talk them out of their grief.
- Accept your own emotions. It's okay if you cry but stay very calm.
- Never leave immediately after making a notification. Ask if there is a friend or family member that you could help them notify. Ask if there is a pastor/clergy you could call for them. Offer to help call friends or family members. Do not leave before someone else arrives.
- Do not take the firefighter's personal items with you when you make the notification. Tell the family they will receive them later. Most survivors will need some time before they feel able to deal with these items.
- Provide the survivor the opportunity to see the deceased firefighter, even if the body is badly disfigured. Offer to transport the family to where the firefighter is, and help prepare them for what they will see.
- Before leaving, write down important information, including the names and phone numbers of the department personnel who will work with the family.
- Have one member of the department stay with the family, unless the family declines.