



**San Diego County Sheriff**

**Training Bulletin**

**William D. Gore, Sheriff**

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## **Family Liaison Protocol**

Effective immediately, per Sheriff's Directive #1901-01, the Sheriff's Department has established a Family Liaison protocol. The goal of the Family Liaison is to effectively communicate with the family of a suspect who has been involved in a shooting or use of force with deputies where significant injury or death occurs. The families of these individuals are often left with unanswered questions during an exceptionally difficult and emotionally-charged time. The goal of the Family Liaison will be to work closely with family members and be a departmental point of contact. The Family Liaison will answer questions and follow up on requests for assistance, while conforming to confidentiality laws and privacy rights; in addition to maintaining the integrity of the investigation.

In order to immediately improve the level of communication with the involved families in such situations, the following procedure should be implemented.

1. When a suspect has been involved in a shooting or use of force with deputies where significant injury or death occurs, the affected Station/Facility Commander or designee shall become the departmental liaison to the deceased or injured suspect's family.
2. The liaison should be introduced to the family, or family's chosen point of contact, as soon as practical in whichever manner is appropriate. The introduction may be completed by on scene personnel or facilitated with the help of the Medical Examiner's Office or the District Attorney's Office.
3. The circumstances of the case will dictate the setting and conditions of the initial meeting or introduction. The Family Liaison should remain flexible and available. This initial contact should take place as soon as practical after the family is notified of the death by The Medical Examiner's Office.
4. The Family Liaison will establish open lines of communication and serve as a single point of contact for the family of the deceased or seriously injured suspect; answering questions and providing support to the family or the family point of contact.

The Family Liaison should be guided by the following general principles:

- Be prepared for hostility and anger, don't take it personally
- Offer support, compassion and assistance; treat the family like you would want to be treated under similar circumstances
- Understand that most families have no knowledge of law enforcement procedures or the investigative process
- Bridge the gap between the family and the Department by responding promptly and courteously to inquiries, calls and emails.
- Provide information when appropriate and when information cannot be released, provide an explanation, follow-up or referrals to appropriate agencies

A policy will be forthcoming to guide personnel assigned Family Liaison duties. As this process is implemented, it will be the responsibility of the Homicide Unit Lieutenant to gather input from individual liaisons' experiences. Feedback and lessons learned will be shared to facilitate program improvement. Recommendations will be provided via the Investigations and Patrol Operations Chain of Command, for ongoing enhancement of departmental policy moving forward.

The information in this Training Bulletin was provided by Homicide Lt. Rich Williams and edited for distribution by the In Service Training Unit. If you have expertise in a particular subject and would like to write a training bulletin, please contact Corporal Brent Longfellow at [REDACTED]