

Finding and Helping the Hidden Victims

Responding to Children At The Crime Scene



*What
Officers
Can Do*



Our goal is to keep children and women safe and less vulnerable. We must always weigh the positive and negative consequences of law enforcement intervention.

"Safety and Justice"

Child Exposure to Domestic Violence

- They hear and witness the emotional abuse
- They see the aftermath
- They intervene
- They are involved in the power dynamic or are blamed for the violence
- They witness assaults of the mother or are forced to watch
- They suffer direct physical violence and death

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Arlington Officer Jillian Michelle Smith Killed in Shooting

24-Year-Old Plashed Police Training 2 Weeks Ago
Tuesday, 24 Dec 2018, 10:47 PM CST

ARLINGTON, Texas -- A rookie police officer was among those killed Tuesday night during a shooting at an Arlington apartment complex. Police confirmed [Officer Jillian Michelle Smith](#) was alone and responding to a domestic assault call around 7:30 p.m. at the Atwood Park Apartments in the 3800 block of Mainline Way.

Officer Smith shielded the child and was fatally shot

Rickard said 39-year-old Darren Samuel Nettles shot his 29-year-old girlfriend and then tried to shoot her 71-year-old daughter. Smith shielded the child and was fatally shot, Rickard said. Nettles then killed himself, she said.

Fight over child led to confrontation where deputy was killed

By Associated Press

GREEN LAKE -- A man who shot and killed a sheriff's deputy then committed suicide after a nearly 12-hour standoff with police had fought with his wife over the discipline of a child, investigators said Tuesday.

Green Lake County District Attorney James Camp said April Tomp, 31, hit his wife on the face during an argument sometime before he fired a high-powered rifle, killing Deputy Bruce Williams.

Tomp told his wife to leave with two children before the shooting erupted Sunday. She was putting the children into a car when Tomp fired from a second-story balcony. Killings, Williams, Campbell,

he responded, "You don't tell me what to do with my kid," Foote said.

Foote said Tomp struck his wife as she sat in a rocking chair, knocking it backward. The wife said she then called police.

"The only thing the wife told me was he absolutely did not want to go to jail. She just said he was definitely afraid to go to jail," Foote said. "I think she knew he had the cops."

Several families were displaced from the building. Foote said bullets struck two of the building's main water pipes, causing gushing water throughout for nearly 12 hours as Tomp was holed up.

Kim Gudarski, who lives across the hall from the Tomps, said she hasn't been allowed in



Power and Control Tactics

Using the Children...

- "The kids will agree with me"
- Dragging the children into the arrest or court
- Sending the children away or into hiding

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Children and Domestic Violence

- 15.5 million U.S. children live in families in which partner violence occurred at least once in the past year, and seven million children live in families in which severe partner violence occurred.
- In a single day in 2007, 13,485 children were living in a domestic violence shelter or transitional housing facility. Another 5,526 sought services at a non-residential program
- Present in 40-55% of homes where police intervene in domestic violence calls.
- Abuse or neglect as a child increases the risk of arrest as a juvenile by 53%, as an adult by 38%, and for a violent crime by 38%.

Futures Without Violence

There are challenges when responding to children at domestic violence calls.

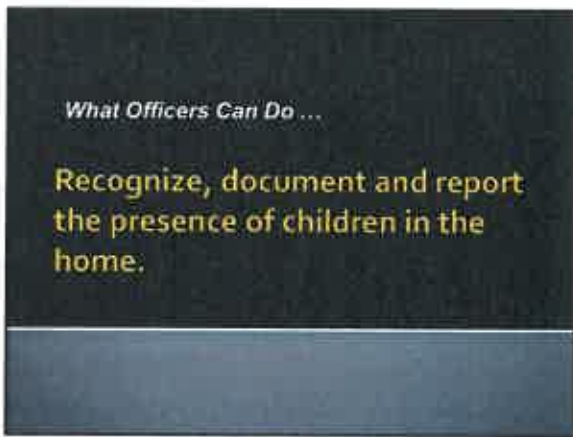
There are a wide range of response to domestic violence depending on the age and stage of development and gender of the child.

You may have to navigate through cultural and linguistic differences



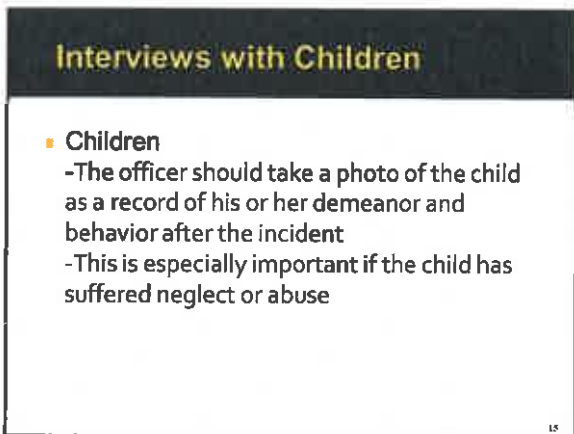
Children may have different reaction to police.

Your response may not be seen as helpful.



What Officers Can Do ...

Recognize, document and report the presence of children in the home.



Interviews with Children

- **Children**
 - The officer should take a photo of the child as a record of his or her demeanor and behavior after the incident
 - This is especially important if the child has suffered neglect or abuse

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What Officers Can Do ...

- Assess whether children have been physically harmed
- Minimize the impact and repercussions to children who are present

What Officers Can Do ...

- Empower children as much as possible in the process
- Maintain victim safety
- Hold the offender accountable

The Impact

- Batterer may threaten or abuse children to control
- Paradoxically, not reporting abuse of children risks victim's losing their custody
- Abused children may be silent to protect parent, themselves, or their siblings

The Impact

Effects of domestic violence on children include:

- Anxiety about being hurt or killed
- Fighting with others
- Temper tantrums
- Hypervigilance
- Substance abuse
- Eating Disorders
- Bed-wetting or regression to earlier developmental stages
- Suicide attempts

The Impact

- Medical problems, ulcers
- Headaches or stomachaches
- Sleeplessness
- Stealing or other juvenile crimes
- Identification with the aggressor
- Withdrawal from other people and activities
- Denial of any problem or dissociation

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What Officers Can Do ...

**Reduce trauma by reassuring
and talking to the children**

What Officers Can Do ...

- Do you feel safe here?
- Do you feel safe talking to me?

What Officers Can Do ...

Facilitate access to specialized police service and community support

What Officers Can Do...

Collaboration works

Various agencies may not coordinate services. In the extreme, victims whose children have been abused may be taken to court for failing to protect their children, with no investigation into whether the victim may have been abused.



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Children have told us:

- Don't interview me in front of my parents
- I need to know why you are here
- You can't find me
 - I'm hiding in my room, under the bed, in the closet, under the cover
- You are so tall, please bend over but not too close – your face is so big

Interviewing the Children

- Introduce yourself and describe your role in simple terms.
- Use the child's name.
- Explain that you were not present and need help to understand what happened
- Ask one question at a time.
- Continually clarify your understanding of the child's responses

Interviewing the Children

- Avoid using "why" questions. Why questions may imply blame.
- Observe the child's non-verbal communication.
- Recognize the variety of ways a child can be present – directly/indirectly.

Interviewing the Children

- Note if child indicates fear of one or both parents
- Try not be critical of one or both of the parents
- Be aware of child's feeling responsible or guilty; reassure the child
- Be aware that he or she may be distrustful of adults or may have been warned not to talk to outsiders

Interviewing the Children

- Interview child away from victim and suspect, in a place comfortable for children
 - If either party objects to you taking the child(ren) to another room to interview, explain "It is my job to interview all witnesses to any crime. I will do my best not to scare the child(ren). I just need to know what happened here."
- Be sensitive. Speak in a calm, soft voice.

Child Interview Problems

- Cases involving child victims can be very difficult and emotional. It is important for the officer to control her/his emotions.
- You may have to abandoned traditional law enforcement interview techniques. A successful interviewer will have several interviewing techniques and adapt them to the child.

Child Interview Problems

- Dealing with restless or crying children.
 - The officer should take control and provide clear direction. If the child is restless, take a break. If a break does not help, then maybe stop the interview. You don't want the child to get upset with the interviewer.



Child Interview Problems

- An officer may be able to relate to children of a certain age, but unable to relate to children older or younger than that age.
- Because of their age, children can be difficult to deal with for people who have no understanding of a child's limitations.

Interviewing Children

Children do not have to be in the same room to witness an incident.

Even if both parties say the child(ren) are asleep, chances are high that they were awakened by the incident and can give very helpful information.

Interviewing Children

Determine the child's developmental level by asking:

What time is it?

What time does school start? End?

How old are you? When is your birthday?

Where do you go to school? How many children are in your class at school?

How many brothers and sisters do you have? What are their names?

Interviewing Children

Use the child's language.

Avoid jargon – i.e., suspect, victim, assault, witness, etc.

Avoid abstract concepts about time, height, weight, or measurements.

Instead of "here," "there," "yesterday" or "tomorrow," use suitable terms such as "in front of the sink," "as tall as," etc.

Interviewing Children

Progress to specific questions.

- If a child under 7 years of age is asked, "Was there a weapon?" The child may answer "no".
- But the same child might answer "yes" if asked, "Was there a gun?".

Interviewing Children

- Never bribe, threaten, coerce or bully children into answering you.
- Inconsistencies can be probed by explaining that you are confused.
- Whenever possible children should not be used as interpreters for the purposes of interviewing.

Good Spontaneous Statement

- Officer Smith interviewed Samantha, age 5.
 - "The whole time during my interview Samantha appeared frighten. She was shaking at the hands and kept looking at the front door of her house where the suspect, Joe, was. I asked her if she was afraid of Joe and she nodded her head "yes". Samantha said she "saw Joe pick up her mom by the head and throw her against the door".

Interviewing Children

- Ask open-ended questions to start.
 - In the midst of a crisis, it is hard for children to spontaneously provide a lot of information. By asking open-ended questions, the child can explain circumstances which may not have occurred to the officer and provide more accurate information.

Interviewing Children

- Children may have negative stereotypes of law enforcement officers.

Dealing with restless or crying children.

- Most children are going to experience some form of discomfort while being interviewed.
- If a child starts to cry, comfort him or her with words and then physical support, if necessary. Help the child regain control of himself/herself. If the child cannot stop crying, take a break.

Closing an Interview

- Ask the child if they want to add anything.
- Do not end the interview immediately after talking about what happened.

Closing an Interview

- Reinforce that they did a good job; what they did was important and right.
- Reinforce that *they haven't done anything wrong; it is not their fault; and that it is not right to hurt people.*
- Talk about some fun things that were revealed during the rapport building stage (favorite toys, sports, etc).

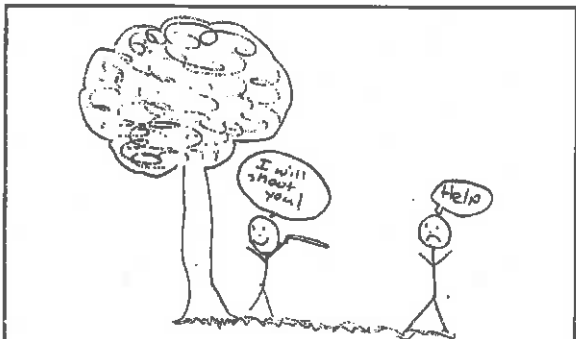
Children's Safety Checklist

- Stay out of the fight
- Avoid getting trapped in a small room or closet or the kitchen
- Find a phone in a safe place
 - Call 911 for help and stay on the phone
- Escape to a safe place
 - find a relative or neighbor and ask for their help
- Above all, remember to tell them "it is not your fault"

9 year old boy



Draw a picture of the people in your family when they are fighting



Draw a picture of the worst fight in your family that you can remember

