

New guidance helps officers confirm identity of someone who has died

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Our new guidance sets out a clear framework for confirming identity, protecting families and investigations.

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Well-established procedures exist for identifying victims of mass fatality incidents. This guidance extends those established identification principles proportionately across the wider range of incidents police attend every day, from road traffic collisions to sudden deaths.

The guidance sets out a clear, practical framework for officers, including:

- using more than one source of evidence to confirm identity
- treating documents found at the scene as a starting point rather than confirmation
- having a second officer or supervisor review identification decisions
- applying the established ABC principle, accept nothing, believe nothing, check everything, before formally telling a family that someone has died

Who the guidance is for

The operational guidance is for everyone in policing who may play a part in identifying someone who has died. This includes:

- officers who are often the first to make decisions about identity at the scene
- roads policing lead investigators and senior investigating officers, who apply and review that decision-making as a case develops
- family liaison officers, who manage sensitive conversations with families
- coroners' officers, whose work relies on accurate identification from the earliest stages

The guidance forms part of our ongoing work to strengthen national policing standards. It has been developed over several months with input from national advisors, including a specialist in the psychological and social aspects of major incidents, to ensure it reflects both the legal requirements and the human realities of this work.

Supporting families with clarity and care

Losing a loved one is one of the hardest things a family will ever face. How they are treated at that moment matters deeply.

The guidance is clear that formal identification must be accurate and officers should apply the ABC principle before confirming a death to a family. This should never mean leaving a family without information when there is genuine cause for concern. Where it is highly likely that a loved one is involved in an incident, families should be told at the earliest appropriate opportunity. Even if this is before identity has been formally confirmed, so they are not left in unnecessary uncertainty.

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Part of our commitment to high standards

Confirming someone's identity accurately is a fundamental part of an officer's duty of care, to:

- the family involved
- the investigation
- delivering trusted and effective policing

The public need to know that, when this work falls to an officer, it will be carried out to the highest standards and with courage, respect and empathy. These are values at the heart of our [Code of Ethics](#) that guides everyone in policing.

The guidance reflects our mission of leadership, standards and performance. It is part of our ongoing commitment to supporting families at what are often the most painful moments in their lives, giving officers and staff the skills they need to do this difficult and sensitive work thoroughly.

[Go to the guidance](#)

Tags

Major incidents