



Sheridan Police Department
Policies and Procedures
11.6 Replaces 103.4
Chapter 11 – Use of Force
Section 6 – Post Incident Trauma

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Signature:

Law enforcement duties can often expose officers and support personnel to mentally painful and highly stressful situations that cannot be solved through normal stress coping mechanisms. Unless adequately treated, these situations cause disabling emotional and physical problems. It has been found that officers involved in incidents resulting in death or serious bodily injury to a citizen or fellow officer may precipitate such stress disorders. It is the responsibility of the Sheridan Police Department to provide personnel with information on stress disorders and to guide and assist in their deterrence. Therefore, it shall be the policy of this agency to take immediate action after such incidents to safeguard the continued good health of all involved personnel.

Definition

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: An anxiety disorder that can result from exposure to short-term severe stress, or the long-term buildup of repetitive and prolonged milder stress.

11.6.1 Supervisory Responsibilities at the Scene

- A. In cases where serious injury or death results from a police action, a shift supervisor shall be dispatched to the scene of the incident, and shall assume primary responsibility in caring for involved personnel.
- B. During any period where the involved officer is required to remain on the scene, but has no immediate duties to fill, the officer should be taken to a quiet area. A peer counselor or other supportive friend or officer should remain with the officer, but should be advised not to discuss details of the incident.
- C. The shift supervisor should arrange for the officers directly involved in the incident to leave the scene as soon as possible, and be taken to a quiet, secure setting.
- D. At all times, when at the scene of the incident, the supervisor, should communicate with the officer and all involved personnel in a manner that acknowledges the stress caused by the incident.

11.6.2 Meeting with Involved Officer(s)

- A. Where possible, the supervisor shall briefly meet with involved officers:
 - 1. Only minimal, preliminary questions should be asked about the incident. The officer(s) should be advised that a more detailed debriefing will be conducted at a later time;
 - 2. Any standard investigations that will occur concerning the incident should be discussed with the officer(s);
 - 3. The officer(s) should be advised that they may seek legal counsel;

4. The officer(s) should be advised not to discuss the incident with anyone except a personal or agency attorney, or departmental investigator, until the conclusion of the preliminary investigation.
- B. The shift supervisor shall determine whether the circumstances of the incident require that the officer's duty weapon be taken for laboratory analysis. Where the duty weapon is taken, the supervisor shall:
 1. Take custody of the officer's weapon in a discrete manner, and
 2. Replace it with another weapon of the same kind, or advise the officer it will be returned or replaced at a later time, as appropriate.

11.6.3 Other Considerations

- A. No caffeine or other stimulants or depressants should be given to the officers unless administered by medical personnel.
- B. Involved officers should notify their families about the incident as soon as possible. Where an officer is unable to do so, an agency official shall personally notify his family, and arrange for their transportation to the officer's location.
- C. In all cases where injury or death result from an officers actions, the services of a chaplain will be made available to the involved officers and their families upon request. The purpose is to provide the officer and family with a source of professional consultation to aid them in dealing with the potential moral and ethical after-effects of the incident. The chaplain services shall not be related to any department investigation of the incident and nothing discussed will be divulged to the department. The consultation sessions will remain protected by the privileged relationship.

11.6.4 Post-Incident Procedures

- A. Involved personnel shall be removed from line duties pending evaluation but shall remain available for any necessary administrative investigations.
- B. All officers directly involved in the incident shall be required to attend a counseling session as soon as practical after the incident. The purpose is to allow the officer to deal with the moral, ethical, and/or psychological after-effects of the incident. The debriefing shall not be related to any department investigation of the incident and nothing discussed in the debriefing will be reported to the department. The debriefing session will remain protected by the privileged physician-patient relationship. After counseling sessions, the specialist shall advise the agency:
 1. Whether it would be in the officer's best interest to continue on administrative leave or be returned to light or full duty;
 2. What will be the best continued course of counseling.
- C. The Sheridan Police Department strongly encourages the families of the involved officers to take advantage of available counseling services.
- D. Any investigation of the incident shall be conducted as soon and as quickly as practical.
- E. The agency should brief other agency members concerning the incident so that rumors are kept to a minimum. Personnel, both sworn and non-sworn, are encouraged to show the involved officers their concern and support.
- F. All personnel involved in the incident should be advised that they are not permitted to speak with the media about the incident. Employees shall refer inquiries from the media to a designated spokesperson, unless otherwise authorized by the chief of police to release a statement pertaining to the incident.

- G. In order to protect against crank or abusive calls, officers should be advised to have phone calls answered by another person for several days if their names are released to the public.

11.6.5 Daily Stress Recognition

- A. As 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 for symptoms of the disorder.
- B. A supervisor may recommend an officer seek assistance or counseling from a mental health specialist through the Employee Assistance Program upon a reasonable belief that stress may be disrupting the officer's job performance.
- C. If a supervisor believes an employee is affected by post-traumatic stress the supervisor shall notify the chief of police who will arrange appropriate evaluation and care.

11.6.6 Training

- A. The agency shall provide employees with training on policy pertaining to post-traumatic stress disorders.
- B. Supervisors are responsible for making available to their teams information about the agency's peer counseling group and mental health services.