

Child Abuse

313.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for the investigation of suspected child abuse. This policy also addresses when Easton Police Department members are required to notify the local Department of Social Services of suspected child abuse.

313.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Child - Unless otherwise specified by a cited statute, a child is any person under the age of 18 years.

Child Abuse - Any offense or attempted offense involving violence or neglect with a child victim when committed by a person responsible for the child's care or by any other household member, or any other act that would mandate notification to a social service agency or law enforcement.

313.2 POLICY

The Easton Police Department will investigate all reported incidents of alleged criminal child abuse and ensure the Department of Social Services is notified as required by law.

313.3 MANDATORY NOTIFICATION

Members of the Easton Police Department shall notify the local Department of Social Services when (COMAR 01.02.07.04; Md. Code FL 5-704(a); Md. Code FL 5-705 (a):

- (a) They receive a report, neither oral or in writing, of a known or suspected incident of child abuse or neglect.
- (b) They have reason to believe a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect.

For purposes of notification, abuse or neglect occurs when a child's mental or physical well-being is at risk because a caregiver either causes a physical or mental injury to a child or fails to properly care for a child.

313.3.1 NOTIFICATION PROCEDURE

Notification should occur as follows (COMAR 07.02.07.04; Md. Code FL § 5-704(b)):

- (a) The handling officer shall:
 1. Make an oral report as soon as possible to the local Department of Social Services by telephone or direct communication.
 2. Make a written report no later than 48 hours after having reason to believe a child has been subjected to abuse, and forward a copy to the local States Attorney.
- (b) The notification, insofar as is reasonably possible, shall include:
 1. The name, age and home address of the child.
 2. The names and ages of other children in the home.

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3. The name and home address of the child's parent or other person who is responsible for the child's care.
4. The whereabouts of the child.
5. The nature and extent of the abuse or neglect of the child, including any evidence or information concerning possible previous instances of abuse or neglect.
6. Any other information that would help to determine:
 - (a) The cause of the suspected abuse or neglect.
 - (b) The identity of any individual responsible for the abuse or neglect.
7. In the case of suspected child abuse or neglect involving a mental injury:
 - (a) A description of the substantial impairment of the child's mental or psychological ability to function that is observed and identified.
 - (b) An explanation of why it is believed the mental injury is attributable to maltreatment or failure to provide proper care and attention.
 - (c) The initial officer shall notify the patrol supervisor for all incidents of suspected child abuse or neglect. The patrol supervisor shall notify the Criminal Investigations Unit.

313.4 QUALIFIED INVESTIGATORS

Qualified investigators should be available for child abuse investigations. These investigators should:

- (a) Conduct interviews in child appropriate interview facilities.
- (b) Be familiar with forensic interview techniques specific to child abuse investigations.
- (c) Present all cases of alleged child abuse to the prosecutor for review.
- (d) Coordinate with other enforcement agencies, social service agencies and school administrators as needed.
- (e) Provide referrals to therapy services, victim advocates, guardians and support for the child and family as appropriate.
- (f) Participate in or coordinate with multidisciplinary investigative teams as applicable (COMAR 07.02.07.22; Md. Code FL § 5-706(f); Md. Code FL § 5-706(g); Md. Code FL § 5-706.2(b).)

313.5 INVESTIGATIONS AND REPORTING

In all reported or suspected cases of child abuse, officers shall write a report even if the allegations appear unfounded or unsubstantiated.

Investigations and reports related to suspected cases of child abuse should address, as applicable:

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- (a) A thorough and timely investigation and report as required by state law (Md. Code FL § 5-706.) This should be done by the investigating officer in all circumstances where a suspected child abuse victim is contacted.
- (b) The exigent circumstances that existed if officers interview the child victim without the presence of a parent or guardian.
- (c) Any relevant statements the child may have made and to whom he/she made the statements.
- (d) If a child is taken into protective custody, the reasons, the name and title of the person making the decision and why other alternatives were not appropriate.
- (e) Documentation of any visible injuries or any injuries identified by the child. This should include photographs of such injuries, if practicable.
- (f) Whether the child victim is transported for medical treatment or a medical examination.
- (g) Whether the victim identifies a household member as the alleged perpetrator, and a list of the names of any other children who may reside in the residence.
- (h) Identification of any prior related reports or allegations of child abuse, including other jurisdictions, as reasonably known.
- (i) Previous addresses of the victim and suspect.
- (j) Other potential witnesses who have not yet been interviewed, such as relatives or others close to the victim's environment.
- (k) Whether within 24 hours after receiving a report of suspected physical or sexual abuse of a child and within five days after receiving a report of suspected neglect or suspected mental injury of a child, the handling officer complied with COMAR 07.02.07.08, Md. Code FL § 5-706(c), and Md. Code FL § 5-706.2(c) by:
 - 1. Seeing the child.
 - 2. Attempting to have an on-site interview with the child's caretaker.
 - 3. Deciding on the safety of the child, wherever the child is, and of other children in the household.
 - 4. Deciding on the safety of other children in the care or custody of the alleged abuser.
- (l) Seeking assistance from the local States Attorney as needed (Md. Code FL § 5-706(d).)
- (m) Completing an investigation as soon as practicable but not later than the time frames specified by State law (COMAR 07.02.07.09; Md. Code FL § 5-706(h); Md. Code FL § 5-706.2(d).)

All cases of the unexplained death of a child should be investigated as thoroughly as if it is a case of suspected child abuse (e.g., a sudden or unexplained death of an infant.)

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313.6 PROTECTIVE CUSTODY

Before taking any child into protective custody, the officer should make reasonable attempts to contact the local Department of Social Services. Generally, the decision to remove a child from his/her family, guardian or other responsible adult should be left to the child welfare authorities when they are present or have become involved in an investigation.

Generally, members of this department should remove a child from his/her parent or guardian without a court order only when no other effective alternative is reasonably available and immediate action reasonably appears necessary to protect the child. Prior to taking a child into protective custody, the officer should take reasonable steps to deliver the child to another qualified parent or legal guardian; unless it reasonably appears that the release would endanger the child or result in abduction. If this is not a reasonable option, the officer shall ensure the child is delivered to the local Department of Social Services.

Whenever practicable, the officer should inform a supervisor of the circumstances prior to taking a child into protective custody. If prior notification is not practicable, officers should contact a supervisor promptly after taking a child into protective custody.

Children may be temporarily removed from a parent or guardian, without prior approval of the juvenile court, when a representative of the local Department of Social Services has probable cause to believe t the child is in serious and immediate danger (Md. Code FL § 5-709.)

313.6.1 SAFE HAVEN LAW

A mother, or a person with the permission of the mother, may relinquish an unharmed newborn within 10 days after birth to an officer when the mother expresses an interest in abandoning the child. As soon as possible, the officer shall take the newborn to a hospital or other facility designated by the Department of Human Resources (Md. Code CJ § 5-641.)

313.7 INTERVIEWS

313.7.1 PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

Absent extenuating circumstances or impracticality, officers should record the preliminary interview with suspected child abuse victims. Officers should avoid multiple interviews with a child victim and should attempt to gather only the information necessary to begin an investigation. When practicable, investigating officers should defer interviews until a person who is specially trained in such interviews is available. Generally, child victims should not be interviewed in the home or location where the alleged abuse occurred.

313.7.2 DETAINING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE VICTIMS FOR AN INTERVIEW

An officer should not detain a child involuntarily who is suspected of being a victim of child abuse solely for the purpose of an interview or physical exam without the consent of a parent or guardian unless one of the following applies:

- (a) Exigent circumstances exist, such as:

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1. A reasonable belief that medical issues of the child need to be addressed immediately,
 2. A reasonable belief the child is or will be in danger of harm if the interview or physical exam is not immediately completed.
 3. The alleged offender is the custodial parent or guardian and there is reason to believe the child may be in continued danger.
- (b) A court order has been issued.

313.8 MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

If the child has been the victim of abuse that requires a medical examination, the investigating officer should obtain consent for such examination from the appropriate parent, guardian or agency having legal custody of the child. The officer should also arrange for the child's transportation to the appropriate medical facility.

In cases where the alleged offender is the custodial parent or guardian and is refusing consent for the medical examination, officers should notify a supervisor before proceeding. If exigent circumstances do not exist or if State law does not provide for officers to take the child for a medical examination, the notified supervisor should consider obtaining a court order for such an examination.

An examination and emergency medical treatment may be provided for a child without parental consent if an officer states a belief that the child has been abused or neglected (COMAR 07.02.07.07(f)(3).)

313.9 DRUG-ENDANGERED CHILDREN

A coordinated response by law enforcement and social services agencies is appropriate to meet the immediate and longer-term medical and safety needs of children exposed to the manufacturing, trafficking or use of narcotics.

313.9.1 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The Criminal Investigations Unit supervisor should:

- (a) Work with professionals from the appropriate agencies, including the local Department of Social Services, other law enforcement agencies, medical service providers and local prosecutors to develop community specific procedures for responding to situations where there are children endangered by their exposure to methamphetamine labs or the manufacture and trafficking of other drugs.
- (b) Activate any available interagency response when an officer notifies the Criminal Investigations Unit supervisor that the officer has responded to a drug lab or other narcotics crime scene where a child is present or where evidence indicates a child lives there.
- (c) Develop a report format or checklist for use when officers respond to drug labs or other narcotics crime scenes. The checklist will help officers document the environmental, medical, social and other conditions that may affect the child.

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313.9.2 OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

Officers responding to a drug lab or other narcotics crime scene where a child is present or where there is evidence that a child lives should:

- (a) Document the environmental, medical, social and other conditions of the child using photography as appropriate and the checklist or form developed for this purpose.
- (b) Notify the Criminal Investigations Unit supervisor so an interagency response can begin.

313.10 STATE MANDATES AND OTHER RELEVANT LAWS

Maryland requires or permits the following:

313.10.1 PROCESSING REPORTS AND RECORDS

The handling officer shall ensure that (COMAR 07.02.07.08; Md. Code FL § 5-706(i); Md. Code FL § 5-706(j)):

- (a) A preliminary report of findings of the investigation is submitted to the local States Attorney within 10 days after receiving a report of suspected abuse.
- (b) A written report of findings of the investigation is submitted to the local States Attorney within five business days after the investigation is completed.

313.10.2 RELEASE OF REPORTS

Information related to incidents of child abuse or suspected child abuse are confidential and may only be disclosed pursuant to State law and the Records Maintenance and Release Policy (COMAR 07.02.07.19; Md. Code FL § 5-707.)

313.10.3 CHILD FATALITY REVIEW

This department will cooperate with a local or State child death review team (Md. Code FL § 5-706.)

313.10.4 HOUSEHOLD ENTRY

Upon request, an officer shall accompany a representative of the local Department of Social Services who has been denied entry into a household in which the representative has probable cause to believe a child is in serious, immediate danger. If necessary, the officer may use reasonable force to enable the representative to gain entry (Md. Code FL § 5-709(b).)

When force is used to make entry, the officer will get a written statement from the DSS representative describing the probably cause for the use of force, in addition to, a copy of their official report.

313.10.5 FAILURE TO REPORT

An officer investigating allegations of child abuse who believes a person has knowingly failed to report suspected abuse or neglect shall file a complaint with the appropriate agency or board (Md. Code FL § 5-705.4.)

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313.11 TRAINING

The Department should provide training on best practices in child abuse investigations to members tasked with investigating these cases. The training should include:

- (a) Participating in multidisciplinary investigations, as appropriate.
- (b) Conducting forensic interviews.
- (c) Availability of therapy services for children and families.
- (d) Availability of specialized forensic medical exams.
- (e) Cultural competence (including interpretive services) related to child abuse investigations.
- (f) Availability of victim advocate or guardian ad litem support.
- (g) Recognizing abuse that requires mandatory notification to another agency.