



SYKESVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lethality Assessment Program

General Order 6-8 Effective: 03/24/17

Authorized By: *Michael A. Spaulding* Chief of Police

I. PURPOSE

This policy defines the use of the Lethality Assessment Program for First Responders.

II. POLICY

Department personnel SHALL use this programs protocol when a domestic violence incident occurs between current and former intimate partners, i.e. spouses, boyfriend/girlfriend and one or more of the following conditions exists:

- 1) There is reason to believe an assault or an act that constitutes domestic violence has occurred, whether or not there is an arrest.
- 2) There is a belief or sense on the part of the investigating officer that once the victim is no longer in the care or presence of the responding officer the potential for assault or danger is high.
- 3) Repeated calls for domestic complaints at the same location or involving the same parties.
- 4) The investigating officer believes an assessment should be conducted based on his/her experience, training and instinct.

III. PROCEDURES

The investigating officer shall:

Advise victims that they will be asked a series of questions to help the officer determine the immediate potential for danger to them.

- (1) Ask the questions in the order they are listed on the Domestic Violence Lethality Screen for First Responders.
- (2) Ask all the questions in assessing the victim. The more questions the victim responds to positively, the clearer and more immediate the potential for danger is to the victim.
- (3) The responding officer will then assess the answers and handle the information as follows:
 - (a) A single "yes" or positive response by the victim to questions # 1, 2 or 3 reflects a high danger situation and automatically triggers the protocol referral.
 - (b) If the victim gives negative responses to questions #1-3, but positive responses to four or more of questions #4-11, this reflects a higher danger situation and triggers the protocol referral.
 - (c) "No" or negative responses, to all of the assessment questions, or positive responses to less than four of questions #4-11, may still trigger the referral if the investigating officer believes it is appropriate. The officer should ask the

- (d) victim the following question; "Is there anything else that worries you about your safety? If yes, what worries you"? The response to this question may aid in your decision.
- (e) Trust your instincts and common sense. Use of the domestic violence lethality screen takes into account the "gut factor." It is flexible and it relies on the investigating officer acting on his/her instincts. If the victim's responses don't trigger the referral, but the officer's "read" of the situation indicates high danger, the officer should initiate the referral.

Referral - Not Triggered: If the referral is not triggered or the victim does not answer the screening questions, the officer will:

- 1. Advise the victim that domestic violence is dangerous and sometimes fatal.
- 2. Inform the victim to watch for the signs listed in the assessment because they may convey to the victim that they are at an increased level of danger.
- 3. Refer the victim to Family and Children's Services of Central Maryland, (Carroll County). Provide the victim with the Department's telephone number, the case number, and the officer's contact number in case the victim wants to talk further or needs help.

Referral – Triggered: If the Lethality Assessment indicates a high danger to the victim ***or the officer believes it is appropriate based upon the information known to him/her***, the referral will be implemented as follows:

- 1. Advise the victim that the assessment indicates that he/she is at an increased level of danger, and that people in the victim's situation have been killed or seriously injured.
- 2. Advise the victim that you would like to call the Domestic Violence Hotline and have the victim speak with a counselor. If the victim initially declines to speak with the counselor, the first responder will:
 - a) Tell the victim that the officer will contact the Domestic Violence Hotline to receive guidance on how to proceed with the situation;
 - b) Tell the victim that they would like the victim to reconsider speaking with the hotline counselor; and
 - c) After the officer concludes the conversation with the counselor, ask the victim if they have reconsidered and would now like to speak with the counselor.
 - i) If the victim continues to decline to speak with the counselor, the officer should do the same thing he/she would do for a victim who did not trigger the referral, including conveying information that the counselor has suggested and going over some safety tips when the victim does not want to leave.
 - ii) If the victim agrees to speak with a counselor, the officer will advise the counselor that he/she has made a high

- danger assessment, or believes that the victim is in danger, and would like the counselor to speak with the victim.
- iii) Officers **will not** provide the name of the victim to the counselor without the consent of the victim.
 - d) At the appropriate time during the conversation between the victim and the counselor, the counselor will ask the victim to speak with the officer about the situation.
 - e) The officer will then be guided by the discussion with the counselor for further assistance. Officers will provide reasonable assistance to the victim if the victim wants to leave the residence.

IV. REPORTING

When completing the domestic violence report, Department personnel shall ensure that the following information is captured therein:

- 1. That the victim was screened
- 2. That the victim did OR did not meet the screening requirements;
- 3. That the responding officer contacted the crisis specialist;
- 4. That the victim did OR did not speak with the crisis specialist.

A Family Violence Investigation Checklist should be used in helping document the Incident (see attached). Officers shall utilize the checklist as a guide when completing their report, and check-off each applicable box to confirm that each item was completed. Officers shall submit the checklist with the original report.

Please remember to immediately contact Carroll County Child Protective Services (410-386-3434) anytime you respond to a Domestic Violence complaint and there are children in the house. There does not have to be allegations of abuse/neglect or evidence of the same. Children who are present in the home when Domestic Violence occurs are considered “risk of harm” cases, and CPS will be notified.