

Notification Visit

TRAINING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this session you will be able to:

- Identify prescribed CACO guidelines and procedures
- Describe the communication principles that can be applied to increase CACO effectiveness
- Describe a range of potential survivor reactions and appropriate CACO responses
- Identify the stages of a grief "process" model and implications for changing communication requirements

CACO Self-Awareness Survey

(This survey is only for your own information. There are no "right" answers.)

1. At this point in my life, I would describe my personal experience with death as:
 none
 very limited
 moderate
 extensive

2. I would say that my primary feeling about death is one of _____

3. To date, my most significant loss through death has been _____

4. When I witnessed or heard about that death, my first reaction was _____

5. To me, the most difficult part of adjusting to and recovering from that death was _____

6. I have have not had the experience of telling another person that a loved one has died.

7. At this point, my biggest fear about making a notification visit is _____

8. For me, the most difficult next of kin reaction to deal with would be _____

9. I think I would handle that type of reaction by _____



COMMAND RESPONSIBILITY

- POSITIVE ID OF INDIVIDUAL
- PCR WITHIN 4 HOURS OF INITIAL REPORT OF DEATH
- POINT OF CONTACT WITH COMMAND AVAILABLE AT ALL HOURS
- ESCORT FOR REMAINS
- PERSONAL EFFECTS INVENTORIED AND SECURED, IF NOT CRIME SCENE
- JAGMAN INVESTIGATION



PREPARATION FOR NOTIFICATION

- **ALWAYS IN COMPANY OF ANOTHER PERSON, PREFERABLY A CHAPLAIN**
- **APPROPRIATE UNIFORM (SW or SDB)**
- **USE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT VEHICLE ON FIRST VISIT**
- **MAKE CONTACT WITH NEXT OF KIN, IN PERSON, IMMEDIATELY, NORMALLY BETWEEN 0600-2400**



THE NOTIFICATION VISIT

- INFORM OF CURRENT LOCATION OF REMAINS.
- INFORM THAT LETTER WILL BE SENT BY CORE CIRCUMSTANCES/EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES OF CASUALTY.
- BEFORE DEPARTING RESIDENCE MAKE SURE THE NOK IS **NOT** ALONE.
- ASSURE NEXT OF KIN OF YOUR CONTINUED AVAILABILITY.
- LEAVE CALLING CARD; INCLUDE YOUR HOME PHONE NUMBER FOR AFTER HOURS ACCESSIBILITY.
- WEAR YOUR KAHKIS IN SUBSEQUENT VISITS



THE NOTIFICATION VISIT

- USE THE WORD **“DEAD”**, **“DECEASED”**
- BE PREPARED FOR RANGE OF REACTIONS EXHIBITED BY THE NOK.
- BE A GOOD LISTENER.
- ONLY PROVIDE INFORMATION YOU KNOW IS **FACTUAL AND CORRECT**.
- KEEP CONVERSATION LOGS
- MAKE COPY OF ALL DOCUMENTS
- CLOSE CASE WITH A FINAL VISIT

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NOTES

First In-Person Contact



Summary of Key Points

Notification



See pages 2-10 to 2-13 for further information.

KEY POINTS FOR INITIAL IN-PERSON CONTACT

The information and examples in this list were compiled from interviews with experienced CACOs. These insights and approaches have been developed in a broad range of hands-on situations.

1. Use your introduction to confirm the identity of the next of kin.
 - A. Use the next of kin's name and the decedent's name as you introduce yourself and any others who are with you.

Example: Mrs. Brown, I'm Warrant Officer Thomas Gray and this is Chaplain Orvec. We have some news about your husband, LT Frank Brown. May we speak with you?

- B. If the decedent has a common name, or there is other reason to doubt the next of kin's identity, ask for confirmation.

Example: Let me make sure that our information is correct. Are you the wife of LT Frank L. Brown who is assigned to the USS X?

2. Make every attempt to inform the next of kin in private.

- A. If you are at the residence, ask if you may come in.

- A fearful survivor who has guessed the reason for your visit may refuse permission, irrationally believing that the message will not be delivered (and will not be true) if you are not admitted.
- Talk quietly to the next of kin until you can gain approval for entering the house and closing the door.

Example: Could we please just step inside the door, Mrs. Brown? We need to talk with you privately.

- The important point is to not enter without permission.

- B. If at a next of kin's place of employment, try to arrange a private room through the employer.

Example: Is there somewhere we could talk privately with Mrs. Brown for a few minutes?

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3. In most circumstances, it is preferable to have the next of kin come to a realization of what has happened on his or her own, and to be the first one to ask whether their Navy relative is dead.

- A. In the following example, the CACO's statements are given with typical responses from the next of kin. There may be no response at all as each of the statements is made, or the NOK may jump immediately to the conclusion and state that the member is dead.

Example:

CACO: I am LT Paula Smith, USN. Are you the mother of LT Frank L. Brown?

NOK: Yes, I am.

CACO: I have some news for you about your son.

NOK: He isn't dead, is he? Is he dead?

CACO: Yes, he is. I'm sorry to tell you that your son is dead.

- B. Some CACOs may prefer a more direct method such as the example below.

Example:

CACO: I am LT Paula Smith, USN. Are you the mother of LT Frank L. Brown?

NOK: Yes, I am.

CACO: On behalf of the Secretary of the Navy, I am sorry to inform you that your son was in a traffic accident in Rome, Italy, and was reported dead at 8:00 this morning.

NOK: No, there must be some mistake. Where did you get your information?

CACO: Regrettably it is true. It was reported by his commanding officer. I am deeply sorry.

4. Avoid euphemisms or vague language that may delay the NOK's acceptance of what has occurred.

The words "dead" and "death" have a finality that has been found to be helpful for gaining NOK acceptance that the event has happened.

5. Gauge your next actions on the NOK's response.
 - A. The next of kin may want more information immediately. If so, give as much information as you know, speaking slowly, and pausing to respond if the NOK interrupts with questions.
 - B. If the NOK remains silent after you have confirmed that the Navy member is dead, it is usually safe to proceed with details.

6. Be prepared for any one of a wide range of responses.

People react to the news of sudden losses in unpredictable ways. These reactions can include:

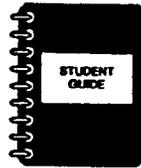
- Physical reactions, including fainting, hyperventilating, nausea and vomiting, cardiac arrest, or self-inflicted injuries
 - One experienced CACO makes a practice of writing the next of kin's address on his hand before he begins the visit. In this way, he is prepared to give the address quickly and accurately in case a call to 911 or other emergency help is required.
- Anger or even rage that includes screaming and attempting to strike the CACO or others
 - Irrational rage is dangerous to others. People who lose control to this extent cannot be reasoned with, and usually have no memory of their actions after the event. In general, if the situation becomes dangerous, go to a safe location and contact the authorities as well as the CACO Coordinator.
 - If the NOK reacting with irrational anger insists that a CACO leave the residence, the CACO should leave immediately. To not do so has been found to be categorized as trespassing. Leave a completed CACO Call Card for the NOK's future reference.
- Abnormal denial reactions that make the NOK unable to process the news
 - A denial reaction is nature's anesthetic that allows humans to continue to function in the face of events that would otherwise be devastating.
 - Extreme denial reactions go beyond this natural numbing, and leave a person immobilized.
 - Most abnormal denial reactions are self-limiting, and pass into slow acceptance. However, if the NOK continues to deny that the death has occurred or to refuse to deal with the event after a few hours have passed, medical help may be necessary.

- Apparent disinterest
 - Experienced CACOs report instances where the NOK appears to be untouched by the news of the member's death. "When do I get my insurance check?" or "Well, let's get on with it," are examples of these types of responses.
 - These types of reactions may be one form of denial, or may, indeed, be a lack of emotional loss.
- Uncontrolled grief and hysteria
 - Crying is a normal and common reaction. However, some NOKs react with uncontrollable grief that can include screaming, sobbing, tearing at clothing, and self-injury actions such as hair pulling or face scratching.
 - If the NOK's reaction seems clearly to be one of hysteria, summon medical help, and talk quietly and soothingly until help arrives. What you say is less important than a slow, low monotonous voice.

Example: I understand, Mrs. Green. Yes. I'm here to help you. I understand. I understand.

7. Do not assume that the NOK will hear accurately or remember anything that you say.
 - A. The natural anesthetic that allows humans to function in the face of events that would otherwise be overwhelming takes effect immediately.
 - B. Most people who have sustained unexpected catastrophic losses report that they have no recollection or only hazy memories of what they heard, said, or did in the first hours or even days after the event.
 - C. Experienced CACOs report that they always make sure that another adult is present when important information is being given to the next of kin, and that this information is repeated to the other person.
 - In the past, Navy family members have sometimes complained about being given faulty information or not being given information that they needed.
 - It seems reasonable to assume that the CACO may have given the information, but that the NOK could not hear it or did not remember receiving it.

Communication Principles



NOTES

See pages 2-15 to 2-19 for further information.

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES FOR CACO ASSIGNMENTS

Human communication is a complex process under any circumstance. A CACO assignment involves many factors that can be barriers to effective communication: 1) strong emotions, 2) negative events and information that can trigger defensiveness, 3) complicated facts, and 4) the possibility of long-term assignments with changing communication requirements. Although the principles below are listed in these categories, many are obviously interrelated.

Responding to Emotion

Many people are uncomfortable in the face of strong emotion, particularly when there is nothing that can be done to change or "fix" the basic situation. Two principles are important to remember:

- A strong emotional response is normal and usually therapeutic. "Controlling" one's emotions in the face of tragedy is a learned response that saps energy. Those who can release some of their emotional reaction immediately are often better able to deal with the details and decisions that must be made later. A quiet, stoic initial response may seem more "rational," but may actually have more negative long-term effects on communication.
- The most effective responses to strong emotions are empathetic listening and calm acceptance. Emotional responses can run their course more quickly in an atmosphere that is supportive and accepting. This kind of acceptance is demonstrated, more than stated. The following factors are important:
 - **Listen.** Listening is a CACO's most valuable communication tool, and can be demonstrated through both words and actions. A steady gaze at the NOK and nodding are perceived as signs of listening. Softly-spoken words such as "I see" or "I understand" or a nonverbal "Um hum" are beneficial. Barriers to listening include thinking of other things or framing a response while the other is speaking.
 - **Be aware of tone of voice and facial expression.** What is actually said is less important than the tone of voice a CACO uses and the expressions on his or her face. If words and nonverbal communication are not in agreement, nonverbal communication is more likely to be believed.
 - **Do not argue, defend, rationalize or justify.** Accepting an emotional response includes listening to whatever is said without argument or judgment. One type of normal reaction that may be difficult to deal with is the NOK's seeking someone or something to blame for the loss. There is usually little logic or reasoning involved.

Examples:

- "He should never have joined the Navy."
- "This is the President's fault."
- "He didn't get enough training."
- "Why did God do this to me?"

In most cases, the NOK does not really expect a response to the statement or question. If the NOK seems to be waiting for a reaction, simply repeat back what has been said.

Example:

- CACO: You feel he should not have joined the Navy.
- NOK: That's right. If he hadn't, he would still be alive.
- CACO: I see.

Another type of response is to attempt to acknowledge the grief and loss behind the statement. "I know this is a terrible loss for you" is usually effective.

- Avoid phrases or platitudes that might appear to diminish the importance of the loss. **FOR THE MOMENT**, the NOK's greatest need is for those present to recognize and acknowledge the enormity of the loss. Phrases such as "it's for the best" or "you'll feel better soon" are often ineffective. Pointing out positive factors such as bravery or service may be comforting later, but are usually not helpful at this time.
- Avoid language that may be perceived as impersonal. The formal words and phrases that are called for in official communication may appear impersonal and uncaring to some NOKs. While many legal and procedural issues require official language, personal expressions of sympathy are likely to be more effective. A simple "I'm very sorry" is the most common personal statement.

Minimizing Defensiveness

The most common human response to negative events and information is defensiveness. The defensive mechanisms that fall naturally into place can hamper clear communication and turn even trivial exchanges into misunderstandings and conflict. The following guidelines are useful for minimizing defensiveness.

- Use positive language whenever possible. Even the most negative information can be reframed to emphasize positive aspects. For example:

Negative:

"The funeral cannot be scheduled yet because we do not know when the remains will be received."

"I do not have that information now, and will not know until tomorrow."

Positive:

"The funeral can be scheduled as soon as we know when the remains will be received."

"I will have that information tomorrow."

The phrases have identical meanings, but the first ones are far more likely to trigger a defensive response.

- Avoid sentences that start with "you" in situations that could be perceived as demanding or critical. People often react defensively to words that emphasize their own behaviors.

"These forms must be completed." RATHER THAN "You must complete these forms."

"These forms still need to be completed." RATHER THAN "You still have not filled out these forms."

- Whenever possible, ask questions rather than "telling." Most people respond more positively when they feel a degree of choice or control in situations. Defensiveness can be minimized by asking NOKs for their opinions, and providing as many choices as possible, even in such simple matters as sequence of items to be discussed.

"Which would you like to discuss first, the honor guard or the obituary notice?"

RATHER THAN "We'll start with the honor guard arrangements."

"Would you like for me to explain your options on funeral arrangements?"

RATHER THAN "The burial benefits offered by Decedent Affairs are something you should consider."

- When possible, be specific about problem areas such as missing information. In situations with many complicated information requirements, problems can be common, and can be a major source of defensiveness and resistance. Defensiveness can usually be reduced by avoiding general statements, and dealing instead with specific needs.

"Two information blocks are incomplete."

RATHER THAN: "We have to re-do the paperwork."

Dealing with Complicated Information

Many of a CACO's responsibilities involve giving out and explaining complex information about benefits or procedures. Even in normal circumstances, most people can only process two or three pieces of new information at a time. In the events surrounding a CACO assignment, it is even more difficult to present information so that it is accurately received and understood.

- **"Chunk" information.** When presenting or explaining a large amount of information, pause after presenting two or three facts. Even if there are no questions, this pause will give the NOK time to process the information before moving on.
- **Check frequently for understanding.** Do not wait for the NOK to seek clarification. Probe for understanding. Use phrases such as "How is this sounding?" and "What do you think so far?" rather than simply asking if there are questions.
- **Summarize often.** Rephrase and summarize the key points that have been covered in a major segment.
- **Have the NOK summarize.** The acid test of whether or not complex information has been understood is if it can be stated accurately by the listener. It is more effective to ask for a summary in a way that places the responsibility for understanding on the CACO, rather than the NOK.

Example: "Could you please summarize what I have said so that I can see if I explained it clearly?"

A summary can also be followed by a discussion, prompted by a question such as "What do you see as the most important points?"

Dealing with Long-Term Assignments

CACO assignments can range from a few hours to many months. In extended assignments, communication needs change over time. Two kinds of communication problems are common: 1) the NOK may become frustrated and angry with slow progress, or 2) the NOK may show signs of becoming too dependent on the CACO. The following approaches will help to avoid both of these problems.

- **Establish short-, medium-, and long-term goals.** As the situation changes, the purposes and goals of communication between the CACO and NOK also change. This process can be facilitated by establishing interim and final goals, and discussing them with the NOK. Measuring and acknowledging progress compared to these goals is a useful tool for keeping communication open and reducing frustration.

- **Identify and discuss milestones and changes.** As each milestone is reached, any changes in communication goals and patterns can be identified and discussed. For example, advising the NOK in advance that calls will be decreasing will help to avoid surprises and negative feelings of resentment at being "abandoned."
- **Involve other resources as needed.** In some long-term assignments, ongoing NOK needs will ultimately be passed off to other support services. Planning for and discussing this long-term strategy can be included as part of the mid- and long-term goal setting process.
- **"Close" the assignment.** In all CACO assignments that include substantial periods of CACO-NOK interaction, a final call or visit to acknowledge that the assignment is finished is usually beneficial. This action is especially helpful after a long-term assignment. The discussion can be opened with a statement such as "We have reached all of our goals" or "Everything has been completed." A closing statement such as "It has been an honor to serve you" can provide a sense of closure for both the NOK and the CACO.

Stages of Grief

- . Shock and Denial
- . Expression of Emotion
- . Depression and Loneliness
- . Physical Symptoms of Distress
- . Panic
- . Sense of Guilt
- . Hostility and Resentment
- . Inability to Return to Usual Activities
- . Hope
- . Readjustment to Reality

Notification



NOTES

KEY POINTS

Sources of help and information for families:

- CACO Handbook resource list (pages 67-69)
- Family minister/priest/rabbi
- Family Service Centers
- Ombudsman Program Volunteers

See pages 2-21 to 2-24 for further information.

THE STAGES OF GRIEF

The generally accepted stages of grieving that occur as a reaction to loss include:

Shock and denial

- Viewed as a *temporary* anesthesia that helps the individuals cope until they are ready to face the grim reality of the loss--as long as it is temporary, it is good.

Expression of emotion

- Individuals need to express their feelings, and should do so--by not doing so, barriers are erected that prolong the grief process.

Depression and loneliness

- It is important to recognize that this is normal and a part of grieving.

Physical symptoms of distress

- Sometimes unresolved grief can manifest itself in physical illness. When this occurs, professional help is usually necessary to work through the feelings of loss.

Panic

- The individual thinks about his/her loss so much that it may lead to an inability to concentrate, fearful feelings, or a desire to run away. While these feelings are to be expected, prolonging them will likely slow down the grieving process.

Sense of guilt

- People often feel guilty after a loved one dies about things they said or did not say or about things they did or did not do--unresolved guilt may be very long lasting if it is ignored.

Hostility and resentment

- As individuals begin to express their emotions, frequently they display strong feelings of hostility and resentment about their loss. They are looking for someone or something to blame for what happened.

Inability to return to usual activities

- One reason for this is our inability to grieve publicly in the presence of others. The survivor does not want to burden others with his/her troubles, while friends and neighbors do not want to be inconsiderate by bringing up a past experience with the deceased. Public sharing of thoughts and memories is helpful for all concerned in returning to normal activities.

Hope

- As the grieving process proceeds, individuals begin to feel or see the possibility of having meaningful experiences and relationships once again.

Readjustment to reality

- People who have gone through significant grief experiences usually emerge as different people; some may be stronger while others may be weaker. In either case, typically a readjustment to reality occurs.

Note: Individual progression through these stages varies both in time and sequence.

Not all individuals go through all of these stages, and frequently people jump back and forth between stages.

COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES ASSOCIATED WITH GRIEF STAGES

- All of the stages of grief are laden with emotions; therefore the communication principles dealing with emotion are appropriate for each stage. Listening, being aware of nonverbal communication, not arguing or being judgmental, and using sincere personal language will show your support and concern for the NOK as they adjust to their loss.
- In stages such as depression and loneliness, panic, sense of guilt, hostility and resentment, and inability to return to usual activities, the communication principles used to minimize defensiveness can be effective. During these stages, there is a strong likelihood that the NOK will be defensive. Using positive language, asking questions, avoiding direct statements that begin with "you", and being specific will help defuse some of the tension that may arise and at the same time communicate to the NOK your interest in their well-being.
- Establishing goals and milestones can be useful in the last three stages. Forward thinking and planning facilitate returning to usual activities, hope, and readjusting to reality. The goals and milestones should be small at first and have a high probability for success. As the NOK begin to achieve results you can encourage them to set larger goals. Assist the NOK in identifying other family members, friends, and coworkers who may be good resources during this time. This is an appropriate time for you to close your relationship with the NOK.

NOTE: Again, it is important to remember that human interaction and communication is not clearly or easily defined nor is it as simple as these guidelines may imply. The NOK may not go through all of these stages in the course of your relationship. They may appear to linger in a certain stage, or they may regress to a previous stage. Each case will be different. What is important is that you, the CACO, are aware that some communication principles can be more effective than others at certain stages.

**FAMILY SERVICE CENTER
and
OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS**

Providing Support to Service Members and Their Families

Navy Family Service Centers (FSCs) are designed to help Navy service members and their families with a variety of personal support services. They provide extensive information and referral services on a broad range of family-related programs and services, including resources which are available in both the military and local civilian communities.

Among the many resources available through the FSCs are reference libraries containing brochures and other information about geographical areas which can assist in the relocation process. Other resources include hospitality kits and information about child care centers, recreational facilities, obtaining a passport, Navy Lodges and other special services.

Family Service Centers also offer programs for service members and their families on a variety of topics such as budget-stretching, finding a new job after a family move, parenting classes, and helping families improve their communication skills.

FSC personnel are useful in obtaining legal aid and voting registration information, and in providing assistance with personal and family problems and "special needs" children.

Family Service Centers are staffed by skilled military and civilian personnel whose aim is to provide the best information and assistance possible to all Navy members and their families.

The Navy Ombudsman Program volunteers also fulfill a vital role in helping families of our casualties during those difficult days following a tragedy. The Ombudsman volunteers help the family to fulfill virtually all their needs, including telephone answering services, child care and comfort needs, etc.

Use the Family Service Centers and the Ombudsman volunteers...They are there to help our families!