



## Chapter 2

# 911 Emergency Communications Center

# 911- EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

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## **FRAMEWORK: BUILDING A SAFETY-ORIENTED RESPONSE**

When telecommunicators are organized, trained, and prepared to determine who is in danger and how, there are multiple opportunities to deliver a safety-oriented response to domestic abuse calls. Accurately recognizing and communicating the risk that one party poses to another can enhance the immediate safety of responding officers and everyone at the scene, as well as the extent to which subsequent interveners can address ongoing safety. An effective response requires solid coordination and communication between call takers, dispatchers, and patrol officers.

Under the Blueprint policies and protocols, responding officers need far more detail about the call than previously expected. As always, they need the correct location, how to safely enter the premises, and the presence and use of weapons. But now officers need specifics provided by the caller on the violence and threats being used, injuries, and the suspect's history of aggression toward law enforcement. They need up-to-date information about changing conditions at the scene. In GOA calls, details about the suspect's identity, physical description, and direction and mode of travel increase officers' ability to locate the suspect. Information about existing orders for protection, harassment orders, domestic abuse no-contact orders, warrants, criminal history, and prior calls to the address and parties involved can assist call takers, dispatchers, and officers to establish the nature of the emergency and the type and level of danger presented.

The Blueprint is designed to ensure that information related to the nature of emergency that call takers and dispatchers gather and document reaches subsequent interveners who are seeking to hold domestic violence offenders accountable. Prosecutors and those writing presentence investigation reports, for example, count on high quality, readily accessible recordings and computer assisted dispatch (CAD) transmissions that document specific details of the nature of the threats, harm, and violence involved in the call. Attempting to determine whether there is an actual domestic relationship involved helps to reduce the hundreds of cases officers respond to that are coded as a "domestic," but are not. Reducing over-coding helps focus officers' sense of urgency on domestic calls and provides a more accurate picture of the volume and scope of reported incidents.

Because domestic violence is a patterned crime, usually occurring over a long period of time, a single call is rarely the extent of the 911 center's involvement with a victim and offender. Many victims make repeated calls to 911 in the face of ongoing intimidation, threats, and violence. The response to each call must therefore establish a foundation for continuing engagement if it is to reflect the ongoing nature of the crime and contribute to the long-term safety of victims, their children, and responding officers. Victims must know that they can use 911 to request help whenever they need it, whether it is the first or fifth or fifteenth call.

## **POLICY: RECEIVING 911 DOMESTIC ABUSE CALLS**

In addition to adhering to general agency policy, 11 call takers will take the following actions in receiving and responding to domestic abuse–related calls, using the protocols and appendices referenced and included as part of this policy.

1. Implement the provisions of this policy in accordance with **Protocol 1: Receiving 911 Domestic Abuse Calls**.
2. Treat each domestic abuse call as a high priority if any of the following circumstances exist, including calls if the suspect has left the scene:
  - a. A weapon is involved.
  - b. A physical assault is occurring or has just occurred.
  - c. It appears that violence is imminent; or the caller is afraid; or the argument is escalating.
  - d. The suspect has made severe threats, such as threatened to kill the victim, take or harm children, harm or kill pets, burn down the house, or commit suicide.
  - e. The suspect has left the scene and the caller or victim fears his or her imminent return or is likely to return.
  - f. The suspect is gone and unlikely to return soon and the caller or victim does not fear his or her return.
  - g. There is a reported violation of a no-contact order, order for protection, or harassment restraining order with no threat of harm and the suspect is not at the scene and/or is unlikely to return soon.
  - h. There is a verbal argument between parties with no known history of violence or no threat of harm.
  - i. A third party reports shouting or a loud argument with no further information.
3. Communicate effectively, respectfully, and safely with callers.
4. Determine and relay the nature of the emergency and the response priority to responding officers.
5. Direct responding officers to the correct address, location, and appropriate people at the scene, including detailed information that will assist officers in locating a suspect who has left the scene.
6. Relay to officers all available information including the type and level of danger involved, description of the violence, if alcohol/drugs are involved, whether other people were involved (such as witnesses or children), threats, and injuries.
7. Advance safety for those at the scene while help is en route.
8. Communicate and document information related to the nature of the emergency; violence, threats, and injuries; and the safety of responding officers and those at the scene.

9. Establish a foundation for continuing engagement with members of the public seeking help in domestic abuse cases.

## **PROTOCOL 1: RECEIVING 911 DOMESTIC ABUSE CALLS**

This protocol is not meant to instruct call takers in a set of strict sequential steps. It acknowledges that receiving 911 domestic abuse calls involves simultaneously obtaining and relaying information while maximizing safety for victims and responding officers. These functions often occur within a short period of intense activity. A safe response to domestic abuse calls requires considerable judgment on the part of call takers and an understanding of complex factors affecting communication and safety.

**Communicate effectively:** communicate in ways that (1) get help quickly and safely to the scene; (2) help the caller convey what is happening; and (3) establish an initial relationship with a member of the public who is turning to the law enforcement and other governmental agencies for help.

1. Use *Appendix 2A: Protocol 1 – 911 Operator Call Card* to guide the call.
  - a. When callers are unable to communicate clearly:
    - Provide language interpretation and TTY/TDD calls.
    - Slow down, simplify language, and adjust the response when the caller appears to have difficulty because of fear, injury, disability, intoxication, or other barriers to communication.
    - Be alert to the impact of strangulation or other injuries on a caller’s ability to communicate.
  - b. Elicit information safely.
    - Verify that it is safe for the caller to speak freely.
    - Utilize strategies that promote safety when it has not been confirmed that the caller can speak freely.
  - c. Inform caller when patrol has been notified and tell the caller that a squad has been dispatched. In emergency situations where the victim is afraid or anxious, check with the squad to see if the officer is en route and relay that information to the caller.
  - d. Respond safely to calls that are disconnected or otherwise interrupted.
  - e. Reflect awareness of cultural and social factors in communication.
  - f. Establish rapport with and communicate core messages to callers.
    - Reinforce that 911 is available when a caller needs it, regardless of how many times they have called.
    - Avoid blaming or criticizing the caller.

- Respond to callers with courtesy, respect, and reassurance, even when they are difficult to work with.
2. Determine the nature of the emergency and the response priority, per policy.
    - a. When in doubt, code the call as High Priority.
    - b. Establish the immediate threat of harm to persons at the scene, responding officers, and others.
    - c. Determine the nature of any injuries and the need for immediate medical attention.
    - d. Establish whether children are safe, harmed, abducted, or being drawn into the events in any way.
    - e. Assign an accurate type code.
      - Code any dispute between adult partners or former partners as a domestic when the relationship between the parties meets the statutory definition of a domestic relationship. Use this code whether or not there is an allegation of physical violence.
      - Code calls that involve allegations that a protection order has been violated accordingly.
      - An officer dispatched to a call coded domestic who finds that there is no domestic relationship between the parties should notify the dispatcher to recode the call.
      - Do not recode a call simply because it does not involve an allegation of physical assault. Re-code the call as non-domestic only if it has been established that there is no domestic relationship between the parties.
      - An officer dispatched to a call coded as non-domestic should notify the dispatcher to recode the call as a domestic when that relationship has been established and there is any allegation of abuse, whether or not an arrest is made.
    - f. When it is safe for the caller to stay on the line, keep the caller on the line until an officer is on the scene and has made contact with the caller, victim, or witness.
      - Apply in calls reporting or suggesting high danger, volatility, or escalation, including but not limited to calls involving weapons, where the caller is afraid, where an assault or another crime is in progress, or where someone has been seriously injured.
      - Apply in calls where the suspect is at the scene and the threat is ongoing.
      - Apply in non-urgent calls reporting a low level of immediate threat and danger, as call volume permits.
      - Apply when the caller is a child and there is an ongoing situation.
    - g. Do not force the caller to stay on the line if she or he says it is not safe. They may, however, be able to put the phone down and keep an open line.
  3. Direct responding officers to the correct address and location and to the appropriate people at the scene.

- a. Use *Appendix 2A: Protocol 1 – 911 Operator Call Card* to guide the call.
  - b. Establish the correct address and physical location of the event.
  - c. Utilize information available via the ANI/ALI screen and GPS sources as necessary and appropriate.
  - d. Establish the means of entry to the premises.
  - e. In third-party calls, determine whether the caller can let officers into the building.
  - f. Establish the identities, descriptions, and locations of those involved at the scene.
  - g. Establish and communicate the caller’s location to dispatch.
4. Establish the type and level of danger to the caller, responding officers, and others at the scene.
- a. Use *Appendix 2A: Protocol 1 – 911 Operator Call Card* to guide the call.
  - b. Establish as clear a picture as possible of the type of violence and actions of aggression or harm involved and the immediate danger.
    - **Enter specific details** in the CAD about the type of violence, actions of aggression, injuries, and harm being reported.
    - Include an **exact report of what the caller saw or heard** in order to assist officers in determining the means of entry, asking questions at the scene, and establishing probable cause. (See *Appendix 1C: Training Memo—Interventions with Victims of Battering as Suspects or Defendants.*)
    - Elicit pertinent information about the suspect’s history of aggression.
    - Determine the risk to persons at the scene.
    - Determine the risk to responding officers, including dogs or other pets that may pose a problem for them.
    - Determine the presence and use of weapons and the suspect’s history of aggression toward law enforcement.
    - Continue to stay alert to and confirm whether it is safe for the caller to stay on the line and respond to the call taker’s questions.
5. Advance safety for those at the scene while help is en route.
- a. Use *Appendix 2A: Protocol 1 – 911 Operator Call Card* to guide the call.
  - b. Communicate safely and effectively with the caller.
  - c. Provide safety suggestions or instructions to the caller.
  - d. Provide medical instructions to the caller as necessary.
  - e. Stay alert to and respond safely to a suspect on the line. When helpful to reinforcing safety, engage with a suspect on the line to control escalation while officers are en route.

- f. Notify the 911 supervisor when one of the parties involved is a law enforcement officer, public safety officer, 911 employee, public official, or a prominent member of the public.
6. Communicate and document information related to the nature of the emergency; violence, threats, and injuries; and the safety of responding officers and those at the scene.
    - a. Use Protocol 1—Cards 1 through 3 to guide the call.
    - b. Relay accurate information to dispatch and responding officers.
    - c. Enter specific details about the violence, threats, and injuries involved into the CAD report.
    - d. Access and relay records, including orders for protection, domestic abuse no-contact orders, warrants, and, upon the officer's request, suspect's probation or parole status, if available.
    - e. Provide updated information about the call and conditions at the scene to dispatch.
    - f. Respond to requests for information from dispatch and officers en route or at the scene.
  7. Establish a foundation for continuing engagement with members of the public seeking help in domestic abuse cases.
    - a. Use *Appendix 2A: Protocol 1 – 911 Operator Call Card* to guide the call.
    - b. Be familiar with *Appendix 1C: Training Memo—Interventions with Victims of Battering as Suspects or Defendants*.
    - c. Avoid placing the victim in a position of confrontation with the suspect.
    - d. Protect the victim from retaliation when communicating with the suspect or the victim.
    - e. Treat each interaction with the victim as an opportunity to build collaboration over multiple contacts.
    - f. Know the signs that violence may be resuming or escalating.
    - g. Respond to callers' requests for information about community resources related to domestic violence.

### **APPENDICES TO PROTOCOL 1: RECEIVING 911 DOMESTIC ABUSE CALLS**

The following appendices are included as part of the policy on receiving 911 domestic abuse calls and can be used for training purposes.

- *Appendix 1C: Training Memo—Interventions with Victims of Battering as Suspects or Defendants*
- *Appendix 2A: Protocol 1 – 911 Operator Call Card*
- *Appendix 2C: Protocol 4— Call Review Checklist*
- *Appendix 2D: Training Memo—Accurate Coding of 911 Domestic Abuse Calls*

- *Appendix 2E: Training Memo—911 Attention to Violence*
- *Appendix 2F: Training Memo—Recognizing Signs of Strangulation*
- *Appendix 2G: Training Memo—Suspect on the Line*
- *Appendix 2H: Training Memo—Open-Line and Interrupted Calls*

See the Madison County Blueprint for Safety Appendix for appendices referenced in the policy and protocols.

## Victims made more 911 calls

if the perpetrator used a weapon, the victim experienced sexual abuse, or the physical violence was severe.

- *Bonomi et al. (2006)*



## **PROTOCOL 2: DISPATCHING 911 DOMESTIC ABUSE CALLS**

This protocol is not meant to instruct call takers in a set of strict sequential steps. It acknowledges that receiving 911 domestic abuse calls involves simultaneously obtaining and relaying information while maximizing safety for victims and responding officers. These functions often occur within a short period of intense activity. A safe response to domestic abuse calls requires considerable judgment on the part of call takers and an understanding of complex factors affecting communication and safety.

1. Relay the nature of the emergency and the response priority to responding officers per policy, using *Appendix 2B: Protocol 2—911 Dispatch Call Card* to guide the call.
  - a. When in doubt, code the call as a High Priority.
  - b. Establish the immediate threat of harm to responding officers, the victim, and others.
  - c. Establish the nature of any injuries and the need for immediate medical attention.
  - d. Establish whether children are present, safe and unharmed.
  - e. Query call taker as needed to verify details related to responding officer and victim safety.
2. Direct responding officers to the correct address, location, and appropriate people at the scene, including detailed information that will assist officers in locating a suspect who has left the scene.
  - a. Verify the correct address and physical location of the call while maximizing safety for the caller.
  - b. Verify the caller's location.
  - c. Relay to responding officers all available details about the identities and physical descriptions of those involved and at the scene.
  - d. Relay to responding officers all available details about suspect identity, physical description, and vehicle when the suspect has left the scene or is reported as gone-on-arrival (GOA).
3. Relay to responding officers all available information about the type and level of danger involved, including violence, threats, and injuries and actions of aggression or harm to persons at the scene.
  - a. Verify and relay the presence and use of any weapons.
  - b. Verify and relay information about the suspect's history of aggression toward those at the scene and toward law enforcement. In cases that seem volatile, notify the records section operator and request record checks.
  - c. Promptly relay details about changing conditions at the scene to responding officers.
  - d. Promptly relay details about any change in suspect location and information that will aid officers in locating a suspect who has left the scene.

- e. Determine and relay the status of any current warrants, court orders, and probation status (if probation information is available to dispatch).
  - f. If possible, determine and relay the history of past calls to the location or those involved.
  - g. Check officer status and safety at the scene as warranted.
4. Communicate and document information related to the nature of the emergency and the safety of all involved to responding officers and subsequent interveners.
- a. Enter into the CAD report specific details about the violence, threats, and injuries involved.
  - b. Provide updated information about the call and conditions at the scene to responding officers.
    - Inform the officer via radio of the general nature and severity of any threats.
    - Enter the more specific description of the call and quotes into the CAD and cue officer to check the CAD as soon as possible.
  - c. Respond to requests for information from officers en route or at the scene.
  - d. Ensure that officers have the following information available:
    - Warrants
    - Criminal history
    - Current order for protection, harassment order, domestic abuse no-contact order, and other court orders
    - Probation and parole status
  - e. Do not recode a call as non-domestic simply because it does not involve an allegation of physical assault. Recode the call only if it has been established that there is no domestic relationship between the parties.
  - f. On information from a responding officer, recode the call to a domestic type in cases where the initial coding was a non-domestic call type.
  - g. Notify the designated 911 supervisor when one of the parties involved is a law enforcement officer or other public safety officer, 911 employee, public official, or prominent member of the public.
5. Utilize all available databases, documents, and other records to assist call takers, dispatchers, and patrol officers in establishing the nature of the emergency and the type and level of danger presented. Upon request, check the following:
- a. Search civil court order registries statewide and nationally for orders for protection, harassment orders, and domestic abuse restraining orders.
  - b. Search for current domestic abuse no-contact orders (DANCO) issued as part of a pending criminal case.

- c. Search and verify status of any current warrants.
  - d. Search and verify vehicle registration and driver's license.
  - e. Search for data on previous calls involving the same parties or address.
  - f. Search for criminal history, including arrest, charging, and conviction data. Use the History of Domestic Violence Summary (See *Appendix 1D: History of Domestic Violence Summary Instructions and Sample*) when available.
  - g. Search and verify probation and parole status, if possible.
6. Promptly relay the search results to personnel receiving, dispatching, and responding to the call.

#### **APPENDIX TO PROTOCOL 2: DISPATCHING 911 DOMESTIC ABUSE CALLS**

The following appendix is attached to and included as part of the policy on dispatching 911 domestic abuse calls:

- *Appendix 2B: Protocol 2—911 Dispatch Call Card*

See the Madison County Blueprint for Safety Appendix for appendices referenced in the policy and protocols.

## When third parties

called the police, “the odds are 2-1/2 times higher that such cases will involve a major injury to the victim, compared to cases in which the victim calls [the] police herself.

– *E. Buzawa et al. (2000)*

## **POLICY: RECORDS SECTION RESPONSE IN 911 DOMESTIC ABUSE CALLS**

In addition to adhering to general agency policy, ECC records section personnel the 911 records custodian will take the following actions in responding to domestic abuse–related calls, using the protocols and appendices referenced and included as part of this policy.

1. Respond promptly to requests for information related to 911 domestic abuse calls, according to **Protocol 3: Records Section Response**.

### **PROTOCOL 3: RECORDS SECTION RESPONSE**

1. Record and keep calls and related documents in a manner which allows later access by investigators, law enforcement, prosecutors, probation, and defense attorneys.
2. Provide calls and related documents to investigators, law enforcement, prosecutors, probation, and defense attorneys when requested.

## **POLICY: SUPERVISING THE 911 RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE CALLS**

In addition to adhering to general agency policy, 911 supervisors will provide the support and oversight necessary to ensure a safety-oriented response to domestic abuse–related calls, using the protocols referenced and included as part of this policy.

1. Implement the provisions of this policy in accordance with **Protocol 4: Supervising 911 Domestic Abuse Calls**.
2. Conduct regular reviews of 911 recordings of domestic abuse calls and provide feedback and guidance to call takers.
3. Conduct regular reviews of 911 CAD transcripts in relation to calls and provide feedback and guidance to dispatchers.
4. Maintain 911 recordings for at least ninety days (and longer if possible) and CAD transcripts indefinitely in a manner which allows later access by investigators, prosecutors, and defense attorneys.
5. Relay recordings of 911 calls and related documents to investigators, prosecutors, and defense attorneys as requested.
6. Notify the designated patrol supervisor when a domestic abuse call involves a law enforcement or other public safety officers, 911 personnel, public official, or other prominent member of the public.
7. Conduct regular reviews of the response to inquiries and requests made to records section personnel in domestic abuse cases.

### **PROTOCOL 4: SUPERVISING THE 911 RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE CALLS**

1. Prepare for implementing this protocol by taking the following actions:
  - a. Read all 911 policies and accompanying appendices and training memos related to the 911 response to domestic abuse calls.
    - **Protocol 1: Receiving 911 Domestic Abuse Calls**
    - **Protocol 2: Dispatching 911 Domestic Abuse Calls**
    - **Protocol 3: Records section Response in 911 Domestic Abuse Calls**
  - b. Be familiar with *Appendix 2C: Protocol 4—Call Review Checklist*
  - c. Review and integrate the materials in *Appendix 1A: Practitioners’ Guide to Risk and Danger in Domestic Violence Cases*, *Appendix 1B: Training Memo—Risk and Dangerousness Appendix*, and *1C: Training Memo—Intervention with Victims of Battering as Suspects or Defendants* into the call taking and dispatching work routines.
2. Conduct regular reviews of 911 recordings and CAD transcripts (as assigned to the designated supervisor).
  - a. Use *Appendix 2C: Protocol 4—Call Review Checklist* to guide the reviews.

- b. Listen to three 911 domestic abuse calls from each call taker on a quarterly basis.
  - c. If problems are identified, meet with the call taker to listen to the calls, review the checklist results, and provide feedback and guidance as needed.
  - d. Provide a written annual report based on reviewing a sample of ten or more of each of the following types of domestic abuse calls:
    - Caller is a “third party,” someone other than the victim or suspect, e.g., neighbor, bystander, family member
    - Caller is a child
    - Hang-up calls coded as domestic abuse calls
    - Disconnected or otherwise interrupted calls
  - e. On a quarterly basis, listen to the radio transmissions from each dispatcher of three 911 domestic abuse calls and read the related CAD transcripts and call taker generated information.
  - f. If problems are identified, meet with the dispatcher to listen to the calls and read the accompanying CAD transcript, review the checklist results, and provide feedback and guidance.
  - g. Include attention to information requested and supplied by records section personnel as part of the regular quarterly reviews conducted with call takers and dispatchers.
  - h. Prepare a quarterly report for the 911 Director regarding compliance with these policies and protocols.
- 3. Maintain 911 recordings and CAD transcripts in a manner that allows later access by investigators, prosecutors, and defense attorneys; relay recordings and documents as requested.**
- a. Ensure that recording equipment and systems are properly maintained, including any necessary software upgrade and instructions to 911 personnel.
  - b. Ensure that the 911 recording will be preserved as potential evidence for at least 90 days, and longer if possible. Ensure that CAD screens will be preserved on the secure server for at least 90 days and indefinitely, if possible.
  - c. Provide clear instructions to investigators, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and probation officers on the process for obtaining recordings and/or CAD transcripts and respond to those requests in a timely manner.
  - d. Designate a 911 supervisor who is authorized to answer questions related to the release of recordings and other documents related to domestic abuse calls.
- 4. Inform call takers of the importance of and process for notifying 911 supervisors when a domestic abuse call involves a law enforcement officer or other public safety officer, 911 employee, public official, or prominent member of the public.**

**APPENDICES TO PROTOCOL 4: SUPERVISING THE 911 RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE CALLS**

The following appendices are attached to and included as part of the policy on supervising the 911 response to domestic abuse calls:

- *Appendix 1A: Practitioners' Guide to Risk and Danger in Domestic Violence Cases*
- *Appendix 1B: Training Memo—Risk and Dangerousness*
- *Appendix 1C: Training Memo—Intervention with Victims of Battering as Suspects or Defendants*
- *Appendix 2C: Protocol 4—Call Review Checklist*

See the Madison County Blueprint for Safety Appendix for appendices referenced in the policy and protocols.