



PRACTICE ADVICE FOR FAMILY LIAISON DEPLOYMENT – STRATEGIES, BRIEFING, TASKING AND WITHDRAWAL

This practice advice provides guidance to assist the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) or Investigating Officer (IO) and Family Liaison Coordinator (FLC) / Family Liaison Advisor (FLA) in setting a family liaison strategy with clear aims and objectives.

(Note: In this practice advice, Senior Investigating Officer (SIO, includes references to Lead Investigators, Investigating Officer or Officer In the Case)

The primary role of the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) is that of an investigator and to assist the SIO in achieving their investigative aims and objectives. As such, the FLO will be responsible for gathering evidence from the family that will assist the investigation.

FLOs should be dedicated to the role in the initial stages of the investigation and should not be performing other roles within the investigation. To perform their function effectively, the FLO should be treated as an integral part of the enquiry team and included in all briefings and debriefings.

FLOs are increasingly deployed to complex situations with families where building trust and maintaining the confidence of the family is crucial. Sometimes the full complexities of an investigation or family dynamics are unknown at the start of the deployment. As the investigation progresses and circumstances change, the family liaison strategy (and risk assessment) must therefore be updated to show how the SIO/FLO has tried to overcome those complexities.

STRATEGY

The SIO has ownership of the strategy. The FLO should work to the aims and objectives set by the SIO.

The following should be considered to allow for the accurate recording of decisions made for family liaison deployments.

Initial Strategy

At an early stage in the investigation an “Initial Family Liaison Strategy” should be prepared. This initial strategy will outline the tasks for the first deployment and should concentrate on the primary objectives and urgent priorities.

Tasking of the FLO will be undertaken by the FLC/FLA on behalf of the SIO. The initial strategy can be prepared by the FLC/FLA on behalf of the SIO; it must be read, understood and signed by all staff deployed to the family.

The initial priorities should include:-

- Explaining what is known about the circumstances of the death as per SIO instruction, including:-
 - Whether person(s) are in custody
 - Whether the offender is known and is wanted in connection to the offence, particularly if there are likely to be any media appeals
 - Whether person(s) unknown are responsible
 - What information is already in the public domain, including what is being reported (e.g. in the media)
 - Establishing the person(s) to speak to within the family
 - Explaining the role of the Family Liaison Officer to the family
 - Explaining the role of the SIO within the investigation
 - Explaining the role of the Coroner – particularly if there is a need for urgent identification of the victim
 - Providing the family with information regarding support services and establishing their consent (or refusal) for appropriate referrals.

Police Considerations for Initial Strategy

- What is already known about the family e.g. whether they have witnessed the incident, and how this may impact on any information that is shared.
- Whether there are estrangement or other known considerations e.g. the house is a crime scene
- Recording all family liaison contact within the FLO log
- Informing the SIO and/or FLC/FLA with any family concerns
- Updating the SIO and/or FLC/FLA with relationship considerations or concerns
- Whether there is a dual deployment
- Engagement with the FLO's line manager and how this is managed
- Research on how many current or previous deployments the FLO has undertaken
- Whether the FLO is a suitable person to be deployed

Briefing the FLO

In the initial stages of the investigation the SIO and FLO should recognise that the family will need information as soon as possible. A family's request for information about how their family member has died must be recognised and managed sensitively.

FLOs should be briefed upon appointment and prior to meeting the family and they should be informed what information can, and what should, be given to the family. The initial briefing from the SIO or FLC/FLA should include the following points:

- Risk assessment and any risk management plan (please see Risk Assessment)
- Initial objectives including fast-track actions for the deployment
- Witness categorisation (vulnerable, intimidated, significant) and how this impacts on the FLO (see Evidence Gathering from Family)
- Reporting chain (SIO/Deputy SIO, FLC/FLA)
- Maintaining strict adherence to recording family contact within the FLO log;
- Resources available to the FLO (e.g. mobile telephones, vehicles, support information packs such as Information for the Bereaved or Brake pack)
- Standards of professional behaviour

The FLO must make arrangements to meet the family as soon as possible, as first contact with the family is vital when laying the foundations for a successful relationship.

In all cases upon deployment the FLO must:

- Familiarise themselves with any available information and intelligence which could impact on the liaison role, e.g., impact assessment document, community tension indicators, previous police involvement with the victim and/or family members. The SIO should be informed of any community tensions from scene vigils, funerals, wake etc.
- Establish the extent and nature of the family's contact with the police since the time of the incident/death
- Establish what information has been passed to the family, to whom and by whom
- Establish what information concerning the incident is already in the public domain
- Have the relevant information to hand, for example Information for the Bereaved or the Brake pack
- Review and update the risk assessment following initial contact with the family
- Inform the SIO of any fundraising being undertaken in the event of any social media impact that could affect the family.
- Have the relevant information to hand on to the family, for example information about the Homicide Service, or the Brake pack in incidents of road death

FLOs should be deployed in pairs, particularly in the early stages of the investigation when the need for information is at its highest and the most demand is placed on both the family and the FLO. One of the FLOs can be identified as the Lead FLO with the family while the other can become the Deputy FLO but they must both remain fully up-to-date on the progress of the liaison.

While it is not necessary for both FLOs to be present every time the family is visited, both should attend where corroboration might be needed (e.g. when gathering lifestyle information) or where the risk assessment suggests that having two officers present on each occasion might be advisable. Once all of the initial objectives are achieved the deployment can be reviewed and decisions made as to the continuance of the FLOs. The deployment of FLOs in pairs has benefits for both the family and the investigation, such as when the lead FLO is unavailable for reasons such as sickness, leave, operational or court commitments.

FLO Strategy

A further, more comprehensive strategy can be completed as soon as the facts and family dynamics are known. A Family Liaison Strategy should include the following aims:

- To secure the confidence and trust of the family, thereby enhancing their contribution to the investigation (this can positively impact on the wider issues of community trust and confidence, as well as bringing positive benefits to the investigation);

- To gather material from the family in a manner which contributes to the investigation and preserves its integrity;
- To work with the family in order to comply with their right to receive all relevant information connected with the enquiry, subject to the needs of the investigation, in a way that is proportional to their fundamental right to privacy and family life.
- To ensure that the family are given information about support agencies and that referrals as appropriate are made to the Victim Homicide Service/ the Brake National Road Victim Service / Victim/Witness support/NHS specialist services and other identified credible agencies in accordance with the family's consent and wishes.

These are long terms goals that should remain current throughout the lifetime of any police investigation.

The strategy should also give an overview of the current position of the investigation and family dynamics, the level of involvement, set specific objectives and tasks and establish the parameters of the role.

Full objectives can be set after a review of the Initial Strategy has been undertaken. The objectives may need to be fulfilled within a set timeframe and should constantly be reviewed and updated at regular intervals during the investigation. This will ensure that the objectives are achieved and that any further objectives are reflected in the updated document. If the objectives are not met then the aims will also remain unfulfilled.

The following objectives can be set for Family Liaison, and the tasking of FLOs should allow for the completion of these objectives:

- Gather evidence and information from the family in a manner which contributes to the investigation and preserves its integrity
- Provide information to the family, subject to the needs of the investigation, and in a way that respects their human rights and the need for dignity
- Ensure that the family are provided with information about support that is available, and where appropriate that referrals are made to the relevant support services in accordance with the consent of the family and General Data Protection Regulation 2018
- Explain coronial and victim identification procedures, and criminal justice processes to families
- Explain the police communication and media strategy, and assist the family in managing the potential impact the media may have on them and the investigation
- Ensure health and wellbeing of the family liaison officers
- Conclude or withdraw family liaison deployments

All family liaison strategies should be approved by the SIO, FLC/FLA and FLO and submitted into the Major Incident Room (MIR) for inclusion onto HOLMES or in cases that are not being placed onto HOLMES, submitted with the case papers, or police electronic case systems. Once these objectives have been achieved in full, family liaison deployments may conclude and a withdrawal strategy implemented.

Selecting the FLO

Even though a person has been trained and accredited as an FLO, circumstances may dictate that their deployment to a particular family is inappropriate.

The force should have in place an appropriate selection procedure for deployments. It should also ensure that there are sufficient numbers of appropriately trained FLOs, FLCs and FLAs to meet deployment requirements

It is the FLO's responsibility to inform the SIO or FLC/FLA of any factors they are aware of that are making their deployment or continued deployment in the role inappropriate. Such factors may include:-

- A recent bereavement of a close relative/partner or other major life trauma experienced by the FLO
- Current workload
- How many times the FLO has been deployed recently
- Availability
- Whether the FLO has undertaken their occupational/welfare referrals
- Change in their personal circumstances
- View expressed by the family
- Conflicts within the family

Where the victim's family has specific cultural or diversity needs then consideration should always be given to seeking independent advice to assist with effective communication. An officer or police staff member with specialist skills may be required and should the SIO feel it appropriate to deploy such a person to work alongside the FLO, they should ensure that any risk assessment is updated accordingly, including details of any upskilling that person has been provided with and how any risks will be mitigated.

Tasking the FLO

Any tasks given to the FLO should assist in achieving the objectives set by the SIO. The following may be considered:

- **Gathering evidence and information from the family in a manner which contributes to the investigation and preserves its integrity**
 - Provide information and significant case developments to the family in compliance with the instructions of the SIO
 - Facilitate care and support for the family, in a sensitive and compassionate manner in accordance with the needs of the investigation
 - Comply with The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime 2015 and to ensure families are treated appropriately, professionally and with respect to their needs
 - Take into account cultural and religious considerations or beliefs of the family and bring these to the SIO's attention
 - Record all contact with the family in the FLO Log provided. These contacts must record an overview of the information disclosed to the family and any queries that the family raise

- Document any requests made by the family, which will be forwarded for the consideration of the SIO, and to gather any complaints or requests from the family
 - Provide the family with as full and up-to-date information as possible about the crime and its investigation, ensuring the investigation is not compromised by the injudicious disclosure of information
 - Act as a conduit between the family and the SIO/investigation team
 - Compile a family tree and gather all relevant intelligence emanating from the family
 - Provide details of the SIO to the family and arrange any visits to the family
 - Identify any safeguarding or other critical issues (and ensure this is cascaded to the SIO). Should a family or individual express concern for their personal safety or have been subject to threats or intimidation, they may request police protection or assistance. In all such cases the FLO must act quickly and effectively, informing the SIO without delay
- **Explain Coronial procedures including assisting with identification**
 - Liaise with the Coroner/Procurator Fiscal, particularly in relation to the Human Tissue Act (HTA)
 - Assist in the identification of the deceased, including completing HTA forms at the direction of the Coroner and SIO
 - Seize any exhibits or DNA reference samples as directed by the SIO (provided that this does not compromise the FLO deployment, this may be pertinent to identification)
 - Explain Coronial Inquest procedures
 - Explain the need for a post mortem and the reasons for a potential second post mortem
 - Provide immediate, appropriate information to the family concerning the death of the victim and explain to the family what happens in relation to the body, e.g. the post-mortem(s) and Coroners' processes. The family should be informed of their right to have a representative present at the post-mortem. The family should be also informed around obligations of the HTA
- **Explain the Criminal Justice Process to families**
 - Explain the role of the FLO and SIO
 - Gain views around the obligations under The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime 2015
 - Explain special measures to the family and obtain their views around which, if any, should be applied for. Consideration should be given to their witness status
 - Compile the victimology/antecedent statement and victim personal statements from appropriate family members as directed by the SIO (see Evidence Gathering Practice Advice)
 - Seize any exhibits as directed by the SIO
 - Return any property

- Facilitate the family's wishes to visit the scene. There is a need to balance evidence gathering with the emotional needs of the family (see Viewing Practice Advice)
 - Explain any Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) or Serious Case Review (SCR) procedure
 - Explain court procedure or custody procedure to families
 - Explain the role of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) including the Bereaved Families Scheme (BFS)
 - Explain any post-conviction contact with the National Probation Service
 - In cases where families are frustrated or unhappy with the charging decision, explain to the family their right to review under The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime 2015
 - In any cases of acquittal, explain Justice After Acquittal (JAA)
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- **Ensuring that family members are given information about support agencies and that referrals are made to Homicide Service/the National Road Victim Service by Brake/Victim Support and other organisations in accordance with the family's wishes and General Data Protection Regulation 2018 compliance**
 - Refer the family to support agencies
 - Refer to the Homicide Service in relation to murder/manslaughter as per national protocols
 - Facilitate access to medical services for the family (e.g. family members suffering the effects of trauma)
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- **Explain the police and family media strategy and assist the family in managing any aspect of this**
 - Explain the role of the police media department within an investigation
 - Liaise with the family about any family tributes either to the media outlet or at the location of death, including photographs that the family may wish to release
 - Liaise with the family and provide advice in relation to social media
 - As far as is possible, protect the family from unwarranted media intrusions
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- **Liaise with any statutory or voluntary organisation as directed by the SIO**
 - Post-conviction contact with the National Probation Service
 - Liaise with CPS in relation to the Bereaved Family Scheme
 - Liaise with Social Services, Education, Health
 - Liaise with any appointed legal representative by the family
 - Liaise with Coronial Support Service
 - Liaise with Court/Witness service
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- **Welfare of the FLO (see Welfare Practice Advice)**
 - Attend any welfare referrals or de-briefs

FLOs should be deployed at the earliest possible moment after a risk assessment has been conducted (please see Risk Assessment Practice Advice).

Visiting and Viewing Strategy

There are occasions where visual identification of the person who has died is not possible but nevertheless the family wish to visit their loved one at the mortuary. There are also times when the family wish to see CCTV or body worn camera evidence. This is really important for the family and as far as possible they should be afforded the opportunity for this to happen. It is not for the police to make decisions on behalf of the family but to give them information that enables them to make informed choices. Further information can be found within the practice advice for FLO deployment – identification, visiting, inquests, organ tissue and organ donation.

Record Keeping

Record keeping is essential to the role of family liaison and any FLO who is deployed must commence an FLO log in which to document contact with family, next of kin, representatives of the family and other parties connected to the family. The log should be maintained by the FLO but supervised at regular intervals by the SIO and FLC/FLA, submitted into the Major Incident Room and registered on HOLMES. Where HOLMES is not in use, FLO logs must be included in the manual processes set up in the relevant department and it should also be supervised by the SIO and FLC/FLA.

The purpose of recording contact with a family in the FLO log is to comply with the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act (CPIA) 1996. It is important to retain any other means of recording contact with the family, such as notebooks, for evidential integrity and disclosure purposes. The FLO log also enables the SIO to manage family liaison effectively. It ensures that there is an accurate, accountable and transparent record for any future review process. The integrity of this record is essential and the paper log book should be maintained in a securely bound document with numbered pages. The SIO must ensure that FLO logs are regularly supervised to enable the effective management and conduct of the deployment.

The log should contain the following information:

- Details of all non-sensitive strategic and tactical decisions agreed with the SIO affecting the family liaison strategy
- Date and time of all contacts made including the times of any meetings
- Method of contact, e.g. telephone and venue where applicable, e.g. at home address
- The purpose of contact and any information exchanged
- Details of any complaint made by the family and action taken to appraise the SIO
- Details of any request made by the family
- Details of who initiated the contact, e.g. police, family, others
- Details of non-family members present at meetings (care and discretion should be employed in establishing these details if they are not volunteered or already known)

- All attempts to contact the family or their representatives without success
- All attempts to contact the family which were refused or declined and any reasons given

Assessing the police – family liaison relationship

The quality of the communication with the family is graded by the FLO on a numerical scale from one to three on an ongoing basis as follows:-

1. The police/family relationship is stable with no ongoing or anticipated problems
2. The police/family relationship is giving, or is anticipated to give, cause for concern
3. The police/family relationship is consistently unstable or non-existent and may require the involvement of an intermediary and/or crisis intervention

It is important to note that the grading relates to the quality of the communication between the FLO and the family; it is not a risk assessment. The grading should be recorded by the FLO in the FLO log. The SIO should take such action as may be necessary if the quality of the communication between the FLO and the family deteriorates.

Although the grading is not a risk assessment, it is important to note that it may indicate a change within the FLO deployment. Some extra considerations or support may be necessary in order to mitigate those changes.

Some forces have now moved to electronic log books as a way to document contact with the family. Provided that the integrity of the system is maintained this practice advice will still apply.

Recording of Sensitive Information

During the course of an investigation it is entirely possible that the family will take the FLO into their confidence and disclose sensitive information either about the enquiry or about the family that they want to keep confidential. At no point should the FLO promise or mislead the family that they will protect this information.

The FLO should immediately contact the SIO to discuss how this information should be recorded. Whether this is done via an Officer's Report marked Sensitive or recorded in the FLO log, it is important that the SIO is the decision maker in this process and must always ensure the safety of others within the investigation.

Return of Property

At the conclusion of the police investigation and in accordance with the SIO's policy, the family should be spoken to in order to establish their wishes before any property is cleaned or returned to them. The FLO should liaise closely with the Exhibits Officer on all matters pertaining to exhibits. It is essential that the property is returned rather than collected as this may cause upset and trauma.

Issues concerning wills and probate should be borne in mind prior to returning property to the family. The SIO and force legal teams should be consulted in any case where there is a possibility that property may be subject to a dispute between family members.

The following should be discussed with the family prior to returning property to the family:

- What property is retained by the police (and under what authority i.e. PACE)
- The condition of property
- What property does the family wish to be returned
- How do they want the property returned, e.g. cleaned, in boxes
- The time scale for any return of property

All conversations should be recorded in the FLO log and the return of property should be in compliance with force policy.

Prior to the property being returned to the family it should be inspected by the FLO/Exhibits Officer to ensure that:

- Any police or court exhibit tags have been removed
- Any clothing has been cleaned and pressed when requested to do so
- Any jewellery or other personal effects have been cleaned and properly presented when requested

In relation to the cleaning of property prior to return, it is vital that the family are the decision makers in how this is done. At no point should the FLO or SIO make decisions on behalf of the family. A full explanation and, if possible (where appropriate), a photograph can be used to show the family the full extent of the damage or condition of the property to be returned. This will ensure that the family are suitably informed to make such decisions. Health and safety considerations must always be taken into account whenever property is searched and/or cleaned and this must be fully explained to the family in case this process damages the property.

Further Considerations for Critical Incidents

For incidents that have been declared as a critical incident by a force there may be additional considerations that FLC/FLAs as well as FLOs will need to be aware of. Any additional factors need to be placed into the Family Liaison Strategy and fully explained to the FLO. This may include additional work that the FLO would not normally consider or undertake. The command structure in such incidents may include:

- Gold Command – The Gold Commander assumes and retains overall command for any operation or incident. They do not make tactical decisions but may want additional considerations for family liaison. These should be discussed with the SIO/Lead Investigator and FLC/FLA prior to inclusion in any strategy
- PIP 4 – it is important that FLOs and FLC/FLAs understand the role of a PIP 4

Clear terms of reference should be set for all parties to ensure management of all the communication between the family, SIO/Lead Investigator, FLO, FLC/FLA and PIP 4 in compliance with the rules of CPIA.

Attendance at court and funerals

FLOs should not make promises to families around attendance at court without first discussing with the SIO and FLC/FLA. Any attendance at court should have the express permission of the SIO/Lead Investigator.

FLOs should not routinely attend funerals without:-

- Being invited by the family
- Discussing and obtaining express permission of the SIO
- The requisite risk assessment being completed

Withdrawal Strategy for the FLO

FLOs must remain focused on their primary role as an investigator throughout the deployment. Where the FLO has developed a good relationship with the family, there is potential for the family to become over-reliant on the FLO and vice versa. The implications of this could have a long-term detrimental effect on both the family and the FLO. Effective supervision and monitoring of the workload of the FLO will help to minimise this.

Withdrawal strategies must be well timed, caring and considerate when implemented. A visit from the SIO and the FLO to explain the procedure from that point is likely to be appropriate and the FLO must not be left to do this alone.

The withdrawal strategy should consider support for the family once the FLO has withdrawn and in cases where the family are supported by other partner agencies, e.g. the Homicide Service, due consideration to notifying them of the withdrawal should be given.

It should be explained to the family that the objectives for police family liaison are now complete and there will be no further contact from the police Family Liaison Officers. The family should be provided with any contact details of support agencies who can offer further advice. If there are other agencies involved the family should be given the relevant contact details of the person who will provide information to them. If necessary the FLO can assist in a handover meeting with the family (with their consent).

Upon withdrawal, the FLO will inform the family that should they wish to contact the FLO it should be done via the usual channels of switchboard or, if the call is of an urgent or emergency nature, the family are to be directed to call 999 or 101.

In cases where it is necessary to maintain contact with a family over a long period of time, consideration should be given to how family liaison will continue. A single point of contact (SPOC) might be introduced to the family to act as a conduit for communication between them and the enquiry team. The SPOC can also be the contact for the family where they have particular concerns about the investigation, but any welfare issues must be passed on to a suitable support organisation for them to assist the family.