

SOP #206 Trauma Responsive Policing

MIDDLE TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT			
<i>Standard Operating Procedure</i>			
SOP #206	# OF PAGES: 4		
SUBJECT: Trauma Responsive Policing			
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BY THE ORDER OF: Police Chief Christopher Leusner			
SUPERCEDES ORDER #: None- New Policy			

I. Purpose:

To establish trauma informed and responsive police practices when officers are handling calls for service involving juveniles exposed to traumatic events to reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences.

II. Policy

The Middle Township Police Department recognizes the significant impacts and risks to children who experience traumatic events. Children who experience significant amounts of toxic stress as a result of adverse childhood experiences are more likely to have poor health, educational, and social outcomes. Police are in a unique situation to play a pivotal role to mitigate these impacts through trauma informed and responsive police practices and making referrals to our partners to help these children build resiliency.

III. Training:

- A. All Officers will receive a two hour block of training on Adverse Childhood Experiences during their Field Training Officer Program which will include viewing the documentary film ***“Resilience, The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope”*** Training will include an overview of neurological impact on the brain resulting in a juvenile in a persistent state of alarm and easily triggered into fight, flight, or freeze response. In addition, the training will cover Juvenile Procedures, Trauma Informed and Responsive Policing Procedures, Handle with Care Program, Police Youth Camp,

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Stationhouse Adjustment Protocols, Runaway Follow Up Procedures, and encourage referring youth to programs such as: Cape May County Sheriff's Department Explorer program, Cape Regional Medical Center Explorer Program, Junior Firefighter Youth Programs, Middle Township Recreation Programs, and any other respectable youth programs in the area. The Special Services Unit will maintain a list of such programs with contact information.

IV. Procedures

- A. If an officer responds to reported call for service involving violence or a call the officer reasonably believes would be a traumatic incident for a juvenile, the officer shall do the following after the scene has been stabilized:
1. Ascertain if there are any juveniles present that may have witnessed or heard the act or event.
 2. Determine if immediate action is necessary to locate the parent or guardian of the juvenile.
 3. Remove the child from the immediate area where the event occurred if possible.
 4. If reasonably possible, officers shall not interview witnesses in front of children.
 5. If reasonably possible, officers shall not arrest or handcuff parents or guardians in front of their children.
 6. Officers shall not use children as interpreters where there is a language barrier.
 7. When investigating Domestic Violence cases with children present, officers shall whenever possible keep the children with the non-offending parent.
 8. Officers shall be assertive when necessary but also calm and collected when on scene. Children will play off the emotions of an adult, especially a police officer.
 9. Officers shall recognize the most important message to send to a child after experiencing a traumatic event is they ARE SAFE, and taking even small steps or actions to convey this message is critical.
 10. If the officer is having a difficult time regulating the child, the officer should attempt to refocus the child by asking questions about their hobbies, video games, sports, etc. If this does not work, officers shall explain Tactical Breathing to the child and parent/caregiver and give the following instructions:
 - a. Ask the child to put one hand on his or her chest and the other hand on his or her stomach.
 - b. Ask the child to take a slow breath in through the nose.
 - c. Instruct the child to hold his or her breath for 1 or 2 seconds.
 - d. Instruct the child to exhale through the mouth as slowly as possible.
 - e. Let the child know, that as she or he breathes, his or her hand should rise with their stomach, while the other hand should move very little
 11. Officers may in addition to Tactical Breathing consider a fine motor activity to re-engage thinking part of the brain such as drawing to help regulate a child.
 12. Officers shall document the presence of any and all juveniles in their Investigation Report for any act of violence or traumatic event.

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13. Officers shall determine if the Department of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) should be contacted.
14. Officers shall complete a Handle with Care Referral in accordance with SOP#207 and forward it to the Special Services Unit before the end of their shift.

B. Follow-up visits

Following up with children in the days following a traumatic event can be a powerful tool to help the child in gaining a sense of security. Even very brief visits of five minutes can have a significant positive impact on the child and they get to see and interact with a police officer when there is not a crisis or emergency.

1. The primary officer or applicable SRO shall follow up by making visits to where the child is sheltered, the child's home, or the school the child attends.
2. These visits shall be conducted periodically and may be brief. (*Five minutes or less if necessary*)
3. These visits will occur for a period no less than one month after the event.
4. Officers will communicate a message of concern for the child and confirm our role in the community as sources of protection, safety, and service.
5. In addition to follow-up visits, the Special Services Sergeant will ensure follow up meeting with the School Resource Officer who will communicate a message consistent with B.4 listed above.
6. If the child's home environment is not conducive for follow-up visits, the primary officer will make arrangements with the SRO to have the follow-up visit conducted at the school.

C. SWAT Operations

The Middle Township Police Department recognizes a Special Weapons and Tactics Operation where children are present can be a traumatic experience for a child. Detectives who have knowledge of children present or the possibility of children present at a target location shall ensure the SWAT Commander includes the following in their operations plan:

1. After the location has been cleared or secured, move the children if reasonably possible to a location from where the adults are being questioned.
2. When reasonably possible, SWAT Operators that remain in the location for security purposes shall remove obstructing garments such as balaclava or ballistic helmets.
3. If children are present, the parent/caregiver shall be allowed to provide care for the child. If the security does not permit or the parent/caregiver is not there, an officer shall be assigned to the child to provide care.
4. Officers interacting with children during these operations shall follow the steps outlined above in Section A.

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D. Death Notifications

Nothing in this policy shall supersede or replace SOP#108, Notification Procedures for Homicide and Sudden Death Survivors. Officers shall do the following during a Death Notification if children are present:

1. Officers shall if reasonably possible notify the parent or caregiver first without the child present.
2. Officers shall provide support the parent/caregiver in giving death notification to the child if requested.
3. The officer shall talk with the parent about words or messages that might not be helpful such as telling the child the person who has died is away on a trip or at work to avoid the notification.
4. The officer shall assist the parent/caregiver in delivering the notification if requested or sitting nearby.
5. If the parent/caregiver requests the officer to make the death notification to the child, the officer shall:
 - a. Utilize clear, simple language
 - b. Demonstrate compassion and empathy through direct and honest communication
 - c. Avoid phrases which may inadvertently create confusion such as “passed away” or “gone to heaven”
6. Officer shall not leave until the parent/caregiver has appropriate support.