



# Yolo County Emergency Medical Services Agency

## Quick References

Revised Date: July 15, 2019

### GRIEF SUPPORT

#### Purpose

The intent of this policy is to provide grief support to the families of deceased individuals who are not transported from the field. Field personnel should identify the need for grief support as soon as possible, especially for an unexpected death or if considering discontinuation of CPR in the field.

#### Responsibilities

- Assist the family in dealing with the death or anticipated death of the patient.
- If resuscitation is in progress, communicate with the family what you are doing and explain to them the next steps based on patients response to treatment.
- There are many different religious beliefs regarding death, respect these beliefs and do everything you can to accommodate the family and their wishes.
- Once death has been determined:
  - Contact all appropriate agencies (Police, Coroner)
  - Assist with the notification of clergy, if requested
  - Provide support until additional resources arrive

#### Grief Support Guidelines

##### Breaking the News

- Physically join the family
- Remove your gloves
- Introduce yourself and your role
- Clearly state that you have news about the deceased (use the patients name)
- Clearly state the events leading to the death. *"We found your (relation) not breathing and without a heartbeat. We did everything we could but your (relation's) condition was so severe we were unable to revive them. I am very sorry to tell you that your (relation) has died."*
- Avoid using euphemisms like "passed away" or "no longer with us"
- Avoid medical terminology
- Give the family time to react; don't leave

##### Grief Support Skills

- Ask the family if there is someone they would like you to contact
- Give them permission to cry
- Tolerate silence
- Touching is okay if they request a hug or reach out
- Ask if they have any questions
- Verify their understanding
- Offer them an opportunity to view the deceased
- You cannot fix grief but you can give it an honest and safe place to exist



# Yolo County Emergency Medical Services Agency

## Quick References

Revised Date: July 15, 2019

### Tell the family what happens next

- The coroner or mortuary must be notified
- The police will be coming to assist
- Tell them you will need to collect some information about the deceased

### Knowing when to leave

- Verify they have support on scene
- Tell them it is time for you to go and ask *"Is there anything else I can do?"*
- Give them a number where they can reach you or your supervisor
- Offer your condolences, shake hands, or touch if appropriate

### Useful 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.

**Keys to Success: Understanding, caring, empathy, support, and advocacy.**

## **Consider**

Crime scenes or traumatic events will require additional considerations:

- Move family away from the scene before informing them of the patient's condition.
- Family notifications at a crime scene should be done with law enforcement.
- If they were injured or involved, consider their injuries before informing.
- If transporting a survivor contact the hospital to have grief counselors available when you arrive.