



# Domestic Violence Response

## Officer Safety in Domestic Violence Responses

*Note: Edited excerpt from December 2013 Police Chief Officer Safety Corner.*

**STUDIES SHOW THAT MOST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDES** occur while victims are attempting to leave or after they have left an abusive relationship. Additionally, of those victims, 76 percent of femicide cases involved at least one episode of stalking within 12 months prior to the murder and 85 percent of attempted femicide cases involved one episode of stalking within that same period. As many law enforcement officers realize, the most dangerous time for the victim, as well as the officer, is when a victim is leaving. Leaving is not an event; it is a complex process.

Case analysis reveals that domestic violence offenders use more force when they believe they are losing control. Therefore, officers can face an increased level of danger when responding to domestic violence incidents. Predictions based on tested and reliable danger assessment protocols can be critical for the first responder. What is known about domestic violence offenders is that they will actively pose a threat to responding officers and fight to defend what they often believe they are entitled to do and how they are entitled to behave. In many cases, perpetrators have been raised in a culture of male privilege that has shaped

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their values and beliefs, creating a mind-set of ownership of a loved one and a lack of personal accountability.

The IACP's training video, *The Crime of Domestic Violence*, highlights information regarding the danger that domestic violence calls may present to responding officers (see sidebar). Law enforcement poses a threat to the power and control of abusers. Because of this, offenders will often respond with manipulation, threats, or violence. The tactics that perpetrators of abuse use to control victims are often the same tactics they will use on responding officers. This video highlights the danger and potential lethality of domestic violence calls, information about offender behaviors that may indicate increased risk for victims and officers, and details that officers should gather before approaching a scene.

There are several steps that can be taken to strengthen support of victims and officers. Strong relationships and regular communication with domestic and sexual violence advocates can help assess the danger posed by perpetrators. Smart policing requires collaboration between the advocacy and police communities. Experience demonstrates that many of the difficulties seen across the United States with the advocate-police relationship develop from a lack of understanding of the difficulties in the work each other does. Cultivating and maintaining this connection is the immediate responsibility of all involved.

The profession's response to domestic violence transformed in the 1980s as the IACP helped police leaders write, implement, and evaluate the first departmental domestic violence policies. Law enforcement leaders must ask themselves "Is my concern for the safety of domestic violence victims and for my officers fully reflected in my agency's policies and practices?" and "Does the work of my officers reflect these standards?"

### THE CRIME OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRAINING VIDEO

Domestic violence is one of the most dangerous and complex calls that law enforcement officers respond to. Officers provide as much support to victims as possible, but the ongoing nature of the crime, the history and relationship of those involved, and the co-occurrence of multiple crimes often leave law enforcement frustrated and discouraged. When equipped with a better understanding of the nuances and dynamics of this course of conduct crime, law enforcement can more effectively address victims' needs and hold offenders accountable. To support law enforcement and strengthen their response to victims of domestic violence, IACP created a four-part training video, *The Crime of Domestic Violence*, with funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women. Through interviews with law enforcement, experts, and survivors, the training video highlights the realities of domestic violence, provides strategies for effective investigations, and counters social misconceptions of this complex crime.

The first segment presents information on the severity of domestic violence and factors that may impact victim behavior. It is critical for law enforcement officers to build a better understanding of the dynamics and patterns of power, control, and abuse. The second segment highlights the importance of recognizing domestic violence as a course of conduct crime, meaning that multiple incidents and abusive behaviors tend to occur over an extended period. Responding officers need to be equipped with this understanding to capture pertinent details to support the victim; hold the offender accountable; and conduct a thorough, comprehensive investigation. The third segment highlights information on the danger that perpetrators of domestic violence may present to responding officers. The fourth segment highlights the value of partnerships to support individual cases and implement system-wide improvements. When law enforcement agencies collaborate with other organizations and partners on multiagency, multidisciplinary teams, victim support improves and response and investigations strengthen.

