



ACCIDENTAL OR NATURAL DEATHS

When a death occurs, naturally or unexpectedly, it can be a very upsetting and sometimes traumatic event for those involved. Law Enforcement is usually called to the scene when someone has died accidentally or naturally (for example, while sleeping or due to unforeseen non-criminal circumstances). This information is intended to help you better understand what happens when law enforcement responds to a death.

What happens when an accidental or natural death is reported to 911?

After a report of a deceased person is received, the first people on scene are usually first responders: EMS paramedics, firefighters, and law enforcement personnel. They assess the situation. Law enforcement will notify the TCSO Criminal Investigation Division, and if there is any concern that the death was unnatural, a detective will be assigned to investigate. This will occur even in situations where the death appears to have been an accident, to ensure that it was in fact accidental. If law enforcement assesses the death to be natural with no concern of criminal or accidental activity, a detective will most likely not be assigned.

In any case of a death, the Medical Examiner's Office will be notified. If the death was natural, law enforcement will attempt to contact the deceased person's primary care physician. If the physician agrees to sign the death certificate, the Medical Examiner will likely leave the body with the loved ones to arrange funeral services. The selected funeral home will typically transport the body to their facility. If there is no primary care physician located or willing to sign the death certificate, or if there is any concern that the death was unnatural, the Medical Examiner will transport the body to their office for examination.

The responding TCSO deputy may call TCSO Victim Services to the scene to provide crisis services to the family and loved ones. Victim Services offers support, assistance contacting loved ones, answers about the process, information about funeral services and grief resources.

There are some cases in which law enforcement may not respond to a report of a death. For example, if the death occurs in a nursing home or the person is under the care of hospice. However, Victim Services may be requested through dispatch or by calling the main Victim Services Unit line at (512) 854-9709.

Grief and Loss

The loss of a loved one or a major traumatic incident that results in a serious injury can both cause feelings of grief. Grief is a normal response to loss, yet it sometimes produces emotional and physical reactions which can be alarming. Not all of these behaviors are healthy and some may need to be changed, but they are understandable and do not mean the person experiencing them is "crazy" or that their feelings are "wrong." No two people grieve the same. If you are grieving you may experience:

Emotional Reactions

Anger
Fear
Extreme sadness
Loneliness
Detachment/Lack of emotional response

Physical Reactions

Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
Unintentional changes in eating habits
Significant and unintentional weight loss or weight gain
Increased susceptibility to illness

Behavioral Reactions

Lack of motivation for daily activities
Lack of concentration or memory
Increased irritability
Unpredictable, uncontrollable bouts of crying or screaming
Panic/anxiety attacks
Wanting to talk about the deceased
Worrying about talking about the deceased too much
Increased use of alcohol, prescription drugs, or street drugs to help you cope
Fast or reckless driving/behavior

Suggestions For Coping With Grief

Keep decision making to a minimum
Accept help and support when offered
Seek support and assistance from others
Talk and tell others how you are feeling
Try to get adequate rest
Try to maintain good nutrition
Keep a journal to understand what you are feeling
Remember that it is okay to feel depressed
Remember that it is okay to cry
Be patient with yourself, healing takes time

If you need assistance with grief counseling or support, there are several resources in the Austin area available to help you. Some are listed below.

Who can I call for more help?

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact TCSO Victim Services at
(512) 854-9709, Monday – Friday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm.

Available Resources

Travis County Medical Examiner's Office: (512) 854-9599
<https://www.traviscountytexas.gov/medical-examiner>

Office of the Attorney General – Crime Victims' Compensation: 1 (800) 983-9933
<https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/cvs/crime-victims-compensation>

The Christi Center: (512) 467-2600
<http://christicenter.org/>
Grief Support Agency

The Austin Center for Grief & Loss: (512) 472-7878
<https://www.austingrief.org/>
Grief Support Agency

Hospice Austin: (512) 342-4700
www.hospiceaustin.org
Provides brief counseling and support groups