



FAMILY LIAISON PRACTICE ADVICE - DEPLOYMENT TO REPORTS OF CHILD DEATH

This guidance provides practice advice on dealing with the deployment of trained Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) to child death investigations.

This document is intended to assist Senior Investigating Officers (SIOs), Family Liaison Co-ordinators (FLCs), Family Liaison Advisors (FLAs), FLOs and any police personnel with a specific interest in child death, in order to inform strategy and direction. This advice is solely aimed at those cases where a decision is made to deploy FLOs and highlights what considerations should be taken into account.

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

This advice does not replace any legislation nor the APP for child death investigations. The relevant legislation, reports and APP can be found on the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice, Major Investigation and Public Protection section.

Background

One of the first considerations regarding FLO deployments to reports of child death is to minimise distress and ensure that a high quality of service to the families and carers is provided. Any deployment of FLOs to the family should be carefully considered and a comprehensive strategy completed, clearly outlining the role and tasks expected of them. FLOs are a finite resource with their primary function being that of an investigator. There must be an investigative function to any deployment and they should never be deployed solely to act as a support function; that is not their role.

Police actions in relation to support for families

The trauma associated with a child death investigation may place families under immense pressure and stress. Investigators are likely to require them to provide detailed information and there may also be intrusive public and media interest.

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The information required by families and carers during a child death investigation will depend on the circumstances of the case; however, police officers or staff with responsibility for investigating a child death must be able to support their needs by:

- Securing 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);
- Gathering material and information from the family in a manner which contributes to the investigation and preserves its integrity;
- Working 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 considers their human rights;
- Ensure that the family are given information about support agencies and that referrals as appropriate are made to the Victim Homicide Service / Victim / Witness Support / NHS specialist services and other identified credible agencies in accordance with the family's consent and wishes.

Consideration of when FLOs will be deployed to child death investigations

FLOs will always be deployed to child death investigations in the following circumstances:

- A homicide investigation where it is suspected that a child has been murdered;
- A road traffic collision where a child has died;
- A DVI investigation where a child has died;
- Rail fatalities involving a child victim

The deployment of an FLO **may** be considered in deaths that involve the following:

- Any criminal investigation where a child has died and a forensic post-mortem is taking place;
- Where a 'Looked After' child has died and there is likely to be an investigation into the circumstances, or other multi-agency parallel investigations, and the deployment of an FLO is needed to gather information and evidence from the family;
- Where the death is a critical incident and there will be some form of police investigation;
- Where there has been a referral to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) around the response to the death of a child (unless the IOPC have deployed their own FLO).

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In order to decide whether an FLO should be deployed to a child death investigation it is important to define what their role would be, and what assistance they could provide to both the family and to the investigation:

- Why are the services of the FLO being sought?
- What will they do?
- How will they be tasked and by whom?
- How will they be supported and supervised?
- What type of investigation is it?
- How will any risk be managed?

Deploying an FLO will bring expectations that information will be shared in a professional and timely manner and that the updates will be meaningful. If this is not done, then the family may feel exasperated, frustrated and let down and it could lead to reputational issues for the force.

The role of the Family Liaison Officer in child death investigations

The aims and objectives of any FLO deployment are contained within the practice advice for strategies, briefing, tasking and withdrawal.

It is also important when there is a child death investigation that objectives are set for the FLO deployment that reflect what investigative tasks need to be carried out, e.g., what exhibits need to be taken (should there be a need for identification at a later stage). These can include medical notes, dental records, photographs, or any other exhibits to aid identification.

It is also important to identify what other tasks the FLO is going to undertake and to whom they should report. With families that are divided or estranged, the strategy needs to reflect what tasks the FLOs are carrying out from which part(s) of the family. Consideration should be given to deploying different FLOs to estranged families but it is essential that the same information is given to the families simultaneously.

Victimology criteria also needs to be set for the FLO, so that all investigative leads can be fully explored. The FLO should be briefed and tasked on a daily basis by the Investigating Officer (IO), SIO, Senior Identification Manager (SIM) or FLC/FLA and any actions should be given during that briefing.

One of the primary concerns of family members will be the need for information. The family must be provided with timely information, so far as the investigation permits. The FLO should have direct communication with the SIO in connection with their role and issues concerning the family. Any information released to the family must first be authorised by the SIO. If the FLO is not updated regularly with the progress of the investigation, they will not be able to update the family.

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Additional Advice in relation to Child Deaths

It is entirely possible that in any death where a child has died (and in particular if the potential defendant is a family member) there will be other parallel investigations to consider. In particular there will be a child death review (multi-agency), the overall purpose of which is to understand why children die and put in place interventions to protect other children and prevent future deaths.

In those cases where a parent, or both parents have been declared a suspect, there will always be a balance between being open and honest with the family and not providing investigative information that will hinder the investigation. Careful consideration needs to be taken in respect of any FLO deployment to a family where the suspect is also a bereaved family member. Any information given should not include investigative updates that could be used to prepare a defence, or provide the opportunity to dispose of any evidence. The integrity of any information given should stand any test of scrutiny and there should be no breaches of PACE by unauthorised conversations between police and designated suspects. Information given should also not compromise any suspect status, or compromise any safety of an individual.

In cases where both parents are suspects, FLOs could be deployed to grandparents or other siblings (depending on age) but the advice below should be taken into account at all times. It may be appropriate for engagement to be through a legal representative acting on their behalf, or another family member who can provide the appropriate information. This is to protect both the suspect(s) and the integrity of the police investigation.

In relation to other family members who are not suspects, careful consideration should also be given to what information is provided. It should, however, include information that treats them as victims and updates them on the progress of the investigation, but does not compromise them as victims/witnesses.

At some point there may also be a need for a victimology interview. It is also important to note that the family may have information vital to the investigation and also instrumental to building a picture of the relationships the deceased had with any family member. An interview adviser can advise on the victimology process in relation to the family members to be interviewed.

The FLC/FLA and FLO should always be in consultation with the SIO to identify what category of person the family members are and how this may impact on the FLO deployment.

Multi-Agency Support

Information sharing protocols with the other agencies will assist in the support for the family.

It is possible that Family Court issues will be running alongside the investigation, particularly if the designated suspect has any parental responsibility for other children

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within the household. This emphasises the importance of the FLO deployment and the need for the risk assessment strategy to be recorded, constantly reviewed and updated.

Should child protection matters be identified, these will be dealt with under child protection procedures and will need managing; it is important that the FLC/FLA supports the SIO in this process.

Attendance of an FLO at child protection strategy discussions or case conferences should be discussed and agreed with the SIO. This is so that updates regarding the investigation are agreed by the SIO prior to attendance.

It is important that consideration is given to any decision to change school or move house during the multi-agency meetings and that the FLO is updated on this. Any decisions made via Child Protection will have a direct impact on the relationship that the FLO has with the family/solicitor. If decisions made within the child protection case conferences are made without informing the FLO, this could lead to a deterioration of relationships with the family and may compromise the investigation and give rise to potential safety and reputational issues.

Discussions surrounding wellbeing and how to ensure the best care for the family that does not compromise the investigation should also take place. This can also include any extra measures that would support the family, e.g., referral to mental health agencies, etc.

Family Support

It is essential that due care is given to the family's welfare in all cases, irrespective of the extent of their co-operation with the police investigation. It is important to remember that stress may have an adverse impact on their emotional wellbeing. The family's wellbeing should be an ongoing consideration and it is important to facilitate their access to such support as is appropriate in the circumstances.

Even if the family refuse the help and assistance of organisations, it is important for this to be revisited in order to ensure sufficient support is given to the family. In particular, if there is high level of media interest in the case, it is likely to lead to significant stress on the family and there is a duty of care for FLOs to identify suitable support for them.

Enquiries surrounding child death specialist or bereavement nurses should also be made in compliance with force protocols.

In addition to the APP and the section within the Practice Advice on Evidence Gathering, Victimology and Information Sharing/Working with the Family (particularly

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around referrals to The Homicide Service and the National Road Victim Service), the following organisations may assist at an appropriate time:-

Embrace

Supporting children, young people and families who are victims of crime

Helpline: 0345 60 999 60

www.embracecvov.org.uk

The Lullaby Trust

Bereavement support

Helpline Tel: 0808 8026868

Website: www.lullabytrust.org.uk

Child Bereavement UK

Helpline: 0800 028 8840

Website: www.childbereavement.uk.org

Cruse

Bereavement support.

Helpline 0844 477 9400

Website: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends

Bereavement Support for child loss

Helpline Tel 0117 953 9639

Website: www.tcf.org.uk

The Child Death Helpline

Bereavement helpline for child loss

Helpline Tel: 0800 282986

Website: www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk

Winston's Wish

Guidance and support for families with bereaved siblings

Helpline Tel: 0845 2030405

Website: www.winstonswish.org.uk

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

Helpline: 0844 561 6855

Website: www.uk-sobs.org.uk

SANDS – Stillbirth & Neonatal Death Society

Supporting anyone affected by the death of a baby

Website: www.uk-sands.org

Helpline: 020 7436 5881

Children and bereavement

www.nhs.uk

2 Wish upon a Star

Bereavement support

Telephone: 01443 853125

Website: www.2wishuponastar.org

In the event of a family being bereaved by road death, and there being surviving children in the family, the family should always be given, along with the Brake pack about road crash bereavement, the Brake children's book "Someone has died in a road crash" and the accompanying book for carers.

Assist Trauma Care

Telephone: 01788 551919

Website: www.assisttraumacare.org.uk

Police Support

National Crime Agency:

CEOP: Police officers/staff who wish to contact CEOP should liaise with their CEOP SPOC within their own force so that they can contact CEOP's Single Point of Entry Team.

Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS): employs a number of specialist services including:-

- ❖ National SIO Advisor (NSIOA)
- ❖ Crime Investigation Support Officer (CISO)
- ❖ National Injuries Database (NID)
- ❖ National Forensic Specialist Advisor (NFSA)
- ❖ National Family Liaison Advisor

Contact details NCA MCIS 0345 000 5463