

Guidelines for the Notification of an Employee Death

Purdue University has a strong commitment to students, faculty and staff, and recognizes that the death of a member of the Boilermaker family or extended family is filled with feelings of grief and loss. Deans, department heads, administrators and supervisors are often responsible for informing the appropriate departments and co-workers of a death but may feel unprepared for this type of response. The guidelines that follow have been developed to assist you in notifying the workgroup or others about the death of an employee or death of an employee's family member.

Who Should Make the Notification?

The employee's immediate supervisor might be the logical, first choice, but consider whether a departmental, college-level or University response is warranted. Each employee will require a thoughtful, timely and individual response. Many offices or individuals can assist you in developing this response, and contact information is listed below.

Considerations Prior to Notification:

- What impact will this news have on the department, college or University?
- What offices and individuals need to be included in the development of this notification?
- Will Purdue Marketing and Communication need to be included in the notification plan?
- Contact SupportLinc at 888-881-5462 or reach out to the Center for Healthy Living at 765-494-0111 if you are concerned about employee reactions. A counselor can address your concerns and, when appropriate, be available on-site to help address employee questions or reactions.
- Review Business Continuation FAQs at <https://www.purdue.edu/hr//mgrres/supportingDocs/deathofanEmployee.pdf>

On-campus death:

- Before communicating with the workgroup, assure that the family of the deceased has been notified. Although there may be questions following an on-campus death it is critical that no information be delivered prior to notification of family members.
- In the event of an on-campus death, the University Police Department will coordinate notification of next of kin or family members.
- Speak with the family soon thereafter to discuss what information they would like disclosed (details regarding the incident, notification about the funeral or memorial service, etc.). Respect the family's wishes to the best of your ability.
- Coordinate all media contacts and questions through the Marketing and Media Department.

Off-campus death:

- Verify that family members have been notified before communicating with the workgroup and others.
- Notify the workgroup and other organizational business entities as appropriate.
- Speak with the family soon thereafter to discuss what information they would like disclosed (details regarding the incident, notification about the funeral or memorial service, etc.). Respect the family's wishes to the best of your ability.

Best Practices in Notification Procedures:

- Prior to notification, confirm as many facts of the incident as possible.
- Decide if the department will send a condolence letter and inform employees of this.
- Determine whether individual employees may send condolences or specifically indicate what the family has requested in terms of contact and memorials.
- Receive authorization to release factual, confirmed information and clarify specific information that is permissible to release. There may be confidential or investigative information disclosed to you but not to be released to the workgroup.
- Notify face-to-face, particularly within the workgroup. Telephone calls or emails may be permissible with other people or groups who may not have as personal of a relationship with the deceased.
- Keep the group small to enhance communication; a large group may be seen as impersonal.

What to Say:

- Pause, monitor reaction of employee(s) and begin to provide facts as you know them.
- If substantial time has passed before the notification was made, explain why.
- If information must be withheld explain why. You may wish to say, "I am unable to share that information due to an on-going investigation" or "The family asked that I provide only the information that I have given you."
- Ask if there are any questions. If you don't know an answer, it's okay to say that you don't have the information.
- Offer [SupportLinc services](#). A possible statement is, "I know that this loss is upsetting for many employees. I would like to remind you that our Behavioral Health Services are available as a resource if anyone would like to speak to a counselor."
- Allow time for individual questions or individual employee meetings following a group notification. Prior to leaving workgroup notification you may wish to say, "Dealing with

the death of a co-worker is an emotional event. I am available to meet privately with anyone who has additional questions or needs to speak with me.”

Examples of how to start the conversation include:

- “I’m afraid that I have some bad news for you.”
- “I’ve just been informed of news that I need to share with you.”
- “I wish I didn’t have to tell you this, I’ve just learned that <employee or dependent name> died.”
- “I wish I didn’t have to tell you this.”
- “I’m sorry this happened.”
- “Grief is something about which we all have reactions and feelings.”
- “It’s common to react with emotion with this kind of news.”
- “I’ll check back with everyone and see how you are doing tomorrow.”
- “This is a difficult time not only for the family of <employee name> but also for all of us who have worked with <employee name>. It’s a very sad time.”

Avoid These Statements:

- “Time heals all wounds.” It doesn’t.
- “We must move ahead with our lives.” This statement may seem insensitive.
- “You don’t need to know that information.” A better statement is, “I am unable to answer that question or provide that information because <explain the reason>.”
- “It must have been his/her time.”
- “We have to be strong for <employee name>.”
- “<Employee name> would have wanted us to move ahead and live life.”
- “Someday we’ll understand why this happened.”

Attendance of Funeral or Memorial Service:

Attending the service of a colleague is a showing of respect to the deceased and their family. It is also a personal and practical decision. For instance, distance may make attendance impractical. If you are unable to attend the service, your thoughts can be expressed through condolence letters or cards (email could be considered impersonal) or with a phone call.

Expression of Condolences through Flowers or Memorials

Personal workgroup gifts are often collected and used to purchase flowers or other memorials. If a department or college wishes to purchase these, the following guidelines would be followed. <https://www.purdue.edu/policies/ethics/iib5.html>

Contacts and Additional Information:

Human Resources, HR Business Partners <https://www.purdue.edu/hr/hrhelp.php>

Human Resources, Benefits Service Center at 765-494-2222 or email hr@purdue.edu

Behavioral Health Services - SupportLinc <https://www.purdue.edu/hr/Benefits/medical/SupportLinc.php>

Office of Marketing and Communication <https://marcom.purdue.edu/contact/>

Office of the Provost <https://www.purdue.edu/provost/about/about.html>

Office of the Chief Financial <https://www.purdue.edu/treasurer/>

Business Continuation FAQs

<https://www.purdue.edu/hr//mgrres/supportingDocs/deathofanEmployee.pdf>

Sample Condolence Letters

<https://www.purdue.edu/hr//mgrres/supportingDocs/sampleCondolenceLetter.docx>

The following websites offer additional guidance:

<http://connect.legacy.com/inspire/funeral-memorial->

[etiquette](http://connect.legacy.com/inspire/funeral-memorial-etiquette) <https://www.funeralwise.com/attending-funeral/>

<https://www.funeralwise.com/customs/>

<https://www.funeralwise.com/etiquette/guide/>