

Law Enforcement

Responding officers are responsible for investigating and securing all possible crime scenes for subsequent forensic examination [photographs, collection of biological samples, or fingerprints]. The location of the child upon first observation may not be the location of the abuse. Initial identifying information interviews with parents, caretakers, relatives, or siblings at the scene, and emergency treatment personnel should be conducted expeditiously. Secure and recover any objects, clothing, furniture, weapons, or other instrumentality potentially related to the crime. When siblings are present, notify the Child Protection Hotline [CPH] for investigation of possible risk to the siblings.

Ideally, the investigating officer will be experienced in both child abuse and homicide investigations. If not, it is recommended that the law enforcement agency employ a collaborative approach between trained investigators in both disciplines within the agency to ensure that the following elements are covered during the investigation:

- determine whether prior contacts concerning the child exist involving current or prior abuse of the child or any siblings
- determine whether there are any prior contacts alleging domestic violence in the home, other crimes of violence, weapons offenses, drug offenses, or dependency intervention
- follow-up interviews with medical personnel including EMTs, paramedics, nurses, physicians, the hospital social worker, and the coroner
- interview the parent(s), caretakers, siblings, other relatives, neighbors, school officials, the family physician, and any mandated reporter regarding the child's history as well as the causes of the child's current injuries
- thoroughly examine all potential crime scenes to ensure proper documentation through forensic crime scene collection including photographs, collection of samples for scientific analysis, and retrieval of all instrumentalities related to the child's current injuries
- obtain current medical records documenting treatment for the presenting injuries, a complete medical history of the child, a recent photo of the child prior to the current injury, DCFS records, dependency court records, and medical records on any siblings who have also suffered prior abuse
- consult forensic pediatric experts regarding allegations of accidental injury, shaken baby syndrome, sudden infant death, birth defects, severe neglect, starvation, failure to thrive, or any special needs of the child [developmental disabilities, visual impairment, hearing deficiency, motor impairment] and obtain opinions from them in writing
- consider using polygraph examinations as an investigative tool to eliminate suspects and elicit additional evidence because any statements made during the course of the exam may be admissible in court
- video tape the suspect's reenactment of the events and/or the scene utilizing the statements given by the suspect
- create a battered-child timeline to reflect when, where, and how previous injuries occurred; the suspect's statements as to how the injuries occurred; who had control of the child and when each person had control; and the medical evidence as to the injuries
- consider whether to request a skeletal trauma series of an injured child for the purpose of revealing old fractures
- locate all previous medical records documenting the child's medical history and the location of treatment