

Typically, death is not “official” until a coroner pronounces the fatality. However, to avoid being perceived as deceptive, you will need to make a judgment in very obvious cases on whether to tell family members that the person “appeared to have been killed, but the coroner’s report has not yet been released.”

### 4.5.3 Tell What They Know

If a crime was suspected or committed, the law enforcement will arrive to take statements. You will benefit the investigation by discouraging those affected from conversing among themselves about the events. This might mean separating eyewitnesses so they won’t discuss what they saw. The desire to commiserate and swap accounts is strong, but law enforcement (and your own corporate investigators) will want to get the cleanest possible story from each witness – an account untainted by the recollections of others.

You could provide pads and pens for those who wish to make notes about what they saw before they talk with law enforcement. This can aid the investigation, but sometimes traumatized people are simply too shaken to concentrate on writing.

#### **Rationale for Employees Not Talking to the Media**

While most average citizens have the right to exercise freedom of speech by talking to the media...

- ▶ The wrong statement to the media can potentially harm you, your coworkers, the company, and others involved.
- ▶ The media are looking for the most emotional and controversial thing any employee will say or do. It’s best to ignore their advances and not respond in any manner. They will take what employees say out of context, many times misquote it, and replay it repeatedly.
- ▶ Employees are typically shocked and stunned following traumatic incidents and not prepared to make public statements.
- ▶ Employees cannot predict what will be asked and will lack well-thought-out responses.
- ▶ If any employee insists on talking to the media, they should understand that they may not make any statement regarding company policy, or speak in any way on behalf of the company.
- ▶ It is best to allow people who are trained and prepared to speak to the media.
- ▶ Employees do not even need to tell media whom to contact. Tell your people, “If you are approached by the media, simply wave them off and don’t let them engage you.”

## 4.6 Employee De-escalation Meetings

Following statements to law enforcement, your people will probably be eager to get away from the site, but don't let them go just yet, if possible and appropriate. Consider holding "de-escalation meetings" where you take stock of what has happened, convey key information, and assess their wellbeing.

Ideally, these meetings are short and take place soon after the incident, before employees are sent home. Local management typically leads them. They can be conducted in large or small assemblies. If police are taking statements, wait until perhaps five or ten people have been interviewed before holding each session, or fewer people if the wait is too long. If your facility operates more than one shift, or if people finish giving police statements at different times, you will want to conduct enough de-escalation meetings to adequately meet the needs of all impacted and help them get home sooner.

The de-escalation meeting is a discussion session that gives management an opportunity to:

- ▶ Give and receive current, appropriate information to and from employees following a traumatic incident.
- ▶ Stabilize and calm employees from the emotions of the traumatic incident.
- ▶ Acknowledge potential stress reactions and symptoms.
- ▶ Collect information.
- ▶ Dispel rumors.
- ▶ Inform employees about what will happen the next day back at work.

### 4.6.1 De-escalation Meeting Content

The essential topics to cover during a short de-escalation session include the following:

- ▶ **Acknowledge the significance of the crisis** with words like, "We are all deeply saddened and shocked ..."
- ▶ **Reconstruct the facts** to the degree that is possible, knowing that in the early aftermath, the story line will not be fully developed. Elicit input from those with different perspectives or accurate information. Make note of rumors or unsubstantiated reports, and promise to investigate and report back at a later time.
- ▶ **Advise everyone not to talk to the media.** Explain that members of the press may be waiting with cameras and microphones in hand