



FAMILY LIAISON PRACTICE ADVICE - RISK MANAGEMENT AND ASSESSMENT

All investigations involve an element of risk, how that risk is managed is important to the investigation. Family Liaison is no different; any rationale should be clearly thought out and recorded to ensure that effective decision making remains transparent and in the best interests for both the family and the investigation.

Risk assessment and management is a dynamic process subject to constant change. The level of risk should be reviewed regularly, along with any interventions put in place, to ensure that they remain appropriate to the situation, provide reassurance and reduce the likelihood of further victimisation.

Risk Assessment – FLO deployments

All police forces have a statutory obligations under the Health and Safety At Work Act 1974 towards Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) and the people that they work with. Therefore a force must ensure that:

- FLOs are volunteers with operational experience and knowledge of the potential risks associated with policing.
- An appropriate selection procedure exists within their force that is designed to evaluate the suitability of each officer for the role.
- Officers selected as FLOs receive the recommended training prior to their deployment.
- FLOs are dual deployed to every incident and any deviation should be subject to a policy decision

While performing the role:

- Staff have access to occupational health (see welfare practice advice advice)
- Have clear lines of communication with their line manager, Senior Investigative Officer or deputy, and FLC/FLA (see tasking, briefing practice advice)
- Have regular briefings and debriefings (see tasking, briefing practice advice)
- Attend their forces CPD events as outlined within their force policy

The SIO has the responsibility for ensuring that risk assessments are completed prior to the deployment of any FLO. The SIO has a duty of care to the staff performing the role, and to others likely to be affected by it. The FLO, FLC and FLA also have a responsibility to inform the SIO of any changes in circumstances to either them or the investigation as this may have a direct impact on ongoing risk assessment and management.

A risk assessment is required to identify and minimise any risk specific to that particular investigation and FLO deployment. A new risk assessment should be completed for every FLO deployment.

A risk assessment should be undertaken prior to the deployment of FLOs, it should be continuously reviewed and updated during the investigation. All risk assessments must identify, assess and manage the risks.

All risk assessments should be submitted and retained by the investigation(e.g. Major Incident Room (MIR) for homicide investigations). Retention should comply with obligations under the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996.

Risk Management Plan

Mitigation of identified risks should be considered in accordance with the College of Policing risk principles.

This may include:

- Appointing an FLO that is a police officer (in order to carry appointments)
- FLOs being in possession of their public protection equipment
- Referral of families to other partner agencies

The SIO will be responsible for any decision to disseminate information to other organisations who may be involved with the family.

As outlined in the practice advice for strategies, briefing, tasking and withdrawal (Assessing the police – family liaison relationship – page 9), the quality of the communication with the family is graded by the FLO on a numerical scale from one to three. The grading relates to the quality of the communication between the FLO and family. The grading should be recorded by the FLO in the log book. The SIO should take such action as may be necessary if the quality of the communication between the FLO and the family deteriorates.

The FLO may deal with families that have never had any association or interaction with the police previously or contain individuals whose expectations are unrealistic, which may conflict with the FLO strategy. In such cases the FLO may have genuine intentions to please the family and may disclose information that the SIO has not sanctioned. This may have been done in an attempt to ease pressure on themselves or in a belief that they are helping the family. This has the potential to undermine the relationship with the SIO and/or the police and the interaction should be monitored and assessed.

The following should be considered when conducting a risk assessment for family liaison:-

In all cases

- The FLO is required to work within the guidelines and aims and objectives within the FLO strategy.
- The FLO is also required to adhere within the standards of behaviours and the code of ethics for police officers and police staff to protect both the family and the investigation.

- Consideration must be given as to whether the FLO is fit to do the job (training, CPD activity, occupational health, workload, leave, other life experiences/issues, etc).
- It is essential that any addresses to be visited are viewed as a workplace for the FLO and that any risks are mitigated. FLOs are likely to spend a considerable amount of time at the premises of the family of the deceased. It is, therefore crucial that the environment is not detrimental to their health.
- FLOs should conduct a dynamic risk assessment prior to any visit, considering any aggravating factors. Prior to the development of the FLOs the addresses to be visited may be the only known fact that can be evaluated for the purposes of the initial risk assessment. A thorough search of databases should be conducted in a bid to establish as much information as possible about the premises and occupants including locality of the home to the offence. Consideration for visits be made by appointment only to reduce unknown risks to both the family and the FLO may be considered
- What is the classification status of the family i.e. significant witness? It may be the family's vulnerability is the risk, which should be mitigated by appropriate referrals to partner agencies (with their consent) in accordance with agreed protocols.
- The risk assessment should also take account of any community tension that exists in that location and any changes in tension revealed during the course of the ongoing assessment. Any changes in the environment may have a bearing on the potential for risk or level of harm to the family, officers or others. If such a change occurs, the SIO should examine the reason for the change and the need for liaison at that location. This should also be shared by the SIO in order for any community impact considerations to be taken.
- What are the threats to others? e.g. Homicide Service, other organisations, data protection, duty of care, statutory obligations – how will this be shared and what is the legality to share?

Case specific

- Are there any threats from Social Media? Media attention should also be a consideration, what is released in media outlets could have a huge bearing on family liaison, particularly if there are things being posted on social media, or reported on, that cannot be confirmed or are being speculated on. These may pose mistrust in the police and hence should be as far as possible mitigated.
- Are any media outlets contacting family, friends or neighbours which the family are finding difficult?
- How difficult family dynamics/culture/religion within the family will be addressed, particularly if this is the motive for the offence?
- In particular are there any cultural issues around release of the body to the family?
- Is the nationality of the victim/family a consideration? i.e. will there be a need to repatriate to another country and how will this impact on the investigation of the families ability to repatriate and will the Consulate/Embassy be able to assist?
- Risk of violence from any family members, associates/neighbours etc. It is difficult to evaluate how people will react during the early stages of the grieving

process; their reaction could depend on previous experiences or their view of the treatment they have received. In addition to this, the potential for harm might increase in the event of others in the community adversely judging the family of a suspect.

- Harm to the officer before deployment or to the officer's safety on being deployed to a location/house/family.
- Are the police patrolling the area due to community tension or threats to police/family? Is high visibility policing being conducted?
- Are there any community impact issues likely to arise from community tension, scene vigil, funeral, wake – the SIO must be informed of these to make informed decisions.
- In relation to explaining graphic injuries, viewing CCTV or listening to distressing telephone calls; what support will be put in place for this to be facilitated?
- Any changes to the community impact assessment that has an impact on family liaison should be shared with the SIO for any dissemination to the deployed family liaison officers.
- What are the investigative risks?
- If there are parallel investigations being conducted and media releases occur, what are the impact issues for the organisation?
- Is there any fundraising being undertaken and are there any issues associated with this i.e. fraud or family dynamics/fallouts.
- What/if any are the additional considerations of any Gold or Silver Group?

One of the fundamental principles of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime 2015 is to receive support to help them, as far as possible, to cope and recover and to be protected from re-victimisation.

We must ensure that information is passed, with consent, to victim support services. In relation to murder/manslaughter investigations that will be within the nationally agreed protocol with the Homicide Service, . In relation to other fatalities, it should be in line with agreed protocols within respective forces. However, the following risks should be considered and mitigated:-

- Are any of the families vulnerable and how will this be managed
- What support services will they be referred to.
- In view of the fact that vulnerability could be permanent, temporary, situational or circumstantial, what and who are the appropriate support agencies.
- What vulnerability exists?
 - Is it the family circumstances (i.e. child at risk, suspect within the family, family alienated from the rest of the family)
 - Is it the circumstances of the family i.e. dependency on illicit drugs or prescription medication, alcohol?
 - Is it their health physical, mental, emotional well-being?
 - Is it their economic circumstances? i.e. their house has been taken as a scene and the family are now without money, clothing and their home.

Review

It is vital that risk assessments are reviewed throughout the investigation and should be seen as an ongoing and dynamic process.