



Responding to Tragedy

Employee Death Procedures

Erie, Colorado Police Department

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide direction for the Erie Police Department to provide compassionate assistance to the family of any employee who has died in the line-of-duty.

The wishes of the employee's family will take precedence over those of the department and ultimately the family will have the final say regarding funeral arrangements.

Although this document is intended to address the line-of-duty death of a police officer, many provisions, including death notification and family assistance, may be applicable to any department employee regardless of whether or not the death is duty-related.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Erie Police Department to utilize all appropriate and available resources to provide compassionate assistance to the immediate family of an employee who has died or been seriously injured in the line-of-duty. All resources will be made available to peers and co-workers of the employee as well to ensure emotional support is provided.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Colorado Fallen Hero Foundation – Volunteers from law enforcement, who upon request from the Chief of Police, will assist departments, with Line-of-Duty deaths.
- B. Line-of-Duty Death – Any action, felonious or accidental, which claims the life of an Erie Police Officer who is performing work-related functions whether on or off- duty.
- C. Trauma Response Team (TRT) – A voluntary team, from the Colorado Fallen Hero Foundation, comprised of members who will coordinate hospital response, make family and agency notifications, coordinate funeral arrangements, and facilitate the arrangements for survivor benefits in conjunction with the Erie Police Department Command Staff.
- D. Trauma Response Team Commander – The TRT Commander from the Colorado Fallen Hero Foundation, is a sworn supervisor holding the rank of Lieutenant or above.
- E. Trauma Response Team Family Liaison – The TRT family liaison is charged with representing the employee's family and will ensure the family is informed, involved and their best interests are protected.

- F. Immediate Family – For purposes of this document, the immediate family consists of the member’s parent, spouse, children (regardless of age), and other relatives who reside in the agency member’s household. Other family members may be deemed immediate family on a case-by-case basis with approval of the Chief of Police.
- G. Survivor – Immediate family member of an agency member killed in the line-of-duty.
- H. Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) – A crisis intervention system with multiple components that may be applied to small or large groups dealing with a critical incident.
- I. Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.) – A national non-profit organization that assists police survivors to include families and co-workers.
- J. Agency Members – Are defined for the purpose of this manual as full or part-time employees, both sworn and civilian.
- K. Emergency Notification Team – Agency members designated to notify immediate family members/survivors of an active agency member’s death. The team consists of a Command Officer, peer support, Victim Services, and any pre-designated peers the officer indicates.
- L. Peer Support Team – Personnel from the Erie Police Department who provide peer support for personnel and their families who experience stresses generated by the role of law enforcement in today’s society.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. TRT Commanding Officer (or designee)
 - a. In order to prevent duplication of efforts, maintain order, and ensure the employee’s family and peers are properly taken care of, the TRT Commanding Officer, along with an Erie PD Command Staff Officer, shall coordinate all department functions regarding the incident.
 - b. The TRT Commander shall make assignments of tasks and responsibilities to department personnel, including working with Peer Support, the Honor Guard, Media Relations, Brotherhood for the Fallen, and other groups. Department personnel should not take independent action on tasks related to the line-of-duty-death without the approval of the TRT Commanding Officer.
 - c. Personnel assigned to tasks related to the line-of-duty death as outlined in this document will be placed on a special assignment and all efforts will be made by supervisors to allow them time from their normal assignments.
 - d. Depending on the family dynamics of the deceased officer or employee, more than one family liaison may be assigned.

B. Death or Life Threatening Injury Notification

- a. If death or severe/debilitating injury has occurred to an agency member, immediate family notification shall be made by the Emergency Notification Team. Preferably, a member of the Peer Support Team who has familiarity with the member's family will be utilized. If this is not possible, another agency member pre-designated on the member's emergency contact form shall assist with notification.
- b. If an agency member suffers injuries which are severe/debilitating and an opportunity exists to get the immediate family to the hospital prior to his/her death, all efforts should be made to do so. If TRT members are available and can transport family expeditiously, this is preferred. If other on-duty officers do the transport, TRT members shall meet the family at the hospital.
- c. Notification of immediate family members/survivors living in the area shall be made in person, in pairs, and in a private place (not in public) whenever possible. At least one member of the Notification Team shall be in uniform, preferably a command officer. If family members live outside the metro area, an in-person death notification will be requested of a local law enforcement agency.
- d. Death notifications are difficult for all involved parties. As soon as the member's family sees law enforcement, they typically know something is wrong. Notification Team members should:
 1. Ask to be admitted to the house. Never make a death notification on the doorstep.
 2. Gather everyone into the home and have them sit down. Special consideration should be given to children. Once the notification is made to the adults, allow them to decide on how to notify the children. Have the adults involved.
 3. Inform the family slowly and clearly of the information you know regarding the incident.
 4. It is important to refer to the member by name during the notification.
 5. If the member has died quickly, clearly relay that information; do not provide a false sense of hope.
- e. The name of the deceased agency member shall not be released to the media until all notifications have been made to immediate family members. The family liaison and Command Staff Officer should be in constant contact with the Public Information Officer (PIO)

- f. TRT members shall keep in constant contact with the member's chain of command as well as the chief's office to ensure proper notifications can be made to the agency member's supervisors, peers and co-workers. Peer Support members trained in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), in conjunction with department consultants, will assist in holding debriefings for agency members. If the member's death occurred on-duty, the employees involved in the incident will likely have a separate Critical Incident Stress Debriefing with Peer Support and the Department Consultant prior to the end of their shift. Additional debriefings may be held in the days following the incident.

C. Assisting the Family at the Hospital

- a. If the member is transported from the scene and the pronouncement of death is made at a hospital, the TRT will respond to the hospital in a timely manner.
- b. The TRT will make immediate contact with the pre-designated hospital representatives. The first TRT member to the hospital will take a lead role in identifying the immediate needs and whether or not family has been notified or not.
- c. TRT members, along with the Emergency Notification Team will, if at all possible, bring the family to the hospital and prepare them for what they may see upon arrival. The family will be taken to a pre-designated "family room" if one is available.
- d. TRT will establish communication with hospital staff and ensure it is made clear all medical bills relating to the care and treatment of the member will be sent to the department and not the home of the member.
 - 1. This will require the TRT to gather all essential information regarding the member. The member's address and next of kin information should be omitted from the admission paperwork.
 - 2. The family should not sign as a guarantor of payment for treatment.
 - 3. Omit requests for insurance information.
- e. If the injuries to the member are going to likely be fatal and it is possible for the family to visit the member prior to the death, they should be afforded the opportunity.

- f. TRT members will remain at the hospital the entire time the family is present and will arrange whatever assistance the family may need, including transportation home.
- g. The personnel who made the initial notification to the family should be present at the hospital if possible.
- h. TRT members will coordinate with the family to arrange transportation to Colorado for out-of-town family members.

D. General Funeral Procedures

- a. All personnel attending in uniform shall wear appropriate "Class A" uniforms unless their current duty status dictates otherwise. Badges shall be shrouded.
- b. Non-uniformed employees shall wear appropriate civilian dress attire.
- c. Uniformed members may be asked to report to an assembly point away from the location of the services for formation, inspection, briefing and/or travel arrangements.
- d. The formal procession from the funeral to the cemetery or place of rest (if applicable) will be one of respect and honor. Thus, in coordination with the Traffic Plan, all vehicles will utilize emergency lights during the procession.
- e. Every part of the funeral process will be pre-organized and respect the wishes of the member's family. An appointed Command Level Officer will work with the TRT Commander or designee and all of the entities who will be assisting with the funeral process.
- f. A formal request will be made by the Chief of Police to have outside agencies assist with calls for service in Erie during and after the funeral. An ideal scenario would be to have coverage from the prior night to the evening after the funeral to afford all shifts to be in attendance and rested.

E. Support for the Family during a Wake or Funeral

TRT members will act as a liaison for the family. Although the liaison should know the deceased officer and be aware of the family relationships, the liaison should not be so emotionally involved with the loss that he/she would become ineffective. There may be more than one liaison depending on family dynamics or size. The duties of the liaison shall include but not be limited to the following:

- Ensure the needs of the family come before the wishes of the department.
- Meet with the family and relate the duties of the liaison(s) or allow the family to designate the person, if appropriate, they wish to perform the liaison role or assist with tasks.
- Meet with the family regarding funeral arrangements.
 - a. Since many officers have not prearranged the wishes for the handling of their own funeral, the family will most likely need to decide all aspects of the funeral.
 - b. The department should only make the family aware of what they can offer in the way of assistance if the family decides to have a line-of-duty funeral.
- Before the TRT leaves the family during the initial day(s) of the death notification, the liaison will leave his/her contact information with the family and ensure they will be available 24/7.
- The liaison should become familiar with all information concerning the death and the continuing investigation in order to answer all family questions.
- The liaison will ensure surviving parents or surrogate parents are afforded recognition and will have proper placement arranged for them during the funeral and funeral procession.
- For a line-of-duty funeral, the liaison will ensure the family is briefed on the funeral procedure including the 21 gun salute, presentation of the flag, playing of taps, etc. The family has the option of excluding any portion of the funeral procedure.

- In the event a members' unexpected death is the result of suicide, an initial determination must be made regarding whether criminal charges were pending against the member or an ongoing criminal investigation was underway with the deceased member as a subject officer at the time of death. This determination will guide the response of the department and its members.
 - a. If no criminal charges were pending against the member and no ongoing criminal investigation was occurring, provisions of this document may be applicable to include the traditional roles performed by the Trauma Response Team and Peer Support. If the members' suicide occurred on-duty, the employees involved in responding to the incident will have a separate debriefing. Additional debriefings may be held in the days following the suicide.
 - b. General Funeral Procedures and Support for the Family during a Wake or Funeral, described above, are modified for a member suicide where no criminal charges were pending and no ongoing criminal investigation was occurring. At the family's request, the deceased member may wear the "Class A" Erie police uniform. All personnel attending will have the option to wear either a "Class A" uniform or business attire. The procession from the funeral to the cemetery will potentially be coordinated by a private company normally contracted by the mortuary; emergency lights on department vehicles will not be utilized.
 - c. If the member was a military veteran, the department may defer a flag-folding ceremony and presentation, 21 gun salute, and a Taps bugler to a military honor guard.
 - d. If criminal charges were pending against a member, or an ongoing criminal investigation was underway with the deceased member as the subject officer, the Trauma Response Team may be employed for making a notification and assisting the family at the hospital. The department, however, will not actively participate in the planning and execution of the member's funeral. The deceased member may not wear an Erie police uniform. Further, the wearing of mourning bands will not be authorized, and officers may not attend the funeral in uniform.