

How to Help the Family... At the Hospital or the Morgue

- Have a member of the department drive the family to the hospital and stay for as long as necessary.
- Work with the hospital staff to secure a private room where the family can gather. This should be separate from the general waiting area, if possible.
- Assist the family in dealing with hospital staff. If you have EMT's in the department, ask them to help with their hospital contacts.
- Provide assistance to the family in making calls to relatives and close friends. Answer incoming calls for the family or get messages to them at the hospital.
- Work with the family to arrange a plan for dealing with the media. The family may wish to have a member of the department speak for them.
- In cases of extended hospitalization, offer to assist with day-to-day tasks such as home maintenance, arranging childcare, or bringing meals and other necessities to the family.
- If the firefighter is taken to a specialized hospital out of the local area, assist with this process. Consider asking another department close to that hospital to assist you in supporting the family while the firefighter remains hospitalized.
- Encourage the family to spend time with the injured firefighter, regardless of the type of injury.
- If the firefighter is badly burned or disfigured, help prepare the family for what they will see. Always allow family members to make the decision.
- Have someone available to drive the family home from the hospital. Offer to help with continuing visits as much as resources allow. Offer to stay with the family at the house.
- Help the family keep track of incoming medical bills and organize files for claims.

How to Help the Family... From Time of Death Through the Funeral

- Notify the Department of Justice of the death. This will begin the process of reviewing eligibility for the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program.
- Contact the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation about the death. This will assure the beginning of emotional support for both the family and the department.
- Work with the family in planning the funeral. Remember that the family's wishes should always come first. If they want a private funeral, the department can still hold a memorial service.
- If the family wants a fire service funeral, secure a uniform for the burial.
- If there are children in the family, consider creating a special role for them, such as riding on the fire truck in the funeral procession. (Be sure to ask a parent before mentioning this to the children!)
- Offer to assist with lodging or transportation for out of town relatives and friends.
- Offer to have a member of the department stay with the family prior to the funeral. In smaller departments, consider rotating people as needed in order to maintain a department presence with the family.
- Have someone available for tasks such as answering the phone, driving the family to the funeral home to make arrangements, or running errands.
- Help coordinate household duties such as food preparation, cleaning, and childcare. Do necessary maintenance such as mowing the grass or clearing the snow.
- If donations are collected for the family, set up a bank account to deposit these funds.
- Coordinate with local law enforcement officials to make routine checks of residence and neighborhood.
- Assign a department member to help the family set guidelines for dealing with the media.

How to Help the Family... Ongoing Support

- Only promise what you actually can do. Keep all your promises.
- Instead of saying “Call if you need anything” offer to help with specific tasks and then follow through. For instance, say “I would like to come over on Thursday to fix the fence.”
- Continue to talk with the family about your memories of the firefighter. Most families want to hear about their loved one, even if it is emotionally difficult.
- Remember that parents of a fallen firefighter need support and contact just like spouses and children do.
- Help with what the firefighter used to do—yard work, fixing things around the house, attending children’s sports and school events, etc.
- Take all steps necessary to secure benefits for the family. The process is often lengthy, so keep the family involved.
- Continue to invite the family to department events, but don’t be disappointed if they don’t always attend.
- Remember that some events, such as holidays and the anniversary of the date of death, may be especially difficult for the family. Even families who seem to be doing well may need extra support and contact during these times.
- Contact the family before releasing any information on investigations, incident reports, etc.
- Consider creating some kind of tribute to the fallen firefighter. This could be a local memorial, a video tribute, a scrapbook, or a scholarship in the firefighter’s name. Prepare a tribute that is fitting for your firefighter and special to the family.
- Provide survivors with information on the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation's programs for survivors. Contact the Foundation to get support for the family.
- Encourage the family to attend the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend and other local, state, and national tributes. Offer to help make travel arrangements and attend with them whenever possible.