

POLICY: PATROL RESPONSE

Protocol 2: Victim Engagement Guidelines

1. Work in collaboration with victims, cognizant of the principles of “continuing engagement,” as addressed in the training memo accompanying this protocol.
 - a. Whenever possible, minimize the victim’s need to confront the offender.
 - b. When using information provided by the victim, protect her or him from retaliation.
 - c. Treat each interaction with the victim as an attempt to build collaboration over multiple interventions.
 - d. Be mindful of the complex and often dangerous implications of a victim’s cooperation with the legal system.
 - e. Be aware that the fundamental purpose of battering, which characterizes the majority of domestic violence criminal cases, is to control what the victim says, thinks, feels, and does. Victims are rarely in a position to “tell all,” although they may do so in unguarded moments. Take great care to not endanger victims with what they have shared about the offender, the abuse and their situation.
 - f. Engage in dialogue with the victim, thereby avoiding inadvertently treating her or him simply as an information source.

In order to avoid unintentionally replicating or reinforcing the actions of the abuser, offer a clear alternative to messages that the victim is crazy, at

fault, unbelievable, and unable to make decisions and that the abuser is unstoppable.

2. Victim engagement guidelines for patrol officers:

In responding to domestic violence–related calls, conducting the on-scene investigation, and interacting with victims and suspects, take the following specific actions, as appropriate to the circumstances of the case and victim safety:

- Do not tell the perpetrator what the victim has told officers.
- Do not ask the victim if she or he:
 - o Wants the suspect arrested
 - o Will testify in court
 - o Will sign a citizen’s arrest form
- Remain at the scene until the likelihood of further imminent violence has passed.
- Recognize that remaining calm and professional even if the victim is upset or hostile will enable officers to obtain better information.
- Recognize that the need for assistance may continue beyond the current incident and that the officer’s response will influence whether the victim will view law enforcement as a resource for ending the violence in the future.
- Reassure the victim that he or she can continue to call law enforcement if necessary. This is

especially true for victims who seem hostile to intervention.

- Be cognizant of the victim’s need for privacy and dignity by allowing her or him to change clothes if needed, shielded from on-lookers.
- Obtain a phone number of someone who will always know how to reach the victim and record that number on the Victim Information Form in accordance with department procedure.
- Provide victim with the *Victim Information Card* that contains information about shelter, orders for protection and other community resources; provides notice of the domestic abuse victim’s rights (Minn. Stat. § 629.341 subd.3).
- Recognize that for a variety of reasons a victim may appear hostile to officers even if she or he asked for help. If officers are patient and calm in the face of that hostility it will often dissipate over time; that is, initial hostility is likely to dissipate three or four calls later, but probably not five or ten minutes later.
- Recognize that victims are most likely to disclose abuse to the responding officer immediately following an assault. Most of the information on lethality and risk will be disclosed at this point in time. Become familiar with the appendix, *Practitioners’ Guide to Risk and Danger in Domestic Violence Cases*, and use this guide to help focus questions about risk.

- Recognize that the officer's need for specific information may compete with the victim's need to talk on his or her own terms.
- Recognize that better information is usually obtained by asking open-ended questions and following up on responses to those questions.
- Reassure the victim that the violence is not her or his fault, that she or he did the right thing by calling law enforcement, and that officers will take appropriate action to protect the victim.
- Provide messages of help, reassurance, and protection.

3. Victim engagement guidelines for investigators:

In conducting the investigation and interacting with victims and suspects, take the following specific actions, as appropriate to the circumstances of the case and victim safety.

- Do not tell the suspect what the victim has told you.
- If circumstances allow, do not tell the suspect you have spoken to the victim.
- Treat each contact with the victim as an opportunity to build a continuing relationship.
- Be patient with victims who may be hostile and less than appreciative of your efforts. Over time, if treated well, most victims will participate in a collaboration to stop the violence.
- Ensure that the victim knows who you are and how to contact you.
- Encourage the victim to report contact, abusive behavior and/or violations by the suspect.
- Request that the victim report any threats made by the offender for cooperating with the investigation.
- Inform the victim of the importance of keeping a record of mail, voice mail, e-mail, text messages, and other communication and contact from the suspect or others acting on the suspect's behalf.
- Inform victim of the availability of periodic "welfare" checks at her or his residence by officers.
- Problem solve with the victim around enhancing safety as the case proceeds through the legal system.
- If the victim is willing to talk about the full scope of abuse and violence, ask for details and record all credible reports of violence, stalking, coercion, intimidation, and related acts of abuse.
- Inform the victim of the availability of community services that will support and enhance safety.
- Ask open-ended questions, which are more likely to produce information than narrow questions.
- Provide the victim with the phone number of the local advocacy program for safety planning and services. (See appendix, *Interventions with Victims of Battering as Suspects or Defendants*, for referrals involving victims who are suspects.)
- If the victim and/or witnesses do not speak English, contact appropriate interpreter services
- For follow-up interviews, do not use neighbors or family members (specify local procedures for interpreter services).
- Provide messages of help, reassurance, and protection, using the guidance provided by the training memo accompanying this protocol.