

Family Liaison Common Standards and Principles

The following standards for family liaison services following a death in custody apply to organisations responsible for the care and treatment of the deceased (including secure settings that hold young people and children) as well as investigatory bodies. Where the standards apply only to those responsible for the care and treatment of the deceased, this has been made explicit.

Informing family members about a death in custody¹

- A. Organisations responsible for the care and treatment of the deceased will:
- have a clear process for identifying family members of individuals in the event of a death in custody
 - contact families immediately, in most cases face to face², following the death of an individual in custody
 - offer ongoing contact, explain the process of investigation, conduct a clear handover of responsibility to other organisations' family liaison staff (where applicable) and tell families about other organisations that will contact them
 - when the organisation is unable to send their own representative, the person delivering the news will be aware of basic information about the death and provide a name and direct number for the family to contact the organisation.
- B. Organisations responsible for the care and treatment of the deceased will provide accurate, timely information based on the facts as understood to be at that time about the circumstances of the individual's death.

Considering the families' needs

- C. Organisations responsible for the care and treatment of the deceased and investigation bodies work with families in a respectful and responsive way, acknowledging that they are grieving and agreeing the frequency and type of contact. Information will be provided in a range of formats, including

¹ Death in custody means any death of a detainee in prison, young offender institution, secure training centre, secure children's home, immigration removal centre or short term holding facility, approved premises and those detained under the Mental Health Act as well as in or following police custody.

² UKBA will not be able to contact families face to face if they are overseas.

interpreters, translation and Easyread, to ensure it is accessible and meets their needs.

- D. Organisations responsible for the care and treatment of the deceased and investigation bodies are clear with the family about the purpose of their relationship and to whom the family liaison worker³ is accountable. They explain when contact will end.
- E. Organisations responsible for the care and treatment of the deceased and investigation bodies give families information about other relevant services for independent advice and support immediately after the death and at key moments during the investigation and inquest. They explain clearly what they do (for example, whether it is bereavement counselling or legal advice).

Investigations

- F. Those responsible for investigating deaths will provide regular updates to the family throughout the investigation process, at intervals and using methods agreed with the family.
- G. Families are informed about how the information they provide will be used as part of the investigation into the death.

Training

- H. Organisations responsible for the care and treatment of the deceased and investigation bodies make arrangements to ensure their family liaison staff are trained appropriately and supported, including relevant professional development, to undertake this role. This does not require accredited training but will include how to communicate with empathy and professionalism to meet the needs of all families.⁴

Follow up and learning

³ Family liaison worker is a general term to denote the member of staff in each organisation with responsibility for fulfilling the family liaison role. The title varies – for example, IPCC have Family Liaison Managers, prisons have Family Liaison Officers.

⁴ The role of family liaison following a death in approved premises is undertaken on an ad hoc basis due to the infrequent nature of deaths in this sector.

- I. Families often want to know what will happen as a result of the death of their family member to prevent it happening again. A senior representative of the organisation responsible for the care and treatment of the deceased will inform families about actions taken, in practice and policy, as a result of investigations and inquests.