

When the worst happens:

Providing trauma- and developmentally-informed death notifications for children and families



Presenters

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Agenda

- 1) Overview of innovative Child Development-Community Policing program
- 2) Death notification principles and strategies
- 3) Q & A

Child Development-Community Policing (CD-CP)

- CD-CP is a collaborative partnership between New Haven police, Yale Child Study Center clinicians, Child Protection, and other social service agencies
- Began in New Haven in 1991 as a new way of looking at police roles in curbing violence
- Goals include increased contact and provision of services to families in the immediate aftermath of a potentially traumatic event (PTE)

CD-CP Replication

- CD-CP strategies and approaches have been replicated in numerous communities across the country and internationally
- The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department in collaboration with the Mecklenburg County Department of Public Health came to New Haven for CD-CP training in 1996 and has been providing CD-CP services, and teaching and training on the model since then

CD-CP Program Elements

- Immediate/on-scene and follow-up collaborative response to violent and catastrophic events 24/7
- Cross-training
- Clinician/police ride-alongs
- Joint follow up
- Weekly case conferences

Yale Child Study Center Responses

Over the past 30 years, the Yale Child Study Center has responded to more than 30,000 children and their families who have been exposed to:

- Murders, murder/suicides
- Non-lethal domestic violence
- Sexual abuse/assault
- Physical abuse and neglect
- Suicides and drug overdose
- Kidnapping
- Hostage and barricade situations
- Serious motor vehicle accidents
- Fires

Police referrals to
Yale Child Study Center

Police make referrals to mental health partners when a child has been exposed to a violent or potentially traumatic event—as a victim or witness— including but not limited to:

- Domestic violence
- Motor vehicle accident
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Community violence
- Hostage/barricade situation
- Kidnapping

Some incidents require an immediate, on-scene clinical response

- An “acute”, or “on-scene response” may be appropriate when a child has been acutely exposed to an extremely violent event, such as:
 - Homicide
 - Suicide
 - Serious assault
 - Major accident
 - Kidnapping
 - Community violence and shootings

Officers provide information to caregivers about the impact of trauma following a violent or overwhelming event by:

- 1. Communicating about the impact** of trauma on children and families using the *When Your Child Sees Violence Brochure*
- 2. Describing the partnership** between NHPD and Yale Child Study and what it can do for families
- 3. Asking family for permission** to make a referral

Clinician Ride-alongs

Clinician Ride-alongs

- All new members of the YCS team do ride-alongs as part of their training.
- Clinicians are on the road 2-3 times a week.
- The typical ride-along begins at 4:00 and continues until the officer and clinician determine the ride is finished.
- Clinicians accompany officers on calls for service, and police-clinician/advocate teams conduct home visits as time permits.

Goals of Ride-alongs

- Offer clinicians a unique perspective on our clients, our community, police work, which they would not otherwise have.
- Allow police to see clinicians on-scene with families, and to better understand what YCS does for children and families.
- Build and maintain relationships between clinicians and officers.
- Best opportunity for clinicians to learn police procedures, with the result that clinicians can be more effective, police-informed, partners

Joint Home Visits

Joint Home Visits

- Follow up home visits are conducted jointly by officers and clinicians/advocates.
- When the referral incident is sexual abuse, the follow-up occurs by phone and will not typically involve a home visit in order not to interfere with the investigation process (which often includes a forensic interview), unless otherwise determined by SVU supervisor and clinical team.

Goals of the Home Visit

- Provide a sense of physical and psychological safety through a joint law enforcement-mental health response.
- Build relationships between victims and neighborhood patrol.
- Improve victims' understanding of court processes and orders.
- Increase parents' understanding of children's responses to potentially traumatic events.

Roles in the Home Visit

Officer's Role

- Provide family with a sense of security and order
- Assist with safety planning
- Answer questions regarding the incident and the investigation, court and protective orders
- Arrange for police follow-up as necessary

Clinician/Advocate's Role

- Screen for trauma symptoms
- Provide psychoeducation
- Assist with safety planning
- Arrange for clinical follow-up as necessary

Joint Community Canvassing

Joint Community Canvassing

A district manager or other police supervisor may request a community canvass following incidents which may impact a larger area of the community (e.g., homicides).

Goals of Joint Community Canvassing

- To acknowledge that something upsetting has happened and indicate that the police are taking it seriously and paying attention to the needs of the community.
- To identify children and families who are experiencing difficulty and provide services.
- Reduce fear of police and increase opportunities for potential witnesses to come forward.

Death Notification

Goals of Developmentally and Trauma-informed Death Notifications

- Provide information about death
- Create immediate stabilization
- Develop plans for safety and concrete needs (if necessary)
- Provide information and support for caregivers and linkages to other resources
- Increase recognition by caregivers of the potential impact of traumatic grief
- Engage families in follow-up assessment and clinical, policing and other services

Overarching Principles of Death Notification

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- In Pairs, In Person, In Time, In Plain Language
- With Compassion

Plan Ahead

In Pairs

Create a plan, with your partner(s), which includes:

- Who actually gives the initial information
- What information to provide
- Where to provide it

Consider on-scene/location factors

In Person

- Request to speak with immediate survivor
- Identify yourself and your partner(s)
- Verify the relationship of the survivor to the deceased

Notifying Children

Notifying Children

- Encourage the family to think about what words they want to use
- Talk with the caregiver in preparation about messages that might not be helpful
- Offer support to the caregiver if they would like it while they are providing the news, for example, by sitting nearby

Consider Development

- Help caregivers understand that preschoolers (and even some older children) may need repetition and may not understand the abstract concept of “death”
- Adolescents may bring more of their religious and cultural beliefs when processing death
- Across all ages: children benefit from information about what will happen to them in the immediate aftermath and from having a trusted caregiver (if possible) attend to their basic and emotional needs

Strategies for Engaging Children

- Consider having drawing materials
- Use language that is appropriate for child's developmental stage
- Consider family's cultural and religious background
- Rely on known and trusted caregiver (if one is available)
- Teach regulation strategy (e.g., tactical breathing)

In Time

In Plain Language

- Be straightforward
- Avoid euphemisms, graphic detail and police jargon
- Refer to deceased by first name or by the relationship to the family member(s) receiving the notification

With Compassion

Avoid attempts to comfort using clichés such as *“I know how hard this must be for you,”* or *“I know how you feel”*

Be Prepared

- Be prepared for a range of responses
- Bring a list of community support services
- Make sure person has support (call a friend or family)
- Leave your card
- When possible, follow up in a few days with a call or visit.

Summary

Working collaboratively can help communities and families:

- Find the help that they need
- Get help more quickly
- Locate a more comprehensive set of resources
- Trust police, their government and institutions
- Feel that they are treated with care and respect
- Feel that their neighborhoods are safer and a better place to raise children

Death Notifications

- Are never easy
- But can be done in a way that considers a child's developmental needs
- Can be a first step in engaging families in follow-up services

Questions?