

The Blueprint for Safety's Approach to Risk

Who is at risk and in what ways? The Blueprint for Safety organizes everyone in the criminal justice system to keep this question in the forefront of their response to domestic assault cases.

Under the Blueprint, assessing for risk and danger in domestic violence-related crimes is built into each step in the response. Every practitioner, from the 911 call-taker to the judge and the supervising probation officer, is positioned to understand the kind of violence that is occurring (context) and the level of harm that has occurred and is likely to occur in the future (dangerousness). [See the [Blueprint Practitioner's Guide to Risk and Danger in Domestic Violence Cases](#) and the [Blueprint Training Memo-Risk and Dangerousness: Managing Severe or Lethal Violence](#)]

Officers have a unique role in developing information about context and dangerousness. Because [offenders tend to threaten victims for participating in the criminal case](#), a victim's willingness to share information about the history, severity, and context of the violence usually diminishes over time. The patrol response may be the only time to accurately identify the risk a particular offender poses to the victim.

The Blueprint uses three open-ended questions at the time of the initial response to help get an early and accurate picture of the nature of the risk and danger involved. The questions (based on [J. Campbell's Danger Assessment research](#)) encourage risk-focused dialogue that helps patrol officers zero in on the essentials of the case, quickly assess for urgency, and determine who is in danger from whom, and in what ways.

- Do you think he/she will seriously injure or kill you or your children? What makes you think so? What makes you think not?
- How frequently and seriously does he/she intimidate, threaten, or assault you? Is it changing? Getting worse? Better?
- Describe the time you were the most frightened or injured by him/her.

Officers use follow-up questions to get at more specific and relevant detail, including the extent to which a victim has been threatened for seeking help, particularly from the criminal justice system. When documented in the police report, the responses serve as the foundation for further investigation, charging decisions, sentencing, and conditions of release and probation.

Concern about accurately identifying risk and danger in domestic assault cases has been a focus of criminal justice system response and research for decades. A number of tools and approaches exist, such as the Danger Assessment, the Maryland Lethality Assessment Program, and the Domestic Violence High Risk Team Model. The developers of the Blueprint for Safety conducted an extensive literature search and consulted key researchers on risk assessment to develop the Blueprint framework, which includes the [Practitioner's Guide to Risk and Danger in Domestic Violence Cases](#) and the [Blueprint Training Memo-Risk and Dangerousness: Managing Severe or Lethal Violence](#). They selected the three risk questions as a way of immediately capturing key information on the scene that would help everyone intervening from that point onward produce as accurate a picture as possible of the danger and safety needs and respond accordingly. They are not the only questions that should be asked but they provide a patrol officer who is working under a high call volume or other time constraints to readily develop a picture of the case that would otherwise be lost or difficult to reconstruct.

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