

# Defining the Role of the Liaison Officer

## General Suggestions:

- I. Team Concept
  - A. If the department is big enough provide two officer to the family
  - B. If needed, one officer from the Department and the other officer either from a neighboring Agency or with the State C.O.P.S. organization, or from a State Response team.
  - C. The reason for the Team concept is to divide the responsibilities between one or more officers
  - D. The Team concept also enables the officers to check on the emotional and physical welfare of the other.
  - E. The Team concept provides the ability for one officer to provide emotional support while the other officer provides pragmatic support to the family. These roles may switch back and forth as needed.
  - F. Communication is Essential
    - a. Between the family and the agency
    - b. Between the team members
- II. General Suggestions for picking a Liaison Officer
  - A. From the department:
    - a. Known to the family (possibly picked by the family?)
    - b. Acceptable to the Department
    - c. Officer willing to do so
  - B. From an outside agency:
    - a. Has the personality to fulfill the responsibilities of a liaison officer
    - b. Has the ability to have time and resources to fulfill the responsibilities of liaison officer
  - C. General guidelines:
    - a. Would be freed from professional responsibilities to fulfill the responsibilities of a liaison officer
    - b. Would have the opportunity to be freed from personal responsibilities to fulfill the responsibilities of liaison officer
- III. General Duties
  - A. Check list to aid the family
    - a. Assist the electing of a family spokesperson for the media
    - b. Provide communication between the family and the agency
      - 1. Wishes of the family for the funeral to the agency
      - 2. Wishes of the agency for the funeral to the family
      - 3. Assist in obtaining information on the "benefits" for the family

- c. Assist or appoint someone to manage the phones
- d. Assist or appoint someone to manage the email
- e. Assist or appoint someone to manage the mail (with the family permission, open the mail and arrange for the bills to be paid, document Sympathy Cards and any contributions made and who made then, etc.)
- f. Assist or appoint someone to manage the security of the residence when the family is away from the home
- g. Assist or appoint someone to manage the flowers and when they are delivered (calling the local florists and arrange for delivery times)
- B. State and local memorial services/award ceremonies/ "memorial" outings (fund raisers)
  - a. Make sure the family wishes are known and followed (assist the family/agency in planning the different ceremonies)
  - b. Support the family during the ceremonies (accompany the family)
  - c. Assure the family it is okay for them to say "no" if necessary
  - d. Offer suggestions of compromise, is necessary
  - e. If there is a fund raising event called a "Memorial" (i.e. Memorial Golf Outing), make sure the reason for the event isn't lost, without opening wounds. (Don't let committees neglect to inform the family about the activities. Better yet, insist the committees include and involve the family during the planning)
- C. Assist the survivor spouse and family to receive information on the following:
  - a. Information on financial planning
  - b. Information on what benefits are available and how to receive them
  - c. Information on how to receive Spiritual assistance (especially if the family doesn't belong to a church)
  - d. Information on employment opportunities and job hunting skills
  - e. Information on setting up college funds for the children and retirement funds for the spouse
- D. Predict the possible future events that might have an impact upon the survivor spouse and family
  - a. Difficulties of the "first year"
    - 1. Holidays (first Christmas, Thanksgiving, Halloween, etc.)
    - 2. Birthdays
    - 3. Wedding Anniversary
  - b. Difficulties of the trial
    - 1. Hearing testimonies about how the spouse was killed
    - 2. Seeing photographs of the spouse's body after being killed or found
    - 3. Seeing the suspects
    - 4. Seeing and maybe having to listen to the suspect's family
    - 5. Experiencing the high media involvement

- IV. Balance of Involvement: (This is the temptation for a liaison officer to be out of balance because of a sense of duty, or guilt, or desire to do the right thing)
- A. Possible causes of imbalance of involvement
    - a. Helping a survivor family may turn into “smoothing” or “enabling”
    - b. Empowering a survivor family may be interpreted as abandonment
    - c. Helping a survivor family may re-enforce an officer’s denial of his/her own grief issues and prolong the officer’s “need” to reach out for personal assistance
    - d. The survivor family needs may be so great, the liaison officer may not see the needs of his/her own family being neglected
    - e. People may confuse “understanding grief” as “compatibility”
    - f. People may confuse “empathy” as “affection”
    - g. Liaison officers may falsely believe that guilt may be erased through sacrifice of one’s own family or needs
    - h. People may believe they are obligated to give intense long term assistance to the survivor family
  - B. Suggestion to maintain the Balance of Involvement
    - a. The responsibilities transform from intense relationship
    - b. Balance time with fallen officer’s spouse and family with time spent with the liaison officer’s spouse and family
    - c. Empower the family by asking them if they believe the liaison officer is getting too close or too distant
    - d. Use the Team Concept to evaluate each other’s involvement
    - e. Involve other officers: Utilize a “Circle of Support” (Provide the Department with a calendar that officers may sign up for different chores, etc.)
      - 1. Cutting the Grass
      - 2. Home Maintenance (painting, small repairs, etc.)
      - 3. Provide and outing for the kids
      - 4. Babysitting
      - 5. Visiting the family while in uniform and in a squad car
      - 6. Accompany the survivor spouse during the trial
    - f. Involve survivor’s extended family and/or friends
      - 1. Contact family members and offer suggestions for giving the survivor family support
      - 2. Accompany the survivor spouse during potentially different times (award ceremonies, memorial ceremonies, the trial, etc.)
      - 3. Remind the extended family and friends to include the survivor spouse and family in functions, parties, movies, etc.)
      - 4. Provide babysitting
      - 5. Assist with job training or finding an outside job

- g. Involve the fallen officer's department
  - 1. Remind the Department to inform the survivor and family about Departmental functions, other than memorial services (i.e. Christmas parties, union/association functions or fund raisers, etc.)
  - 2. Remind the Department to inform the survivor and family about Departmental changes (i.e. promotions, retirements, disabilities, severe illnesses, critical incidents; who was involved, when, changes made within the department, etc.)
  - 3. Suggest that the Department allow some funding for unexpected family needs
  - 4. Suggest that the Department would allow officer to stop by the survivor's home while on duty, so that the family (especially the children) will be able to feel connected to the Law Enforcement community, if the family would like such a connection

V. Notes for Working with Liaison Officers

- A. Duo-liaison officers were thought to be beneficial if possible. One to handle emotions, the other to handle the pragmatic elements of the duties.
- B. It is preferable to have an officer who is known to the family, if possible. If not, an officer how has a more compassionate personality if preferred.
- C. If the officer is not very familiar with the family, it would be beneficial for the officer to find out as much as possible about that family as soon as possible
  - a. Knowing extended family and where they live
  - b. Know if they are "touchy/feely" people or "rough and tough" kind of people
  - c. Knowing what that particular family and specific family members' needs are. (i.e. do they want to know the facts about the incident or not, do they want to see the body or not, do they want a lot of assistance or only minimal)
- D. Continue to have information flowing back and forth between the family and department. Continue to exchange information as new information becomes available
- E. Stay in touch with the family after the funeral (inviting the family to department functions- with the department's knowledge and blessing)
- F. Encourage and possibly assist the Department to file out the paper work, and submit it in a timely manner with the justice department
- G. Continue to use direct language (i.e. death, dead, died, killed, etc.) when talking about the officers death, avoiding euphemisms
- H. Know and be sensitive of the fine line between dependency and assistance, being out of assistance without creating a dependency

- I. Look for signs and/or symptoms of possible dysfunctions with the spouse, children, parents, in-laws, siblings, etc. (listen to family members about one another)
  - a. Depression: different than grief or mourning
  - b. Inappropriate behavior (i.e. self-destructive, obsessive behavior; sexual addition, buying binges, neglect of the children, etc.)
- J. With the family's permission and desire, screen phone calls from people to only let through those calls the family wants



Taken from the Utah Department of Public Safety General Orders and used with their permission.

## **Life Threatening Injuries/Death of a Department Member Checklist**

### **Immediate Action**

- Personal notification of family (spouses, children, parents).
- Provide transportation to the hospital and back home again.
- Arrange for an officer to be station at the department member's home to provide security and control access to family.
- Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, and Division Director should personally contact the family as soon as possible.

### **Hospital**

- Designate a Hospital Liaison Officer.
- Arrange for an appropriate waiting area for the family at the hospital.
- Arrange for a separate waiting area for officer and friends.
- Establish a media staffing area at the hospital, away from the family waiting area.
- Arrange for all ambulance and hospital bills to be sent to the department, not to the department member's home.
- Ensure the family is continually updated by hospital personnel.
- Try to arrange for the family to visit the critically injured member before death occurs.
- Provide the family with as much information regarding the incident as you can under the circumstances.

### **Notifications**

- Notify department members and the media (news release) of the incident by e-mail or fax.

- Have the Bureau of Criminal Identification notify other state and local law enforcement agencies through the NLETS system.
- Notify "C.O.P.S." (Concerns of Police Survivors) nationally at 1-800-784-2677, and locally at 801-768-9724, regarding the death if it involves a peace officer.

### **Logistics**

- Have the department public information officer handle the media and respond to their needs.
- Obtain a flattering photo of the department member for release to the media.
- Establish a depository bank account for memorial donations. Make department members, other agencies, and the media aware of the memorial account.
- Advise department members wearing badges to drape them with a black band through the day of the burial.
- Have 8x10 photos made and appropriately matted and framed for display at Headquarters and for presentation to the surviving spouse and parents.
- Have the Benefits Coordinator begin research on all insurance benefits and other financial assistance available.
- Gather newspaper clippings of all print media coverage of the events relating to the incident for department record and presentation to the family.

### **Funeral Preparation**

- The department member's division director should meet with the family to determine their wishes for the funeral and what department participation is desired.
- The division director assigns a Family Liaison Officer to the family. The Family Liaison Officer must have a pager.
- Provide assistance to the family in making funeral and burial arrangements.
- Have the department member's personal belongings delivered to the family.
- Coordinate traffic control issues with other jurisdictions prior to the funeral.
- Arrange security for the department member's home and for the parent's home for the day of the funeral when people will be away.



## **Day of Funeral**

- The member's division director should ensure all department plans are in order.
- Maintain a roster of all departments sending personnel to the funeral .
- Note which agencies render special service such as motors, honor guards, ect.
- Have someone try to gather the name and department information of all out-of-state officers in attendance.
- The slain member's division director should present out nation's flag to the surviving spouse with words of sympathy and appreciation for the sacrifice made.

## **After the Funeral**

- Provide routine patrol checks of the survivors home for several weeks following the funeral.
- Arrange for a "Critical Incident Stress Debriefing."
- Arrange for "grief counseling" for the surviving family members, if appropriate.
- Brief the family on all available survivor benefits.
- Send letters of appreciation to all visiting and assisting departments, and to those who sent flowers or mad monetary donations.
- Make periodic visits to the family. Let them know you care!
- Make notification to the FBI if the death involved a peace officer and occurred in the line of duty.
- Notify the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial and IACP of the peace officers death.
- Work with the UHPA to have memorial wall plaque made that contains the members badge, name tag, and service starts, rank insignia, and shoulder patch, if applicable.
- Scheduled the department memorial service to add the members name to the DPS Memorial in the lobby of the Calvin L. Rampton Building, if applicable.
- Have the department public information officer obtain video tape copies of all TV news coverage of the incident, funeral, and burial for the family and the department.

## **The Future**

- Have the Family Liaison Officer work with the family throughout any subsequent legal proceedings.
- Include the family in future organizational activities.
- Remember the department members family on holidays, special family dates, and on the anniversary of the members death.