

Lt. Scott Jenkins
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High stakes

SCOTT JENKINS: These are cases that are mundane, low level violence, they're not sexy cases where you walk away feeling like you really accomplished a lot. They're unique cases because of the connection that the parties involved have to each other. It's not like going to a bar fight where you separate the parties, or if you tag each of them for assault, probably they're gonna be friends the next day. These are people who have real things in common. They have a life in common, they have children in common, and the stakes are very high for losing those things, and that keeps them together. So the recognition that there's very unique aspects to this type of crime, and the fact that it happens in a place that's generally been off limits to police officers to act, being inside someone's home and inside their private lives, is very difficult for a police officer to recognize that this is a place where now we have some authority, now we have some ability to make changes. To at least start an intervention by making the right decision about arrest and what's best in those particular circumstances

The initial intervention

SCOTT JENKINS: So in regards to a working police officer on the street, they may not be the person who causes a coordinated community response to form, but they are the person who supplies the initial intervention, they're the eyes and the ears of everybody else involved in domestic violence response. All of the other agencies, both inside and outside the criminal justice system. We're the eyes and the ear, and the first contact, representatives of the intervention that could potentially happen here, good or bad, based on what we do in the those first several minutes, or the first hour that we're with this couple.

Protect yourself first?

SCOTT JENKINS: Typically, what's told to officers first is protect yourself first. Without being safe and protecting yourself, you can't do anyone else any good. That's a true statement. However, police officers immediately that these are some of the most dangerous calls that they'll handle, which is totally a fallacy. If you look at FBI statistics for officers assaulted or killed in the line of duty for any given year, domestic violence or domestic problems are generally somewhere in the middle in the rankings of how many officers are killed. The fact of that matter is and the trueness of that statement is that this is the most dangerous call for someone -- and that's the victim and their children. That's who the stakes are highest for. And although there are police officers that are killed, and police officers that are assaulted, we really need to go in with our eyes and ears open. Looking for the amount of or level of dangerousness or lethality that faces that family inside.

Will the batterer escape the consequences?

SCOTT JENKINS: So when that officer arrives on the scene, they are now a filter or a trap, so be it, for the rest of the system. They take in all of this information, and when you meet that

batterer at the door, when you come into that family's home, the batterer has all the reason in the world to make you look certain directions, to make you look at her and blame her for what's happened there ultimately, or to try to make things look very different than what's actually occurred. To make her look crazy and take the focus off of him and put it on anybody else. And if we do that, if we fall for that as young officers, or as officers responding to that scene, chances are that batterer is going to escape any type of consequence or arrest. So officers need to have this awareness of, "I need to collect the facts before I make a determination of what's happened here. The more facts, the more knowledge I have, the better prepared I am to make a determination about what my response is going to be this night or this day."