

 Cambridge Police Department	POLICY & PROCEDURES		No. 402
	Subject/Title: Post-Shooting Incident Guidelines		
	Issuing Authority:  Robert C. Haas Police Commissioner		Issue Date: <i>Introduced as part of the Firearms Qualifications Training for the Fall of 2007 & Reviewed at 2008 Training.</i>
			Effective Date: July 1, 2008 Review Date: Rescinds:
References/ Attachments:		Accreditation Standards:	
		1.3.5; 1.3.8; 22.2.4; & 22.2.6(f)	

I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines that shall be uniformly applied following any officer-involved shooting incident that has resulted in death or serious bodily injury, in order to minimize the chances that involved personnel will develop or suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

II. POLICY:

It is incumbent upon all personnel involved in a post-shooting incident to be cognizant of the implications and the various facets associated whenever a member of this department resorts to the use of deadly force that results in the death or serious bodily injury of another. Personnel who are engaged in the supervision and/or the investigation of a post-shooting incident are expected to balance what may seem at times competing objectives, to include:

- Take immediate action after incidents where shooting causes death or serious bodily injury to an officer or another person to safeguard the continued good mental health of all involved personnel.
- Ensure that the officer involved in a shooting-incident receives prompt medical attention, when warranted.
- Ensure the scene of a post-incident shooting has been preserved so as to facilitate a complete and thorough investigation.
- Ensure that the constitutional rights of the officer involved in a post-shooting incident are preserved and respected.

III. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES:

Law enforcement duties can often expose police officers and support personnel to mentally painful and highly stressful situations that cannot be resolved through normal stress coping mechanisms. Unless adequately treated, these situations can cause disabling emotional and physical problems. It has been found that officer-involved shootings resulting in death or serious bodily injury to a citizen or a fellow officer may precipitate such stress disorders. It is the responsibility of this law enforcement agency to provide personnel with information on stress disorders and to guide and assist in their deterrence.

Not all officers involved in a shooting incident or other similar deadly force confrontation experience an overwhelming reaction. However, some of those who suffer from the more serious reactions, and particularly those who do not receive proper assistance for their problem, leave law enforcement in the aftermath, and many suffer from long-term consequences. The individual impact of specific circumstances on law enforcement officers cannot be reduced to a simple formula and should not be overly simplified. The potential traumatizing affects of specific circumstances depend greatly upon the dynamics of the situation and the experiences and mind-set of the officers involved.

Each officer experiences the emotional aftermath of a shooting in a personal manner that depends on many factors. These include: the officer's perceived vulnerability during the incident; the amount of control he or she had over the situation; and the individual's ability to react effectively; his or her expectations concerning shooting situations and how closely those expectations correlated with what happened during the incident; how close or far away physically the officer was from the suspect; how bloody the shooting was; the reputation of the suspect, for example, whether he or she was a murderer or a scared teenager; the perceived "fairness" of the situation, for example, shooting a person who used the officer to commit suicide is perceived as unfair and may produce anger or other reactions in the officer; legal and administrative consequences of the officer's actions; the amount of stress in the officer's life and his or her level of emotional adjustment; personal coping skills; and the amount of peer and family support.

The traumatic experience starts when a situation puts the life of an officer or another person in danger, and the officer makes the decision to use deadly force. Often, physical psychological and emotional phenomena may occur during the brief moments of peak stress, many of which may be confusing to the officer.

Sensory reactions: It is quite common to experience perceptual distortions of various types. It is important that supervisors at the scene and investigators assigned to the shooting know these sensory distortions are normal and common.

Physical and emotional reactions: The shock disruption phase starts when the shooting ends. An officer may experience a few minutes of shock symptoms such as tremors, shaking, crying, nausea, or hyperventilation among others. These are symptoms of the de-

escalation of stress that sometimes occurs when a high-impact situation is over, and are not signs of weakness.

It is important to remember that the officer may be very sensitive to others' reactions, particularly in regard to whether the department will stand behind him or her.

Emotional first aid: First, a supervisory officer should be immediately assigned to any officer-involved shooting and assume control of the situation. The first order of response in such situations is to identify any injured persons and to ensure that medical attention is secured. When order has been established and the involved officer is no longer required at the scene, he or she should be taken to a quiet and secure location away from the sights and sounds of the event area. In many cases, spectators as well as friends and relatives of suspects or victims may congregate at the scene, many of whom may focus attention on the officer involved. For these and related reasons, it is best that the officer be given some physical space as soon as practicable so he or she may regain some composure and attempt to relax.

Immediately following an officer-involved shooting one can anticipate a substantial amount of media attention. Media personnel can be expected to attempt to make contact with involved officers. Under no circumstances should these officers make comments to the press concerning the incident. All information concerning the incident should flow from the supervisory officer in circumstances deemed appropriate after consultation with the department's public information officer, the department's public information officer, another assigned spokesperson, or the Police Commissioner. At this stage, basic information concerning the incident should be provided to the press as soon as possible if it will not inhibit or undermine the department's investigative process. Timely release of such information will serve to discourage the press from speculation or uninformed or misdirected commentary that could be harmful to the officers and the department. Officers involved in the incident who have been removed from the immediate scene may be accompanied by a peer stress counselor or personal friend based on a supervisor's appraisal of the officer's needs.

Most officers also have a desire to contact their families at such times. This is an important courtesy that is sometimes overlooked and one that can be facilitated by the supportive officer. If the officer is not injured, he or she should contact his or her family by telephone to let them know what happened before they hear rumors, news reports, or get the news from some other source. If the officer is injured, a member of the department who knows the family should contact them and take them to the hospital. In these instances, it is also important to ensure that the family members have someone else with them for support, such as close friends or relatives. Supervisory officers and all other officers having contact with the officer involved in a shooting incident, whether at the scene or at a later point in time, should attempt to be reassuring and supportive without being unrealistic. At all times they should act in a manner that reflects an understanding of the potential stress the officer may be experiencing. Even at this early stage, the officer's fears of the short or long term consequences of his or her actions—such as potential civil or even criminal charges or a protracted internal investigation—may fuel the officer's fears and anxieties.

Investigation of police shootings is essential. However, investigations of police-involved shootings can be one of the more stress-provoking activities following such an incident. Officers may be relieved from duty and their firearm taken from them. They may also be isolated from fellow officers and family for a lengthy period during interview and may be informed of their “rights” much like those whom they arrest. Officers involved in these situations are acutely aware of how they are perceived, and the manner in which such investigations are conducted can heighten or diminish feelings of alienation and isolation. Complete and professional investigations of police-involved shootings can be conducted while also showing consideration for an officer’s emotional well-being.

If the officer’s firearm must be taken for evidentiary purposes, it should be replaced with another, or the officer should be advised when he or she can expect it to be returned or replaced. Unless the officer is being relieved of duty on charges, there is little justification for confiscating the officer’s duty weapon without replacing it. Having an officer return to duty status without a handgun can create the impression that the officer has been branded or come to think the department does not “trust” him or her with a handgun.

At some point in the process, the emotional impact of the situation is experienced. The adrenaline “high” wears off, and the officer typically experiences an emotional and physical letdown. This impact phase usually occurs within three days of the incident although some officers experience a delayed reaction ranging from six months to a year or more after the incident. During this phase, the officer confronts feelings of vulnerability and mortality. Generally, the more vulnerable the officer feels during the incident, the greater the emotional impact of the situation. Feelings of vulnerability often stem from a perceived lack of control over the incident.

The next phase, which in most cases starts soon after the emotional impact hits, is the acceptance or coping phase. At this stage an officer starts understanding, working through, and coming to grips with the emotional impact of the situation. The emotional intensity tends to wax and wane over time, often peaking after about two weeks, and then starts to decrease. There is often much introspection during this time, and the officer generally mentally recreates the incident, repeatedly wondering if he or she made the correct decision, took the correct action, or if there was anything else that could have been done. If the officer allows him/herself to work through the emotional impact, and does not try to suppress or deny it, he or she will normally come to accept the incident without inordinate guilt or anguish.

The acceptance/resolution phase is usually achieved within two to 10 weeks, but may take longer depending on the incident, the legal/administrative aftermath, the amount of peer and family support, and the officer’s coping skills. Once achieved, the officer understands and accepts what happened and what had to be done. There may still be occasional nightmares, flashbacks, and anxiety, particularly those triggered by situational reminders while on the job. However, the officer who is returning to a healthy and balanced emotional state comes to understand these and other underlying emotions and is

capable of dealing constructively with them. With proper support and coping skills, the officer may even become stronger.

If an officer who has been in a shooting develops a pattern of work problems, such as repetitive excessive use of force that he or she did not exhibit before the incident, it may be a sign of trauma. It is important to be able to recognize these problems and be prepared to refer the officer to an appropriate source for assistance rather than merely administer discipline.

The investigation of any police use of deadly force is essential. Difficult questions must be asked and answers found. However, the stress of the administrative, investigative, and legal processes following the incident can unnecessarily compound the stress of a shooting. It is not unusual for the officer to perceive that he or she is being treated like a suspect and is being abandoned by the department.

Although the investigative process may be appropriate under certain circumstances, it is not necessary to subject an officer to insensitive, non-supportive, or impersonal treatment. There are many constructive actions that can be taken and procedures that should be followed to avert or minimize an officer's stress that will not interfere with or compromise the investigative process.

IV. DEFINITIONS

- A. Officer-Involved Shooting Incident:** A line-of-duty incident where a shooting causes death or serious bodily injury to an officer or other person.
- B. 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. The person must have experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of one's self or others. The person's response to the event(s) will have involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.
1. *Acute Stress Disorder:* A category of stress disorder lasting for a minimum of two days and a maximum of four weeks occurring within four weeks of the event(s).
 2. *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:* A category of stress disorder in which the symptoms last more than one month. This can result from exposure to short-term severe stress, or the long-term buildup of repetitive and prolonged milder stress.

NOTE: These are guidelines intended to help officers understand what is expected of them and are not intended as medical definitions or standards for disability determinations.

V. PROCEDURES:

A. Handling of Officers at Scene of Shooting Incident:

1. A supervisory officer shall be dispatched to the scene of the incident, and shall assume primary responsibility in caring for involved personnel. For purposes of this policy, a supervisory officer will include any ranking officer within the police department.
2. The supervisor shall make appropriate arrangements for all necessary medical treatment.¹
3. During any period where the involved officer is required to remain on the scene, but has no immediate duties to fulfill, the officer should be taken to a quiet area away from the scene of the incident. A peer stress counselor or other supportive friend or officer should remain with the officer, but should be advised not to discuss details of the incident.
4. The 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.
5. When possible, the supervisor shall briefly meet with the involved officer.
6. No stimulants or depressants should be given to the officer unless administered by medical personnel.
7. Only minimal, preliminary questions should be asked about the incident. The officer should be advised that a more detailed debriefing will be conducted at a later time.
8. Any standard investigations that will occur concerning the incident should be discussed with the officer.
9. The officer should be advised that he or she may seek union representation and/or legal counsel.

¹ CALEA Std.: 1.3.5 – A written directive specifies procedures for ensuring the provision of appropriate medical aid after use of lethal or less lethal weapons, and other use of force incidents as defined by the agency.

10. The officers should be advised not to discuss the incident with anyone except a personal or agency attorney, union representative, or departmental investigator, until the conclusion of the preliminary investigation.
11. The 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:
 - a. Take custody of the officer's weapon in a discrete manner; and
 - b. Replace it with another weapon, or advise the officer that it will be returned or replaced at a later time, as appropriate.
12. Involved officers should notify their families about the incident as soon as possible. When an officer is unable to do so, an agency official shall personally notify his family, and arrange for their transportation to the hospital.
13. At all times, when at the scene of the incident, the supervisor should handle the officer and all involved personnel in a manner that acknowledges the stress caused by the incident.

B. Post-Incident Procedures:² The supervisor or commanding officer who is tasked in taking over as incident command of a post-shooting incident is responsible for making sure that the Police Commissioner is immediately notified (in accordance with department procedures). Said officer is also responsible making the appropriate notifications to the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office. With respect to the interactions with the affected officer(s), the following set of procedures should be observed.

1. Debriefings shall be held as soon as possible after the incident. The department shall ensure that there is a designated supervisory officer on call or on-duty at all times so that someone is available shortly after an incident.
2. An officer who shoots a person causing death or serious bodily injury shall be placed on paid administrative leave. (This is not a suspension and does not imply any wrongdoing. It is for the officer's benefit.)³
3. Involved personnel shall be removed from line duties pending evaluation but shall remain available for any necessary administrative investigations.

² CALEA Std.: **22.2.4** – A written directive defines assistance services to be rendered to agency personnel and their families following line-of-duty deaths or serious injuries.

³ CALEA Std.: **1.3.8** – A written directive requires that any employee, whose action(s) or use of force in an official capacity results in death or serious physical injury, be removed from line-duty assignment, pending an administrative review.

4. All officers directly involved in the shooting incident shall be required to contact a department designated specialist for counseling and evaluation as soon as practical after the incident. Involved support personnel should also be encouraged to contact such specialists after a shooting incident. After the counseling sessions, the specialist shall advise the agency:
 - a. Whether it would be in the officers' best interest to remain on or to be placed on administrative leave or light duty, and for how long;
 - b. When the officers were relieved of their duty weapons after an incident, at what point they should be returned; or
 - c. Consider what would be the best course of counseling to be continued.
5. The department strongly encourages the families of the involved officers to take advantage of available counseling services.
6. Any department investigation of the incident shall be conducted as soon and as quickly as practical.
7. The department should brief other employees concerning the incident so that rumors are kept to a minimum. Department members are encouraged to show the involved officers their concern.
8. All personnel involved in a shooting incident should be advised that they are not permitted to speak with the media about the incident. Officers shall refer inquiries from the media to a designated agency spokesperson, unless otherwise authorized to release a statement pertaining to the incident. (See departmental policy entitled, *#300 Media/Public Information Guidelines*).
9. 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.
10. Officers directly involved in the shooting incident shall be required to re-qualify as soon as practical.

- C. Following an Incident - Supervisory Officer's Role:** Often the impact of a shooting incident does not immediately present itself in terms of a change in an officer's behavior. It could be days, weeks, or months before there is any evidence that the stress of such a traumatic incident could alter an officer's behavior or performance. It is for this reason that it is vitally important that supervisors be cognizant of any symptomatic behaviors or change in work performance, which may suggest that an officer is feeling the delayed affects of such an incident.

1. 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 unit members for symptoms of the disorder.
2. Some symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders include:
 - a. A feeling of being numb;
 - b. Feeling out of touch with what is going on around them;
 - c. A feeling that this is happening to someone else;
 - d. Withdrawing and avoiding anything to do with the traumatic situation or police work;
 - e. Avoiding other people, including one's family;
 - f. Intrusive and recurring thoughts of the event and feeling that it may be happening again;
 - g. Irritability;
 - h. Sleep problems;
 - i. Difficulty in concentrating; and
 - j. Hyper-vigilance.
3. A supervisor should immediately confer with his/her immediate supervisor. It is through this early intervention that it is the department's intent to minimize the impact any stress related reaction.
4. A supervisor observing any deviations in behavior or performance should be conferring with the officer. It is imperative that an officer who may be suffering the after affects of a traumatic incident not be treated any differently than would be the case of any other similar supervisory counseling session.
 - a. If the officer reveals that he/she is experiencing problems stemming from an incident, the supervisor should be supportive and encourage the officer to seek professional assistance either from his/her own professional physician or through the city's Employee Assistance Program.
 - b. The supervisor should also encourage an officer who may that be feeling the after affects of the incident, to take advantage of speaking with of the department's Peer Stress Councilors.

- c. If the supervisor is made aware that an officer may be suffering from the after affects of shooting incident, that supervisor has an obligation to bring such matters to the attention of the Police Commissioner (not necessarily through the appropriate chain of command, depending upon the circumstances).
5. Supervisors are responsible for making available to their unit members information about the agency’s peer counseling group and mental health services.⁴

⁴ CALEA Std.: **22.2.6** – *The agency makes available to employees an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) designed to assist in the identification and resolution of concerns or problems (personal or job related), which may adversely affect an employee’s personal or professional well-being or job performance. These personal concerns may include, but are not limited to, health, marital status, family, financial, substance abuse, emotional/stress, and other personal matters. The Employee Assistance Program shall include, at a minimum: f. training of designated supervisory personnel in the program services, supervisor’s role and responsibility, and identification of employee behaviors which would indicate the existence of employee concerns, problems and/or issues that could impact employee job performance.*
