

1.02A POST-SHOOTING PROCEDURES



POST-SHOOTING PROCEDURES

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I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

Law enforcement duties can expose officers and support personnel to mentally painful and highly stressful situations that cannot be resolved through normal stress coping mechanisms. Unless adequately treated, these situations can cause disabling emotional and physical problems. It has been found that officer-involved shootings resulting in death or serious bodily injury to a citizen or a fellow officer may precipitate such stress disorders. It is the responsibility of the West Brookfield Police Department to provide personnel with information on stress disorders and to guide and assist in their prevention.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines that shall be uniformly applied following any officer-involved shooting incident that results in death or serious bodily injury, in order to minimize the chances that involved personnel will develop or suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the West Brookfield Police Department to take immediate action after officer-involved shooting incidents to safeguard the continued good mental health of all involved personnel.

III. DEFINITIONS

IV. PROCEDURES

HANDLING OF OFFICERS AT SCENE OF SHOOTING INCIDENT

A supervisor shall be dispatched to the scene of all officer-involved shootings and shall assume primary responsibility in caring for involved personnel. The supervisor will ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for all necessary medical treatment.

During any period where an involved officer is required to remain on the scene, but has no immediate duties to fulfill, the officer(s) should be taken to a quiet area away from the scene of the incident. A peer counselor or other supportive friend or officer should remain with the officer(s), but should be advised not to discuss details of the incident.

The supervisor should arrange for the officer(s) directly involved in the incident to leave the scene as soon as possible, and be taken to a quiet, secure setting.

Where possible, the supervisor shall briefly meet with the involved officers. Only preliminary questions should be asked about the incident. The officer(s) should be advised that a more detailed debriefing will be conducted later. Investigative procedures that will occur concerning the incident should be discussed with the officer(s). The officer(s) should be advised not to discuss the incident with anyone without authorization.

For any officer that discharged a firearm, the supervisor shall make provisions for the officer's duty weapon to be taken for laboratory analysis and replace it with another weapon. A uniformed officer should never be left unarmed in public, unless extraordinary circumstances exist. The officer's firearm may be taken without replacement in the privacy of the police department, if necessary.

The involved officers should notify their families about the incident as soon as possible. Where an officer is unable to do so, a member of the department selected by the supervisor on scene should personally notify the officer's family, and offer transportation to the hospital if the officer has been transported there.

At all times the supervisor should handle the officer and all involved personnel in a manner that acknowledges the stress caused by the incident.

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POST-INCIDENT PROCEDURES [1.1.8]

Involved personnel shall be removed from field duty during the post shooting investigation, but shall remain available for any necessary administrative investigations. Formal statements from officers involved shall be provided 24-72 hours after the event. Officers should not make a formal statement for at least 24 hours and one full sleep cycle. Several sleep cycles may be preferable to account for the greatest recollection of the event. If practical, the involved officer(s) should be permitted to make their formal statement while doing a walk through at the scene of the incident.

The department will ensure that a debriefing is held as soon as possible after the incident. All officers directly involved in the shooting incident shall be required to contact a department-designated specialist for counseling and evaluation as soon as practical after the incident. Involved support personnel should also be encouraged to contact such specialists after a shooting incident. The department strongly encourages the families of the involved officers to take advantage of available counseling services as well.

After the counseling sessions with the officers directly involved in the incident, the specialist shall advise the department:

1. Whether it would be in the officers' best interest to be placed on further administrative leave or light duty, and for how long;
2. If the officer was relieved of his firearm, without replacement, at what point should it be returned; and
3. What the best continued course of counseling will be.

Any department investigation of the incident shall be conducted as soon and as quickly as practical. The department should brief other department members concerning the incident so that rumors are kept to a minimum. Department members should be encouraged to show the involved officers their concern.

All personnel involved in a shooting incident should be advised that they are not permitted to speak with the media about the incident (See departmental policy on Police Media Relations). In order to protect the officer against crank or abusive calls, they should be advised to have phone calls answered by another person for several days if their names are released to the public.

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DAILY STRESS RECOGNITION

Since some post-traumatic stress disorders may not arise immediately, or the officers may attempt to hide the problem, each supervisor is responsible for monitoring the behavior of officers under their command for symptoms of the disorder.

Some symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders include:

1. Feeling numb;
2. Feeling out of touch with what is going on around them;
3. A feeling that this is happening to someone else;
4. Withdrawing and avoiding anything to do with the traumatic situation or police work;
5. Avoiding other people, including one's family;
6. Intrusive and recurring thoughts of the event and feeling that it may be happening again;
7. Irritability;
8. Sleep problems;
9. Difficulty in concentrating; and
10. Hypervigilance.

The Chief of Police may order an officer to seek assistance or counseling from a mental health specialist upon a reasonable belief that stress may be disrupting the officer's job performance.

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