



EMS Delivery of Death Notification



Prepare yourself:

- Take off your gloves, tuck in your shirt and wipe the sweat off your face
- Softening – the switch from resuscitator to death notifier (from clinical to empathic)
- Direct yourself to spouse, parent, family member or friend
- Put yourself on the same level (sitting or standing)
- Make eye contact but don't stare

Deliver the death notification:

Suggested script of notification:

“I'm sorry, we've done everything we could and all of the same treatments they would have done in the ER. I talked to the doctor and (s)he agrees the condition was so severe that we were unable to revive your <<family member>>. We tried everything we could and I need to let you know that (s)he is dead. I am very sorry for your loss.”

- Deliver the death notification by using the 'D' word: dead, died, death. (helps avoid denial)
- Deliver quickly – don't drag it out
- Reassure about resuscitation efforts (if started): “We did every medical procedure possible, but were unable to revive him/her”
- Allow a pause for survivor response

Using Touch:

- Generally touching key survivor's hand, shoulder or arm is sign of closeness
- Take survivor's lead from there
- Hugging the survivor works for some providers. Gauge the situation appropriately

Helpful Phrases:

- I can't imagine how difficult this is for you
- I know this is very painful for you
- I'm so sorry for your loss
- It must be hard to accept
- It's harder than most people think
- You must have been very close to him/her
- How can I help?
- Most people who go through this react just as you are

Comments to avoid:

- God clichés such as “It was actually a blessing because...”
- Unhealthy expectations such as:
 - You shouldn't feel/act that way
 - Aren't you lucky that at least...
 - You must get a hold of yourself
 - You must focus on your precious moments



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- Hurtful Phrases/Basic Insensitivity:
 - I know how you feel. My_died last year
 - We all have to deal with loss
 - At least s/he died in their sleep
 - S/he had a very full life
 - Everything is going to be OK
 - I'm sorry (in isolation = pity)

Supporting Survivors:

- Describe what you did and why
- Listen to how the survivor feels and what they need
- Answer with honesty (not brutal) & in a nonjudgment way. Omit clichés
- Do not reinforce denial of death
- Restrain violent survivors only enough to protect them and you. (involve police)
- Offer to make tea, coffee, get drinks
- Offer to call relatives if needed
- Don't feel you have to keep talking – just being there is usually sufficient
- Offer the family the chance to say goodbye, including touching deceased (consult with police)
- Place the body in an appropriate location such as in bed. (if local coroner/police authorities allow)