

# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF POLICE CHAPLAINS

Chaplain Jim Crowley  
Basic Core Class  
B2 - Death Notification

B02 - Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

1

# DEATH NOTIFICATIONS

CHAPLAIN JIM CROWLEY

## THE MISSION:

To deliver an in person message of death as humanely and compassionately as possible and then remain to help physically, emotionally and spiritually until the natural support system is assured.

B02 - Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

2

# Types of Death Calls

- ☐ Natural Causes
- ☐ Traffic Accident
- ☐ Household or Industrial Accident
- ☐ Homicide
- ☐ Suicide
- ☐ Shootings by Police
- ☐ Child Death

B02 - Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

3

# Procedure

- ☐ Face to face; never by phone if possible
- ☐ Present identification
- ☐ Ascertain identity of deceased and relationship
- ☐ Have everyone be seated
- ☐ Be specific and use clear language
  - Use words like "Dead" and "Killed"
  - Do not use words like "Passed On" or "They're Gone"

B02 - Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

4

# Procedure

- ☐ Give pertinent information
- ☐ Be compassionate
- ☐ Answer questions truthfully
- ☐ Do not speculate
- ☐ Begin to assemble support for the family such minister, family, neighbors
- ☐ Determine funeral home preference
- ☐ Explain Medical Examiner if appropriate

B02 - Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

5

# Procedure

- ☐ Allow people to act out their emotions
- ☐ Be truthful with information
  - Provide appropriate information
  - Do not share information regarding the ongoing investigation
  - Advise family when necessary on how to find further information

B02 - Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

6

## Preparation

- ☐ Assume Nothing
- ☐ Identify those involved
- ☐ Check your information
  - Hospitalized or deceased
  - Who, where, when
  - Next of Kin
    - Location
    - Relationship
    - Special Circumstances (physical, mental)
- ☐ Proceed as quickly as practical



B02 – Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

7

## Preparation



- ☐ Clothing
- ☐ I.D.
- ☐ Business Card – Chaplain vs Pastor
- ☐ Note Pad that looks professional
- ☐ Something to write with x's 2!!!
- ☐ Flashlight
- ☐ GPS
- ☐ ID for Vehicle
- ☐ Your Vehicle/Officer Drives they stay!!!

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

8

## PEWTER

### Preparation

- ❖ Begins with helper's preparation!
- ❖ What is your physical condition?
- ❖ What is your mental and emotional condition?
- ❖ Your own spiritual preparation.
- ❖ Restroom – breath mints – odors.

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

9

## PREPARE

- ❖ Combating the grim reaper image!
- ❖ Do you ever get depressed at the thought of the responsibility?
- ❖ Combat it by the integrity of the responsibility.
- ❖ It must be cared for with integrity.
- ❖ Do you have the right address and correct information?

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

10

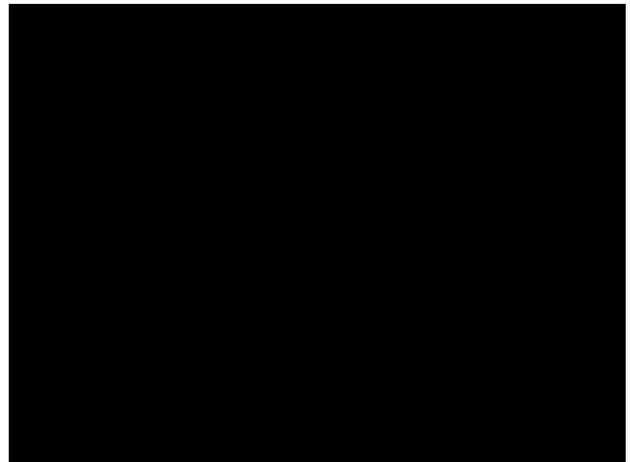
## Prepare

Other issues to consider!

- ❖ What is the Medical history at the address?
- ❖ What is the physical setting? Do you have privacy? What if they collapse?
- ❖ Is the house clear?
- ❖ Do you have or need a safe distance? No one else will maintain that for you but you!

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

11



## EVALUATE



Assess!

- ❖ Assess what the family member knows or think they know
- ❖ Listen for a moment. It maybe your best tool.

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

13

## EVALUATE



- ❖ Clarify!
- ❖ Depending on the news to be delivered, a few questions could assist you:
- ❖ “What have you been told or has anyone spoken to you about\_\_\_\_\_?”

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

14

## EVALUATE



- ▣ “An awareness of what the person knows and the accuracy of the information can assist you in determining what needs to be explained or corrected.”

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

15

## WARN



- ❖ Identify the event!
- ❖ The warning is simply coming to the place that identifies the event.
- ❖ i.e. “There has been a bad car accident and your husband was involved.”

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

16

## WARN



- ❖ Pause!
- ❖ Pause to allow them to register this information.
- ❖ I’m sorry to tell you that your husband did not survive – he died at .... The scene – the hospital – en route -

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

17

## TELL



- ❖ Use simple, everyday speech!
- ❖ Medical terminology, criminal investigation or law enforcement language will only confuse and may require you to explain more than you want or are capable of!

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

18

## TELL

- ▣ Simple language says – “we are equals in this time of your loss and grief” The tone of voice should be direct – soft – clear – compassionate rather than robotic – “just the facts ma’am”

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

19

## TELL



- ❖ Don't do an investigation!
- ❖ In the part of telling it is better for the Chaplains to leave criminal investigation knowledge with the agency that you are serving.
- ❖ Allow them to give information as they see fit.

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

20

## TELL



- ❖ Warning!
- ❖ Furthering conversation may bring about unneeded stress.
- ❖ Continued questioning may arouse or create hostility. We need to be careful.

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

21

## EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

- ❖ Pay close attention!
- ❖ Pay close attention to the verbal and nonverbal messages.
- ❖ An emotional breakdown would necessitate immediate care and a break from any further information until they are stabilized.
- ❖ There are times that laughter maybe the reaction.

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

22

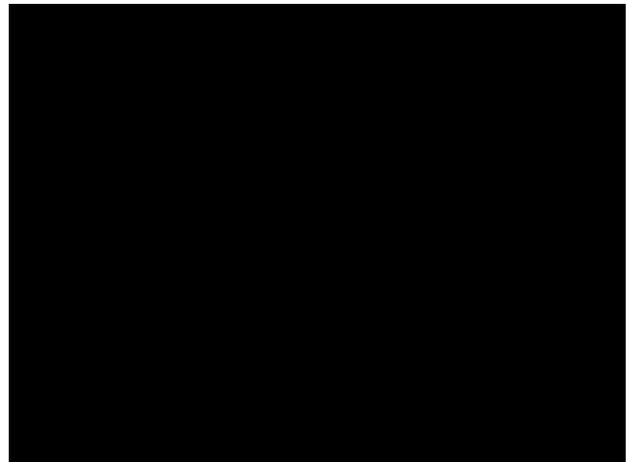
## EMOTIONAL RESPONSE



- ❖ Pay close attention!
- ❖ There are times that Denial will be exhibited.
- ❖ A complete lack of Emotion may be the experience as well.
- ❖ Follow up at the scene or in the next day or two may be needed – is most often needed!

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

23



## REGROUP



- ❖ What's next?
- ❖ What is the next course of action? This could vary from how do we get our loved one home, to the vehicle towed, personal affects – how do we clean our home?
- ❖ We should be prepared in this phase to assist with resources and answer basic questions.

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

25

## REGROUP



- ❖ What's next?
- ❖ Referral for pastoral care.
- ❖ Family, Friends, Neighbors
- ❖ No piece of paper with names on it will be as valuable as the professional and caring attitude of the Chaplain.

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

26

## REGROUP



- ☐ THE WAVE IMPACT
- ☐ When support arrives we relive the shock, the pain, the brokenness.
- ☐ We Grieve!

B02 – Death Notification - Revised  
2/8/2012

27

## What NOT to Say

- ☐ I know how you feel
- ☐ Time heals all wounds
- ☐ You'll get over this
- ☐ You must go on with your life
- ☐ He didn't know what hit him



B02 – Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

28

## What NOT to Say

- ☐ You can always find someone worse off than yourself
- ☐ You must focus on your precious memories
- ☐ It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all



B02 – Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

29

## Religious Clichés

- ☐ It must have been his/her time
- ☐ Someday you'll understand why
- ☐ It was actually a blessing because . . .
- ☐ God must have needed her more than you did
- ☐ God never gives us more than we can handle
- ☐ Only the good die young



B02 – Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

30

## What TO Say

- ▣ I am sorry
- ▣ I am so sorry for your loss
- ▣ Accept the survivor's expression of grief
- ▣ Don't try to talk the survivor out of his/her grief
- ▣ Sometimes saying nothing at all



B02 – Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

31

## Legal Aspects

- ▣ Verify facts to be sure identification is correct
- ▣ Don't make notification by phone if possible
- ▣ Don't leave survivors alone
- ▣ Have an officer, other personnel, or another chaplain accompany
- ▣ Avoid media contact; do not release information
- ▣ Provide information about Medical Examiner procedures if applicable



B02 – Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

32

## Reactions to Death Notification

- ▣ Shock
- ▣ Disbelief
- ▣ Confusion
- ▣ Physical illness
- ▣ Extreme emotional response
- ▣ Numbness
- ▣ Quiet



B02 – Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

33

## Media and Investigation



- ▣ Never share information with media unless directed by police personnel
- ▣ Media should not be involved in notification process
- ▣ Investigation is separate from notification process
- ▣ Never relate crime investigation information to survivors or media

B02 – Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

34

## Basic Principles

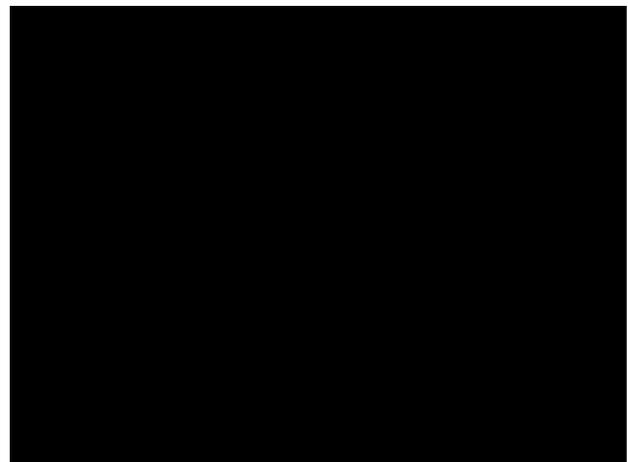
### REVIEW

- In person
- In time
- In pairs
- In plain language
- With compassion



B02 – Death Notification - Revised 2/8/2012

35



## Role Play

- Using the Pewter Method accomplish a group Death Notification!
- Identify your Reactions -
- Identify their Reception -
  
- Choose Two Concepts that you will Adapt and Polish.
  
- Questions and Feed Back time permitting!

