

FAMILY SUPPORT GUIDANCE

Purpose

The role of Family Support is to provide a link between the organization and the family of staff impacted by serious events (as defined below). The assignment of a Family Support staff member is to:

- ensure an open channel of information;
- reduce duplication of information;
- enhance efficiency in communication between the family and the organization;
- provide family members with ongoing support;
- allow the organization managers to focus on resolving the situation without undue interference.

The primary objective for the Family Support staff is to reaffirm the organization's commitment to staff members' welfare. A family will want time and attention from the organization: information, advice on what they can usefully do and perhaps should not do, and a feeling that the organization is doing everything possible, to e.g. obtain their loved one's safe release/to obtain necessary medical care, deal respectfully with the circumstances following the death of the family member.

Deployment

Family Support person can be deployed in a number of situations:

- the kidnapping or taking hostage of a staff member;
- death of a staff member as a result of violent, purposeful action;
- severe injury to staff member serving in a location distant to family members.

The variety of possible situations and the unique circumstances of each will need to be factored in to the use of Family Support. Death and injury to staff may not require long-term deployment of a Family Support staff member where family, social or cultural support systems are in place and able to provide support.

Where the Critical Incident Management Team (CIMT) decides not to make use of Family Support services the reasons for this decision must be documented. The HR member of the CIMT will have critical input in making this decision.

Kidnapping or hostage taking of a staff person always requires use of Family Support service. The following procedures and activities relate primarily to the kidnapping of staff but can be altered to fit other circumstances where appropriate.

Family Support staff must be fully aware of the organization's critical incident management plan and hostage taking and abduction policy and procedures. The protocols contained in the critical incident management plan and associated policies and protocols describe the objectives and activities of the CIMT and its members.

Status

The Family Support staff should be a management level staff person to reflect the value the organization places on the importance of the person and family involved. The Family Support person should not be a member of the CIMT. Since the Family Support role is very demanding and time consuming, personnel

assigned as Family Support should be freed from other duties and responsibilities.

Family Support staff must have training in interpersonal skills, listening skills and stress and trauma management. HR shall organize, identify and ensure appropriate training for Family Support personnel.

Upon being identified and deployed, the Family Support person shall initiate a 'family support log' to document all interactions, questions, issues and family support activities.

Initial Procedures

Once an abduction/kidnapping has been confirmed the organization will establish an Incident Management Team (IMT) at country office level and a CIMT at headquarters to support the IMT.

It is imperative that the family be immediately notified by the organization of any kidnapping or abduction. This information should come from the organization in order to secure the family's trust and confidence in the organization. Given the nature of global media and social networking the time between the event and family notification will be quite short. In the absence of any confirmation that a staff member has been abducted, it may prove necessary to notify the family that a staff member has 'gone missing'.

In the event of the kidnapping or abduction of a staff member, the Family Support staff person must be able to meet personally with family members within 1 hour of the family being notified.

The initial contact/notification should be made by the highest ranking the organization staff member available as this conveys organizational commitment to the staff and family. While the need for immediacy is very important, the organization shall make every effort to notify the family in person. If the designated Family Support staff is available they should accompany senior staff identified to notify the family.

The initial notification will generally follow the following process:

- Script what will be said beforehand.
- Introduce yourself and any relationship to abducted staff member.
- Give the message in a straightforward, sympathetic manner (though this may vary depending on cultural considerations).
- Deliver a concise but detailed message, "(name of the hostage) has been abducted/went missing today by..."
- Give assurance of staff member's welfare and well-being as far as is known.
- Allow time for the news to set in and for any questions family might have.
- Explain briefly what is known and not known.
- Assure family that the organization will take all appropriate measures to secure the safe return of the family member.
- Solicit concerns and wishes of the family.
- Introduce or identify the Family Support person and set a time (no more than 1 hour) when the support person will contact the family.

The Family Support staff will perform the following actions:

- **Establish and maintain trust.** When a family does not trust the organization, its competence in handling the situation, or its honesty in respecting their rights, they may choose to undertake their own initiatives and/or publicly criticize the organization, which may complicate incident management and could jeopardize a timely and successful resolution.

The Family Support person should:

- Listen to the family's concerns and questions.
 - Outline the support services available to staff and families. Many families are unclear about HR policies and practices and may be unaware of the range of services available.
 - Describe (in general) the process the organization will follow to manage the critical incident with emphasis on the expertise being deployed to assist with this incident.
 - Describe the makeup of the CIMT and the high-level status of this team within the agency.
 - Assure the family of the existence of a professional understanding/experience of this type of incident in the organization and that skilled persons are working for the safety of their family member.
 - Assure the family that they will have 24-hour access to the CIMT through the Family Support staff. Assure them that the Family Support staff has direct access to the CIMT. They need to know that they are not being brushed off or sidelined.
 - Give the family direct contact telephone numbers for the Family Support staff and any backup staff provided for that purpose.
 - Make sure the Family Support person is available 24 hours a day with open phone channels and forwarding to another live phone number should the Family Support staff be otherwise occupied.
 - Set up a regular briefing time at agreed times for the family. In the initial stages of a case this may be hourly. Make regular in person visits to the family.
 - If the family insists on coming to the organization office, set up a specialized room for the family to use. This room must not be the incident control room.
 - Set up face-to-face meetings as appropriate with the CIMT Leader to demonstrate respect for and commitment to the family.
- **Develop a clear approach towards the family.** Balance the family's right to know and remain informed, with the need to maintain the integrity of the critical incident management strategy. It is essential that the family feel included and actively engaged.

The **Family Support** person can assist this process by:

- Listening to family concerns, questions and issues and assuring them that these will be addressed as best as possible and in a timely manner.
- Helping the family select a point of contact with the organization. This person should be an adult and should be able to make decisions on behalf of the family. The Family Support person will communicate primarily with this person but will remain available to all family members.

- To better understand family structure and dynamics it is advised that the Family Support person work with the family to sketch out a family tree.
 - Being available to family members (siblings, parents, uncles/aunts, etc.) who may feel they should be involved in assisting the organization or may demand access to the CIMT. The Family Support will be available to these people as and when required to provide updates and answer questions. The family point person should be present for these discussions to maintain consistency of message and maintain the flow of information.
 - Making provisions for timely updates from the CIMT to the family as above. Include other family members in this briefing as required.
 - Encourage the family to take an active role in support of their loved one. Activities might include:
 - Developing a hostage profile
 - Suggesting 'proof of life' questions
 - Monitoring media and social media networks for references to the case and maintaining the documents record
 - Keeping diaries of their actions, emotions, questions, events
 - Writing letters of support
 - Developing a media appeal strategy (as warranted and in coordination with the organization)
 - Holding vigils or other ritual activities
 - Constantly reinforcing the organization's commitment to a successful resolution and build the family's confidence in the organization, the CIMT and the critical incident management process.
- **Implement the agreed information policy.** The CIMT will have determined the appropriate policy on information sharing. This policy needs to be implemented with the family. Careful consideration will have been given to what the family will likely learn through the media and their reaction to not having been informed. The **Family Support** will be the key person implementing and managing this policy under the guidance of the CIMT.

The Family Support can assist this process by:

- Having a clear understanding of what information can and cannot be shared;
- Having a clear understanding of all the information in the hands of the media. This includes public media outlets, social media and various twitter, blogs, etc. The CIMT communications staff will have assigned someone to monitor all media.
- Ensuring, to the extent possible, that the family hears breaking news directly from the organization rather than through the media. Encourage the family to relay any media references to the Family Support person as soon as possible.
- Assisting the family to develop their own media relations policy. It is possible that media may wish to interview family members. Obviously, the organization cannot deny such access. However, the Family Support can assist the family to effectively manage the media in line with the communications approach adopted by the CIMT.

- Meeting with the family to assist them to prepare for any media contact or interviews (if possible, make available a media professional from the organization).
- Assisting the family to interpret and make sense of any claims made by the hostage takers, media commentators and broadcasters concerning the situation. Families will be in a high state of anxiety and will react strongly to statements from the media.

Continuous Support

Critical events may drag on for weeks, months or sometimes for years. The family will require continuous support throughout this period. The Family Support person building on the confidence and relationship with the family will:

- **Pass on information about the hostage.** The CIMT will implement a process to gather as much information as possible about the person taken hostage. The family will be asked to provide as much detailed information about their family member as early as possible given the shock to the family and the sensitivity of some of the questions. Required information may include: general personality, mental state just prior to the kidnapping, possible concerns on his/her mind, ability to get along with others, physical endurance, special needs, likely reaction to captivity etc.

The Family Support can assist this process by:

- Reviewing the information given by the family in the early stages.
 - Checking the accuracy of information given by different family members. Individual family members will have different experiences of the staff person and will be able to complement the information previously gathered.
 - Verifying with the family any information that comes from the hostage takers regarding behavior or statements supposedly coming from the abducted staff person.
- **Identify possible support networks.** The family will function best when they are well supported.

The Family Support person should carefully explain the support and services available to them from the organization's employee assistance program and liaise between the family and the service provider.

The Family Support person can help the family identify potential members of their own support network and then assist the family to mobilize this network to provide needed support. The support network will be most effective where it is involved in doing real work with tangible objectives. Activities designed to keep the support network and family away from the 'action' will be self-defeating.

The Family Support person should get to know the membership of this network and spend time gaining the trust of its key members. It is essential that this network has confidence in the organization and the processes being used to assist their family member. The

Family Support needs to spend considerable time with this network ensuring the continuance of trust and confidence in the agency.

The members of this network will come from a number of sources. They may be friends, relatives, religious leaders, community members or professional service providers.

There are a number of key components to this support network. A balanced network will comprise the following:

- Practical logistic support. Vehicles, shopping, cooking, laundry and running errands. Assist the family to designate these roles to identified supporters.
 - Child care and support. Child minding of younger children, helping to get them to school or social events. Providing a supportive presence for children impacted by the event. Listening and responding to concerns expressed by children. Supporters might be relatives or family friends. It is most effective where the children have an existing relationship with the supporters.
 - Financial support. It is possible the circumstances may place financial pressure on the family. There may be travel required, more people to feed and house, and out of pocket expenses on a day to day basis. Assist the family to identify people in the network who can assist in financial management for the family especially during the early period. Though The organization may be able to reimburse these expenditures later, immediate access to resources will be appreciated.
 - Emotional support. Each family member will experience a wide range of feelings in their own unique way. Members of the support network need to be able to ride the waves of emotions with the family. Assist the family and the supporters to identify who can be the persons to provide the emotional support.
 - Professional counseling services. At some stage of the process family members will benefit from professional counseling services. It is possible that family members may have an existing relationship with a professional service provider or may seek the advice of such a service. Some families will seek the services of medical professionals. These people can be a valuable part of the support network. Sometimes, because of their professional standing, such people may request special attention from the organization. The Family Support staff must take the time to personally meet with such professionals if they request this. Maintaining the confidence and partnership of these professionals is essential to maintain control of the overall process. If necessary, the CIMT Leader can meet with such persons.
- **Expect fluctuating attitudes from the family.** Over an extended period of time, the family will experience and express a range of emotions: anger, frustration, gratitude, desperation, hope, hopelessness. This is perfectly normal. They may come to voice doubts about the organization, the authorities, or the strategy being pursued. Out of frustration, they may be tempted to undertake action themselves: go to the press, seek to establish their own line of negotiation, etc.

Maintaining a relationship with the family is critical. A positive and proactive relationship between the organization and the family may successfully preclude such actions.

If the family does decide to undertake their own actions the Family Support should endeavor to remain close to the family. If the family does take this course the Family Support should not criticize the action but should seek ways to remain engaged with the family despite any negative concerns expressed by family members. The CIMT needs to have information on family activities should they decide to take their own action.

Extreme behaviors that are self-destructive or dangerous to others need to be acted on. The extended support network needs to be involved if any such signs are observed.

- **Self-Care.** The role of Family Support person is a demanding responsibility. Over time the stress of the role will build and could impact the health and wellness of the person performing the role. Burn out and other stress reactions are common. While it is essential that Family Support services be available to the family at all times it is critical that the Family Support person has time to rest and recover as well. The Family Support person should be put in contact with the appropriate EAP support from the beginning of assignment and touch base regularly to debrief and monitor stress reactions. In prolonged situations, it is essential that Family Support role be shared or backed-up appropriately. The Family Support person should be released from all other duties for the period they are in the role. Lengthy incidents will require management decisions on the sharing/rotating of roles and responsibilities.

Aftermath

At the end of the event the Family Support person should have both an operational and psychological debriefing. The operational debriefing will be a component of the overall CIMT debriefing and after-action review. Psychological debriefing for the Family Support person is not optional and at least one assessment session must be undertaken by any staff taking the role of Family Support. More in-depth support may be advisable depending on the nature of the incident, negative outcome, complexity, and/or in case of a long-term event.