



## Communicating with Families During a Crisis

Communicating with customer and their families after an accident or crisis is never easy. You are still learning and coming to terms with what exactly happened and the passenger and family are highly emotional and stressed. However, it is imperative that keep up a regular dialogue with them to give updates and how and what you can do to help them.

Here are some suggestions on how you can manage the emotional trauma during and after a crisis:

1. **Establish a communication link with the passengers** (and their families if necessary) as soon as possible. Contact the family about the incident after your crisis communication team has assessed the situation and devised an action plan. This will ensure the family has accurate information and is aware that you are handling the emergency responsibly.

The worst thing that a company can do is leave the family to others, such as government agencies and the police. Establish first contact, if you don't know all the facts at least tell them there was an incident; how their family member was effected; and what you are doing to take care of those involved, i.e. put them on different transportation, collected all belongings and you are cooperating fully with all authorities on the matter.

Make notifying the victim's family about new developments a top priority. Whether it's good or bad news the family must be first to know. Also provide a company contact to the family so the family always knows who to call.

2. **Build compassion into crisis communications.** Proactive crisis communications are an excellent vehicle for providing continuous support, whether it's information about services available through an assistance program, support with media interviews, or practical assistance with childcare or transportation. Don't wait for the family to ask for help. Ask the family what they need.

3. **Manage the flow of information.** During a crisis, screen new information while maintaining a sense of openness and transparency. This means not withholding critical information, and not avoiding tough questions.

It is best to ensure all your company executives and spokespeople are on the same page and know all the facts as they come in. These situations are often fluid as investigations progress so you want to make sure everyone has the right information. If information cannot be released because it's under legal review or still being investigated, explain this to them. If you're honest, information won't be distorted as it goes through the community and media.

4. **After the crisis passes, reconnect with those passengers affected.** It can be something as simple as sending a card or making a phone call to say, "We just wanted to check in with you and see how you were doing." This will go a long way to maintaining your reputation and goodwill amongst passengers affected.