

# Homicide Detail

## Protocols for Victims of Homicides



**CITY & COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO**

Police Department

June 15, 2022

## Introduction

The Homicide Detail is comprised of 16 sworn members (15 investigators, one officer), two retired investigators (assigned to the Cold Case Unit), and one civilian support staff member (secretary).

The Homicide Detail is responsible for investigating unlawful deaths, Officer Involved Shootings for outside agencies, In-Custody Deaths for outside agencies, and deaths deemed suspicious by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

## SFPD's Homicide Detail

The Homicide Detail focuses case-specific work with families impacted by homicides. The goal is to provide specific support, information, and resources.

Specifically related to cold case homicide investigations, the Homicide Unit has designated investigators to engage directly with community partners to ensure on-going communication and transparency regarding cold case investigations.

SFPD facilitates collaborative meetings with DPH, SFDA, and the families of deceased victims in unsolved homicide cases to provide case updates, service connections, and support services.

### **Protocol for Engaging Families and Surviving Victims After a Homicide**

- Prior to engaging the victim's family, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner must first notify the next-of-kin (NOK).
- After the NOK is notified, the lead investigator will arrange to meet in person with the victim's family in a timely manner.
- Initial contact by the investigators usually occurs on the phone, but in some cases the NOK is contacted at the crime scene or at the hospital.
- After the initial contact, a second visit may be necessary, because the family is likely to have more questions the second visit than they did at the initial notification.

### **Engagement or Contact with the Families or Surviving Victims**

The investigator will meet in person with the victim's family members. It's important to know if the NOK is the spouse, parent, sibling, or adult child.

- Introduction
- Explain our role and the process, investigative steps, and potential inaccurate media coverage
- Obtain information about the victim from the family
- Listen to the family's concerns and expectations
- Answer all questions honestly and to the best of our ability, understanding the sensitivity and confidentiality of homicide investigations

## Resources, Services, or Connections Provided to Families and Surviving Victims

San Francisco  
Department of Public  
Health

- Response to homicides and critical shootings which may include:
  - Response to the scene or hospital ER
  - Engagement with and support of the family
  - 24 hours/7 days a week support services
  - Act as a liaison between SFPD and hospital staff
  - Linkage to Victims of Crime Services
  - Community debriefings and support following incidents

San Francisco District  
Attorney Victims  
Services

- Assistance w/ CA Victim Compensation Board (CalVCB) that can support with the following:
  - Crime scene clean-up
  - Funeral and burial expenses
  - Home or vehicle modifications for victims who became disabled
  - Income loss
  - Medical and dental treatment
  - Mental health services
  - Relocation
  - Residential security
- Orientation to the criminal justice system and court proceedings

### **How Often Are Families Notified of Case Updates**

- Case dependent, but generally weekly or biweekly on new or very active cases.
- Sometimes multiple times during week on an open/active case.
- There are many factors to include the family's level of interest, their relationship with the victim, and their willingness to assist the investigators when applicable.
- As cases proceed, time between communications (calls, emails, etc.) may increase.

### **How Often Are Families Notified of Case Updates (Cont'd)**

- SFDA Victim Services often advises the families of court dates and available resources.
- Victim Services will also assist in meetings with family, investigators, and prosecutors after preliminary hearings or court cases.
- Family members will also have the lead investigator's desk and cell phone numbers to contact them if they ever have any questions, need to forward new information, or want a case update.



## **How Often Are Investigators Reaching Out to Families for Unsolved Homicide**

- There's a standing Unit Order (#20-01) requiring Homicide Investigators to call family members of unsolved homicide investigations on the anniversary date of the homicide or the next business day to provide updates, if any and to make sure the family members know who the assigned investigator is and how to contact the investigator.
- Upon retirement or transfer of a Homicide Investigator from the Homicide Detail, the investigator's unsolved investigations and investigations discharged "27" or pending further investigation shall be reassigned to another Homicide Investigator or an investigator in the Cold Case Unit.

Thank you.

Any questions?