

# St. Joseph, Missouri Police Department



DIRECTIVE TYPE: SPECIAL ORDER		INDEX NUMBER: SO1602
SUBJECT: Lethality Assessment Program		
EFFECTIVE DATE: 08/01/16	REVISED: N/A	AMENDS/RESCINDS: No Previous
REVISIONS CONTINUED: N/A		DISTRIBUTION: B & C

## I. Policy:

It is the policy of the St. Joseph Police Department to use the Lethality Screen at the scene of domestic violence incidents to identify victims of domestic violence in potentially lethal situations. When a victim is assessed as being in **High-Danger** the screening officer shall call the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) hotline and ask the victim to speak with a hotline advocate.

## II. Definitions:

- A. **Lethality Screen:** The form used to assess a person who is the victim of intimate partner violence for his/her risk of being killed by an intimate partner.
- B. **High Danger:** A term used for a victim who has been assessed through use of the LAP and the Lethality Screen as being at the greatest risk of being killed. The victim is said to be at "**High Danger.**"

## III. Procedure:

### A. Initiating the Lethality Assessment

#### 1. General

- a. The responding officer shall complete the Lethality Screen when he/she responds to a domestic violence complaint involving intimate partners and one or more of the following conditions exist:
  - 1) There is reason to believe an assault or an act that constitutes domestic violence has occurred, whether or not there is an arrest.
  - 2) There is a belief on the part of the responding officer that once the victim is no longer in the presence of the responding officer the potential for assault is high.
  - 3) There have been repeated calls for domestic violence complaints at the same location or involving the same parties.

- 4) The responding officer believes one should be administered based on his/her experience and training.

## 2. Lethality Screen Questions

- a. To initiate the Lethality Screen, and LAP response protocol, the responding officer should:

- 1) Advise the victim that he/she will be asked a series of questions to help the officer determine the immediate or potential danger to the victim;
- 2) Administer the Screen in an area away from the suspected abuser;
- 3) Ask the questions in order, as written; and
- 4) Ask all the questions when assessing the victim. The more questions the victim responds to positively, the clearer and more immediate the potential for danger is to the victim.

## 3. Assessing the Responses to the Lethality Questions

- a. After the responding officer completes the Lethality Screen he/she shall handle the information as follows:

- 1) A single “yes” or positive response by the victim to questions 1, 2 or 3 reflects a **High-Danger** situation and automatically triggers the hotline call. Officers should still ask the remaining questions, as they will help the officer gather a better understanding of the victim’s situation before calling the hotline. Doing so will also allow the victim to relay information that indicates he/she is at risk of being killed by his/her intimate partner.
- 2) If the victim gives negative responses to questions 1-3, but positive responses to four or more of questions 4-11, this reflects a **High-Danger** situation and triggers the hotline call.
- 3) “No” or negative responses to all of the assessment questions, or positive responses to less than four of questions 4-11, may still trigger the hotline call if the responding officer believes it is appropriate. The officer should ask the victim if there is anything else that worries them about their safety. The response to the question may aid the officer in her/his assessment.
- 4) Similar to the subsection above, the officer may also assess a victim as **High-Danger** if the officer believes it is appropriate when:
  - a) The victim declines to answer any or all of the questions on the Lethality Screen; or
  - b) If the victim’s responses do not reflect **High-Danger**, but the officer’s assessment of the situation indicates **High-Danger**.

## 4. Assessing the Responses to the Lethality Questions – Non-High Danger

- a. If the victim is not assessed as **High-Danger** after the Lethality Screen is completed, the officer shall:

- 1) Advise the victim of the dangers of domestic violence;
- 2) Inform the victim to watch for the signs listed in the assessment that may indicate she/he is at an increased level of danger;
- 3) Refer the victim to the YWCA and volunteer to call the LAP hotline for the victim. If the victim agrees, the officer does not need to remain on the scene during the victim-advocate conversation; and
- 4) Provide the victim with the case number, officer's contact information or an alternate agency contact in case the victim wants to talk further or needs help.

#### 5. High-Danger Victims and the Hotline Call

- a. If a **High-Danger** assessment is made the hotline call shall be conducted as follows:
  - 1) Advise the victim that their situation indicates he/she is at an increased level of danger; and
  - 2) Invite the victim to speak with a hotline advocate.
- b. If the victim initially declines to speak with the hotline advocate, the officer shall:
  - 1) Contact the domestic violence hotline and advise the advocate that he/she has made a **High Danger** assessment; and
  - 2) Ask the victim to reconsider speaking with the hotline advocate.
- c. If the victim declines to speak with the hotline advocate, the officer shall:
  - 1) Do the same thing he/she would do for a victim who was not assessed as **High-Danger**;
  - 2) Relay information suggested by the hotline advocate regarding safety planning; and
  - 3) Request a phone number for an advocate to follow up with the victim.
- d. If the victim agrees to speak with a hotline advocate, the officer shall:
  - 1) Remain on scene during the conversation between the hotline advocate and the victim;
  - 2) Speak with the hotline advocate prior to the conclusion of the call; and
  - 3) Provide reasonable assistance to the victim if requested, such as transporting the victim to the YWCA Shelter.

#### 6. Filing of the Lethality Screen

- a. Officers who have completed Lethality Screens shall:
  - 1) Document the use in their report;
  - 2) Document whether or not a High-Danger assessment was made;
  - 3) Document whether or not the Hotline was called; and
  - 4) Turn in the original, along with their completed report, by the end of their shift for supervisor review.

- b. The agency LAP representative shall:
  - 1) Maintain a file of all Lethality Screens;

**7. LAP Agency Representative**

The LAP agency representative shall:

- a. Facilitate training;
- b. Serve as a liaison, communicate, and meet with participating LAP agency representatives and agencies; and
- c. Generally oversee and monitor progress of the LAP.

**8. Training**

- a. LAP training shall be provided by LAP trained staff to all new entry-level officers who have not received it in the training academy before the conclusion of their field-training period.
- b. In-service LAP training shall be provided to officers at least every two years.

**9. Records Reporting**

- a. The department will forward all lethality screens to the LAP Team Coordinator within 24 hours of completion.
- b. Necessary reports will be completed by the Team Coordinator and shall be accessible by the Agency Representative.
- c. The Agency Representative will use the reports to track domestic violence trends, assess the Department's response to domestic violence and to make training recommendations.

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Chris Connally, Chief of Police

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Date