

Appendix 2G

Training Memo—911 Attention to Violence

Why is it important for call takers to pay explicit attention to and document violence in domestic abuse–related calls to 911?

Domestic violence is the most common form of violence in our society. It has a huge impact on our schools, neighborhoods, prison population, child protection system, hospitals, mental health institutions, and every human service agency in our communities. Sit at any 911 console and the reality of that statement jumps out. Call takers and dispatchers play a key role in how cases enter the criminal justice system for resolution. A well-organized criminal justice system can reduce by half the homicides and serious assaults in our families. The Blueprint is one of the country's most ambitious efforts to continue a thirty-year effort to eradicate this social problem.

Every practitioner touching a domestic violence case is organized through the Blueprint to link up with every other practitioner acting to protect victims and hold offenders accountable. The Blueprint presents a key shift in case processing. This shift is characterized by (1) a collective effort to make the full scope of violence and abuse transparent to each practitioner and (2) policies and procedures that direct practitioners to adjust their interventions based on the context and severity of abuse occurring in a case. Training at every level of intervention will help practitioners recognize the known lethality and risk factors in these cases. This approach is intended to avoid a one-size-fits-all response to people with very different circumstances and needs. It seeks to move away from responding to one individual incident at a time in cases involving a history and pattern of violence and abuse.

What is involved?

The “Blueprint Approach” begins with the call taker and dispatcher. By listening to each caller, asking appropriate questions, and transmitting critical information about the nature of the emergency and events at the scene to officers, the 911 center ensures that the response begins with attention to the full scope of violence, to connecting the caller with help and to connecting responding officers and others with the information they need to provide that help. The 911 protocols and related response cards have been designed to guide a process that requires call takers to develop and relay as much information as the caller's immediate safety, the 911 center's call volume, and time allow. This means that call takers must be prepared to help the caller focus, calm down, and describe exactly what is happening, i.e., describe who is doing what to whom, and how.

The following chart summarizes and illustrates the kind of information about the violence and possible danger that call takers should document as they link the caller to the responding officer and eventually to the entire criminal justice system.

Caller to 911 ⇔ Call Taker ⇔ Dispatcher ⇔ Patrol Officer What is happening that creates the need for police intervention?		
Information that responding officers need:	Examples of specific information from call takers and dispatchers that best meets that need:	
	WRITE THIS:	NOT THIS:
1. <u>Specific</u> information and <u>details</u> about the level of violence that is occurring or the threats being made	Man pulled woman out of car by her hair, woman screaming Former husband is saying he will burn down the house before letting her have it...he is throwing things out of the garage Caller said "he slugged me in the back and backhanded me in the face"	"Male female fighting physical" "Verbal but now escalating" "Woman says he hit her"
2. <u>Specific</u> information and <u>details</u> about the caller's level of fear and concern and that of people in background	Caller crying, short of breath difficult time talking sounds afraid Caller is the victim's mother and "she says he may kill her...he's threatened to bury her and the children" OR " he says he will take the car and leave her penniless"	"Caller upset" "Mother called in worrying about daughter"
	ASK THIS:	NOT THIS:
3. <u>Specific</u> information and <u>details</u> about weapons and their involvement in the situation	What weapons are in the house and where are they? Have any weapons been used or has he/she threatened to use one? Does the suspect carry a weapon? Does he/she have one now? Has he/she used a weapon or threatened anyone in the past with a weapon? What kind? Has he/she ever threatened to use a weapon against a police officer? Has he/she fought with police in the past?	"Are there any weapons?"

Communicating and documenting this kind specific, detailed information accomplishes the following:

- Helps 911 and officer determine the response priority according to severity and urgency.
- Helps officer make a determination if forced entry is appropriate in cases where no one comes to the door.
- Helps officer recognize when a victim is too afraid to speak freely about what is happening.
- May help officer recognize signs of strangulation.
- Contributes to an officer's overall impressions of the situations and parties' accounts of events.
- Helps officers decide if the call is not in fact a domestic assault call.