

Domestic Violence Investigation Checklist

From Law Enforcement Response and Procedure, Chapter 10, in Criminal Domestic Violence Investigations Manual, South Carolina Department of Public Safety, Criminal Justice Academy Division.

1. Victim

- Describe the victim's location upon arrival.
- Administer first aid to the victim.
- Document statements made by the victim.
- Describe the victim's emotional condition.
- Describe the victim's physical condition.
- Document the victim's injuries.
- Physically separate the victim and suspect in different rooms and interview.
- Document the victim's injuries in detail.
- Make note of the victim's relationship to the suspect.
- Document history of abuse.
- Note any temporary restraining or other court orders.
- Give victim required written information on local resources for victims of domestic violence and explain what will happen to the police's report.
- Document any temporary address or telephone number of the victim.

2. Suspect

- Describe the suspect's location upon arrival.
- Administer first aid to the suspect.
- Document any statements or admissions made by the suspect.
- Describe the suspect's emotional condition.
- Describe the suspect's physical condition.
- Document the suspect's injuries in detail.
- Document evidence of substance or chemical abuse by suspect.
- Interview the suspect.
- Obtain a photograph of the suspect if not present for identification and arrest purposes.

3. Witness

- Interview the reporting party.
- Identify all witnesses and interview separately.
- List names and ages of children present.
- Interview the children.
- Document names and addresses of emergency personnel.
- Document name of treating physician in emergency room.

4. Evidence

- Photograph the crime scene.
- Take "full body" photograph of the suspect.
- Photograph the victim's injuries.
- Retake photos 48-72 hours later.
- Photograph the suspect's injuries.
- Seize all weapons used.
- Obtain copy of emergency call tape.
- Attach related reports, photographs, and evidence to investigation copy.
- Obtain medical history.

Interviewing Techniques

Interviewing the Victim:

- Interview the victim separately from the batterer.
- Ask only one question at a time, and wait for the answer. Listen carefully to the victim's answers, and do not interrupt. Allow her to describe the incident in her own terms, and then ask clarifying questions.
- If she is shaking or crying, acknowledge this. Be prepared for her to be angry, as well.
- Remember that victims may often use minimizing language to describe extreme acts of violence. Follow up by asking them to expand on what they just said.
- Ask the victim about any history of abuse, whether it was reported or not. Remember that victims may not remember all instances of abuse; they are more likely to remember the first, the last, and the worst incidents.
- Be patient and reassuring, and try to avoid unnecessary pressure. The victim may feel a combination of both fear of and loyalty to the suspect.
- Do not judge victims and listen with non-blaming feedback. Try to avoid making assumptions about the situation or her experience.
- Resist giving your personal opinion about what the victim should do.
- Reassure her that she is not to blame and that help is available.
- Ask the victim whether she has injuries that are not apparent. Sometimes, it may be necessary to ask an open-ended question, such as: "Where did he put his hands?"
- Conclude the interview in such a manner that the victim feels comfortable contacting the investigator again.

Interviewing BATTERERS:

- Do not make accusatory statements or confront him with contradictory information. Ask open-ended questions and allow him to tell his story.
- Acknowledge that he may be feeling frustration, anger, and concern, but do not justify or excuse his behavior.
- Do not express sympathy with his explanations for the violence.

Interviewing Children:

- Interview children outside the presence of their parents.
- Conduct the interview in a place that is comfortable for the child.
- Attempt to place yourself on the child's level by sitting or kneeling.
- Begin the interview with non-threatening questions.
- Avoid suggesting responses to questions.
- Understand that children may feel responsible for what happened, or guilty about telling the police about the incident. Reassure children that you only want to help and that they would not be doing anything wrong by talking about what happened.

Sources:

- Law Enforcement Response and Procedure*, Chapter 10, in *Criminal Domestic Violence Investigations Manual*, South Carolina Department of Public Safety, Criminal Justice Academy Division, available at <http://www.scdps.org/cja/cdvmanual.htm>.
- Domestic Violence*, Chapter 13, National Victim Assistance Academy, 1996, available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/assist/nvaa/ch13dv.htm>.
- First Response to Victims of Crime: A Handbook for Law Enforcement Officers on How To Approach and Help Elderly Victims, Victims of Sexual Assault, Child Victims, Victims of Domestic Violence, and Survivors of Homicide Victims*, U.S. Department of Justice, May 2000, available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/firstrep/welcome.html>.
- Presentation on Law Enforcement Investigation Techniques at the Inter-Balkan Conference on Strategies to Combat Domestic Violence*, Loretta Frederick, 4-6 November 1997.

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