

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH VICTIMS OF MASS CASUALTY EVENTS



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- “If you need anything give me a call” might not produce the response you are looking for. Victims’ families don’t know what they need initially. Offer a suite of services you can provide for them.
- Utilize lessons learned from past tragedies to guide victims, e.g., “The victims of x tragedy did this or they found this beneficial.”
- Reach out to victims’ family members on a regular basis so they know they are not forgotten. Text them first and ask if you can visit them—face-to-face contact is always better.
- Delayed communication to victims’ families contributes to a lack of trust. Don’t hesitate to communicate for fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. Do not let that delay your outreach.
- Set up a communication method for the victims’ families to assist them in communicating with each other (e.g., Slack).
- Law enforcement and community efforts should be proactive and victim centric. All events and engagements should be vetted by the victims’ families FIRST. They know best how they feel and how they want their loved ones remembered.
- Victim advocates should meet the families in their homes, as opposed to the families traveling to a central location.
- Never assume victims’ family members have everything they need and do not need your assistance based on their financial status or legal representation.

REFRAMING OUR LANGUAGE

Don’t Say:	Instead, Say:
Anniversary	One month, six-month mark One-year mark, two-year mark, commemorate their life, remember who they are, etc.
Trigger	Activate
Execute	Facilitate, organize
Lost (for victims)	Killed, murdered
Event, incident	Tragedy

A standard operating procedure (SOP) was developed for coordinating with external jurisdictions and regional liaisons, with the goal of ensuring effective communications and minimizing the number of people at the incident command post.

We updated our policy on police actions during officer-involved shootings to include contacting the hospital’s public information officer (PIO), discussing hospital security, and intercepting media, as appropriate. Triage tags will be used in the future to track patients and identities.

We also updated SOPs to establish a line of direct and consistent communication between the PIO on scene (in this case, APD PIO) and the city’s communications director to encourage effective communications coordination.

Based on your experience, what are key strategies, protocols, and policies that agencies can implement right now that would help them respond to and recover from a mass violence incident?

Training. Training. Training. Prior to the incident, the City of Aurora and surrounding jurisdictions’ responding agencies invested time and resources to develop preparedness and response capabilities, specifically their capacities to respond to an active shooter incident. Integrated training across disciplines, agencies, and jurisdictions enabled them to develop strong working relationships and improved joint operations.

Invest in Equipment. Prior to the incident, the Aurora Police had invested in various equipment and policies that same year:

- Purchased pelican cases, emphasizing the ability to rapidly deploy;
- Issued diversionary devices and 9-Bangs to all operators to ensure availability in the field and conducted trainings for breaking/pushing contact through deployment;
- Purchased new armor and helmets, renewed emphasis on shield use, purchased four new pistol shields and four new rifle shields;
- Added marking using light sticks;
- Purchased training bolts and pistols;
- Implemented a new mass notification system (EVERBRIDGE); and
- Enacted policy to ensure that BearCat keys are accessible to all operators.

Aurora invested in tools and training in advance of this incident because we understood the importance of preparing for the unthinkable. Active shooter response training not only provided officers the operational skills they utilized that fatal day but also the mindset to pursue the shooter despite the risk to their own lives. ♡