

UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT
POLICY AND PROCEDURES

No. 610

Supercedes: NA

Effective: November 18, 2002

Page: NA Section: NA

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Dated: October 2, 2002

POST SHOOTING/TRAUMATIC INCIDENT PROCEDURES

- I. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for dealing with department employees who are involved in shooting or other traumatic incidents. The goal of these guidelines is to provide information on how to constructively support an employee involved in a shooting or traumatic incident and diminish emotional trauma by doing so. These guidelines are not meant to be a rigid protocol. It is important to apply these guidelines in a flexible manner that is appropriate to the situation.
- II. **POLICY:** Law enforcement duties can often expose department employees to mentally painful and highly stressful situations that cannot be resolved through normal stress coping methods. Unless adequately treated, these situations can cause serious emotional and physical problems. It has been found that officer-involved shootings resulting in death or serious bodily injury to a citizen or fellow officer, and other traumatic incidents, may precipitate such stress disorders. It is the responsibility of this department to provide employees with information on stress disorders and to assist in their deterrence. Therefore, it shall be the policy of the Upper Merion Township Police Department to take immediate action after such incidents to safeguard the continued good health of all involved employees.
- III, **CROSS-REF:** Policy #410, USE OF FORCE.
- IV. **DEFINITIONS:**

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.

OFFICER INVOLVED SHOOTING INCIDENT: An incident where shooting causes death or serious physical injury to an officer or another person.

TRAUMATIC INCIDENT: Any event with sufficient impact to produce significant emotional reactions in people at the time of the incident or later. A traumatic incident includes, but is not limited to:

- ◀ Line of duty death
- ◀ Serious line of duty injury/assault
- ◀ Multi-casualty incident/disaster
- ◀ Suicide
- ◀ Significant event involving children
- ◀ Traffic crashes involving death or serious injuries
- ◀ Knowing the victim of an incident.
- ◀ Personal or family tragedies

V. **PROCEDURES:**

A. HANDLING OF PERSONNEL AT THE SCENE:

1. A supervisor shall be dispatched to the scene of the incident, and shall assume primary responsibility for caring for involved employees.
2. The supervisor shall make appropriate arrangements for all necessary medical treatment. At all times while at the scene of the incident the supervisor should handle all involved employees in a manner that acknowledges the stress caused by the incident. It is important to show concern for the employee and to provide mental and physical first aid.
3. During any period where the involved employee is required to remain at the scene, but has no immediate duties to fulfill, he/she should be taken to a quiet area away from the scene of the incident. A supportive officer or other employee should remain with the involved employee, but should be advised not to discuss the details of the incident to avoid legal complications. No caffeine or other stimulants or depressants should be given to the employees unless administered by medical personnel.
4. The supervisor should arrange for the employees directly involved in the incident to leave the scene as soon as possible, and be taken to a quiet, secure setting.
5. Where possible, the supervisor shall briefly meet with the involved employee.
 - a. Only minimal, preliminary questions should be asked about the incident. The employee should be advised a more detailed debriefing will be conducted at a later time.

- b. Any standard investigations that will occur concerning the incident should be discussed with the employee.
 - c. The employee should be advised not to discuss the incident with anyone except a personal or department attorney, union representative or departmental investigator, until the conclusion of the preliminary investigation.
 - d. The employees should be advised that they may seek legal counsel.
 - e. The employee should be advised to notify his/her family of the incident as soon as possible. If the employee is unable to do so, the supervisor shall ensure that the family is notified and arrange for transportation to the employee's location, if necessary. Make sure the family has support (i.e., call friends, chaplain, etc.)
6. The supervisor shall determine whether the circumstances of the incident require that the officer's duty weapon be taken as part of the investigation. Where the duty weapon is taken, the supervisor shall:
- a. Take custody of the officer's weapon in a discreet 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.

B. POST INCIDENT PROCEDURES:

- 1. Involved employees shall be removed from line duties pending evaluation but shall remain available for any necessary administrative investigations. Other support personnel should be screened carefully for their reactions and given leave for the rest of the shift if necessary.
- 2. All officers directly involved in a shooting which results in death or serious bodily injury shall be required to meet with a department designated specialist, who is experienced with the law enforcement culture and trauma, for counseling and evaluation within 72 hours, or as soon as practical, after the incident. The department shall make arrangements for the specialist to contact the involved officer(s). Other affected support personnel should also be encouraged to contact such specialists after a shooting resulting in death or serious bodily injury. After the counseling sessions, the specialist shall advise the department on the following:
 - a. Whether it would be in the officer's best interest to be placed on administrative leave or administrative assignment, and for how long.
 - b. On the officer's physical and mental fitness for duty.
 - c. On what will be the best-continued course of counseling.

3. In the case of all other traumatic incidents, the decision to require the involved employee to undergo counseling and evaluation shall be made by the employee's division command officer after a review of the incident. If the command officer's decision is not to require counseling and evaluation, the involved employee may seek counseling on his/her own through the department's Employee Assistance Program.
4. The Chief of Police or his/her designee may order an employee to seek assistance or counseling from a mental health specialist upon a reasonable belief that stress may be disrupting the employee's job performance.
5. The department strongly encourages the families of the involved employees to take advantage of available counseling services.
6. The departmental investigation of the incident shall be conducted as quickly as practical and the affected employee(s) notified of the outcome.
7. The department should brief other employees about the incident so that the employee is not overwhelmed with questions and rumors are kept to a minimum.
8. All employees 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 department spokesperson, who shall consider the employee's interests when making any news releases.
9. In order to protect against crank or abusive calls, employees should be advised to have phone calls answered by another person for several days should their names be released to the public.

APPROVED: _____

DATE: _____

APPROVED: _____

DATE: _____

TO BE REVIEWED: ANNUALLY

DISTRIBUTION: All police officers
All civilian employees
Township Manager
File