

COPS, KIDS, & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

TO PROTECT OUR FUTURE

Children who are exposed to domestic violence may experience traumatic stress in response to events that they perceive to be dangerous or threatening. Studies have shown that children exposed to domestic violence are vulnerable to developing mental health problems, and becoming victims and perpetrators in the future. The actions of law enforcement officers can have a powerful impact in helping to stop this devastating cycle of violence.

POLICE OFFICERS RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CALLS

By taking a few simple actions, police officers nationwide are in a unique position to positively impact the lives of countless children, families, and communities.

BEGIN BY VIEWING THIS TRAINING PRESENTATION

This CD-Rom contains information, resources, and tools for police departments to use in individual and group training presentations.

RIGHT NOW!

Children are the innocent victims of domestic violence situations and the actions of law enforcement officers can make a difference. Please join us in this very important mission to help protect our future and bring about lasting change.

What Police Officers Should Know - Outline

What is traumatic stress?

- When children are exposed to events that involve threats of injury, death, or danger—either to themselves or their caregivers—they may experience intense terror, anxiety, and helplessness. This reaction is called a traumatic stress reaction.
- Common causes of traumatic stress in children include physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, war, community violence, or natural occurrences, such as hurricanes or earthquakes. A child may be traumatized by directly experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, or by hearing about another person's experiences.
- Children are particularly vulnerable to the traumatic experiences of their parents. If a parent is perceived to be in danger, the child—especially a young child—will experience intense trauma.
- Children of all ages may experience traumatic stress. The reactions may vary with age, but even very young children experience intense reactions to events that they perceive to be dangerous or threatening.

Responses to traumatic events

When a child has experienced a traumatic event, their responses may include:

- Shock or numbness
- Fear or acute worry about the safety of loved ones
- Clinging to a parent or trusted caregiver
- Withdrawal or avoidance of any reminder of the trauma
- Repetitive talk or play or pre-occupation with the event
- Heightened vigilance or sensitivity to sounds; distractibility
- Sleep disturbances: nightmares, early waking, difficulty falling asleep
- Increased aggression

Why is it important to identify and intervene with children who have been affected by trauma?

- Usually a child's immediate reaction to a traumatic event is considered to be a normal reaction to an abnormal event. In some cases, however, the difficulties resulting from exposure to trauma persist over time and can result in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- PTSD affects children in every area of their development, causing difficulties with peer relationships and learning, and possibly leading to increased substance abuse

and delinquent behavior in adolescents. There is also increasing evidence that chronic trauma affects early brain development and, therefore, may be particularly harmful for young children. Thus, early identification of children and early intervention are essential in order to avoid or reduce the longer term consequences of traumatic stress.

How does intervention help children?

- Because they are often first on the scene of a domestic call or other violent crime, police are in a unique and important position to identify children exposed to violence. If police can link children to services, children and adults may be able to get the early help they need.
- The first goal of any intervention is to provide safety and stability for the abused parent and children. Police officers often fulfill this need for families; their presence at the scene provides safety. If police make a referral for counseling, they are helping children with the critical follow-up that is needed.
- Counselors then will assess the child's safety and will assist the family in getting legal help, advocacy, or access to other services, if needed. Counselors will provide a safe place for the child to talk about what has happened.
- In many cases, it is helpful to the child to be able to share the specifics of a terrifying event with a counselor. Sometimes children misunderstand why the event happened. They may blame themselves or feel guilty about not being able to protect a parent from harm. Sometimes they remain fearful that it will happen again, or that their parent is not safe. Counseling provides an opportunity for a child to talk about these worries. In addition, counseling can provide helpful information to the parent about the child's symptoms, about how to help the child, and how to talk to the child about the violence. In short, the goal of counseling is to reduce the child's intense feelings and responses to the trauma, to support the parent in helping the child and to allow the child and parent to return to normal living.

Core Message #1: *All children are affected by domestic violence; however, each child reacts in a different way.*

- "I think that one of the most important things for police to remember is that children often try to avoid their feelings in these situations because they are so overwhelming ...and kids do all sorts of things to make themselves feel better that don't really work." **Steven Berkowitz, MD**
- "I think that one of the most important things for officers to remember is that children are there and that they notice, and that their reactions are unique...and that you can't underestimate the power of an officer noticing a child." **Miriam Berkman, JD, MSW**

Core Message #2: *Children living with domestic violence often have complicated feelings about their parents.*

- "Officers often feel confused that a child can't understand the nature of the event and what the officer's role is." **Steven Berkowitz, MD**

- “In a situation like domestic violence, children’s views of parents and their expectations of what their parents can provide them shift radically, and that may create confusion and conflicting feelings in children.” **Susan Ko, PhD**

Core Message #3: *Children often worry that they are responsible for the violence in their homes.*

- “I think that the messages police can give children reassure them that what happened to them wasn’t their fault and it’s also not their responsibility to make the situation right.” **Betsy McAlister Groves, MSW, LICSW**
- “Often times children worry that the reason behind the violence is because of something that they did...the truth is that in these situations, children are helpless.” **Susan Ko, PhD**

Core Message #4: *Police Officers really matter to kids.*

- As many of us know, children display a wide range of reactions in the presence of a police officer. However they may feel about us, good or bad, they watch our every move, and remember what they see. This tells us one thing: police really matter to kids.
- “As a police officer, you might be the first person who observes some of what children live with.” **Betsy McAlister Groves, MSW, LICSW**
- “...and what good officers can do is help restore security and order. That makes a big difference to children.” **Miriam Berkman, JD, MSW**

Core Message #5: *There are simple things police officers can do while on the scene to help reduce the impact of domestic violence on children.*

- When we respond to a domestic violence call where kids are living in the house, we may be the first ones from outside the family to see the adverse conditions the kids are living in. When a police officer walks through that door, we are getting an uncut snapshot of a family’s life.
- If we leave without doing something, the opportunity to intervene in a child’s life is lost. It’s critical for all of us to understand there are simple things police officers can do while on the scene to help reduce the impact of domestic violence on children.

When responding to a domestic violence scene

- Check for signs of children’s presence; recognize the ways that children may be present, both directly and indirectly.
- Try not to interview parents in a child’s presence.
- Avoid making an arrest in a child’s presence, if possible.

- Keep children with known adults; whenever possible – identify someone at the scene who can take care of them.

When talking to parents...

- Ask about children; do not accept that they were unaware of the situation.
- Try not to talk badly about either parent in front of children. Children are more likely to see police officers as helpful if their parents are treated with respect.
- Express concern for children. This helps parents think about them too.
- Provide parent with information about safety and legal issues so children can remain safely in her care.

When talking to children...

- Introduce yourself and describe your role in simple terms.
- Sit or squat so you are physically at their level.
- Check for injuries.
- Acknowledge that something upsetting happened.
- Explain to children why any use of force was necessary.
- Reassure children that the violence was not their fault.
- Be realistic. Don't say everything will be okay or make promises you can't keep.
- Reassure children that it is not their responsibility to stop the violence. Encourage children to act in ways to keep themselves safe.
 - Tell the children, police are there to help. If there's violence, call them.
 - If they're in danger, they should go to a trusted neighbors' house, or another safe place where there are trusted grownups.
- Before you leave, make sure you explain what's likely to happen next.

Know your resources:

- Domestic violence advocates and shelters
- Child protective services
- Child welfare and child advocacy groups
- Mental health professionals
- Emergency medical services/medical professionals

Relationships with other professionals can help make your work more effective.

Links and Resources

In addition to these national resources, we recommend creating connections with your local resources.

Domestic violence advocates and shelters.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

T: 800.799.SAFE or 800.787.3224 (TTY)

Website: www.ndvh.org

Email: ndvh@ndvh.org

Office on Violence Against Women (OVW)

800 K Street, N.W., Suite 920; Washington, DC 20530

T: 202.307.6026

F: 202.307.3911

Website: www.usdoj.gov/ovw/

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV)

P.O. Box 18749; Denver, CO 80218-0749

T: 303.839.1852 or 303.839.8459 (TTY)

F: 303.831.9251

Website: www.ncadv.org

Email: mainoffice@ncadv.org

Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF)

383 Rhode Island Street, Suite 304; San Francisco, CA 94103-5133

T: 415.252.8900 or 800.595.4889 (TTY)

F: 415.252.8991

TTY: 800.595.4889

Website: www.endabuse.org

Email: info@endabuse.org

Child protective services/ Child welfare and child advocacy groups

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)

440 First Street, NW, Third Floor; Washington, DC 20001-2085

T: 202.638.2952

F: 202.638.4004

Website: www.cwla.org

Children's Defense Fund

25 E Street NW; Washington, DC 20001

T: 202.628.8787

Website: www.childrensdefense.org

Email: cdinfo@childrensdefense.org

National Center for Children in Poverty

215 W. 125th Street, 3rd Floor; New York, NY 10027

T: 646.284.9600
F: 646.284.9623
Website: www.nccp.org
Email: info@nccp.org

Mental health professionals

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

11150 W. Olympic Blvd., Suite 650; Los Angeles, CA 90064

905 W. Main Street, Suite 24-E Box 54; Durham, NC 27701

T: 310.235.2633 or 919.682.1552

F: 310.235.2612 or 919.667.2350

Website: www.nctsn.org

Email: nationalresourcecenter@duke.edu

Child Witness to Violence Project

Department of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center

91 East Concord Street, 5th Floor; Boston, MA 02118

T: 617.414.4244

Website: www.childwitnessstoviolence.org

National Center for Children Exposed to Violence (NCCEV)

Yale Child Study Center

230 South Frontage Road, P.O. Box 207900; New Haven, CT 06520-7900

T: 877.49.NCCEV or 1.877.496.2238

F: 203.785.4608

Website: www.nccev.org/us

Email: nccev@info.med.yale.edu

Children Who Witness Violence Program

1736 Superior Avenue; Cleveland, OH 44114

T: 216.623.6555

F: 216.623.6539

Website: www.charityadvantage.com/mhs/ChildTraumaServices.asp

Project ERIN (Emergency Response Intervention Network)

Child Trauma Center, Children's Institute International

711 S. New Hampshire Ave.; Los Angeles, CA 90005

T: 213.385.5100

F: 213.383.1820

Website: www.childrensinstitute.org/programs/storyview.php?ssi=15

Emergency medical services/ Medical professionals

Emergency Medical Services for Children

T: 202.884.4927

F: 202.884.6845

Website: www.ems-c.org

Email: information@emscnrc.com

American Academy of Pediatrics

141 Northwest Point Boulevard; Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098

601 13th Street, NW, Suite 400 North; Washington, DC 20005

T: 847.434.4000 or 202.347.8600

F: 847.434.8000 or 202.393.6137

Website: www.aap.org

To print extra NCTSN Domestic Violence Tip Cards follow these simple steps:

- Print this PDF on your desktop printer on standard 8.5x11" paper
- Fold the page two times across the fold marks
- Make four cuts along the outer dotted line
- Make two cuts along the inner dotted lines
- Fold card and slide into wallet

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FOLD

FOLD

TIP CARD

HELPING CHILDREN AT THE SCENE OF A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CALL

- Ask where **children** are. Check to see if they are **hurt**.
- Describe **your role** in simple terms.
- Speak at children's level by **sitting** or **squatting**.

NCTSN The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

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About the NCTSN

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is working to advance effective interventions and services to address the impact of traumatic stress.

Comprising over 40 centers from across the United States, the NCTSN integrates the strengths of academic institutions that are dedicated to developing research - supported interventions and training people to deliver them, and community-based treatment and service centers that are highly experienced in providing care to children and families. As an outgrowth of bipartisan federal legislation, the Donald J Cohen National Child Traumatic Stress initiative was funded in October 2001. Under the leadership of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), this initiative has represented a unique opportunity to contribute to our national agenda to transform our mental health systems of care.

Our mission: The NCTSN works to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families, and communities throughout the United States.

Please visit our website to learn more. www.nctsn.org