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Early connections last a lifetime

## ***Compassionate Response:***

### **A Public Health-First Responder Partnership to Promote Trauma-Informed Approaches and Young Children's Resilience**

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## Taking a Moment to Reflect



- Reflect for a moment on experiences have you had with First Responders (police, fire, EMT) in your family or community.
- What might these experiences have felt like through a young child's eyes?



## Young Children Are Present and Watching



### POLICE-INVOLVED SHOOTING

Jacob Blake police shooting: Black man shot in front of 3 sons after he broke up fight, family says

### WORLD & NATION

'I don't want you to get shot': Philando Castile video shows reaction of girlfriend's 4-year-old daughter

## Mother Arrested In Front Of Child



## What is *Compassionate Response*?



- Audience: First Responders and staff who work directly with families
- Learning experience focused on 4 key questions:
  1. What are traumatic experiences young children might experience?
  2. How do traumatic experiences impact children over the short- and long-term?
  3. How can professionals mitigate the impact of trauma on children who are present during First Responder calls?
  4. How can professionals manage their stress levels on and off the job (self-care)?

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## Children and First Responders: Presence at Parental Arrest



	Number of adult arrests in 2010	Estimated number of time a child experienced a parental arrest	Estimated number of times a child was present for a parental arrest <sup>b</sup>
United States	13,120,947 <sup>a</sup>	6,368,709	1,273,741 - 5,286,028

<sup>a</sup> Uniform Crime Reports, 2010

A father I spoke with in a state prison described the pains he took to ensure his 2-year-old daughter, for whom he was the primary caregiver, did not witness his arrest for failure to pay child support. He called his mother to watch his daughter, then called the police and waited outside for them to arrive to take him to jail.

Burnson, C., 2019: <https://www.evidentchange.org/blog/how-witnessing-parents-arrest-affects-child>



## Traumatic Parental Separation



**Parental arrest represents the “convergence between real life events and worst childhood fears”**

[A mother of a young boy] told me that her family was on a walk when several police cars drove up and surrounded them. Right in front of the family, police officers arrested her husband for violating parole, while her son kept asking where and why they were taking his dad. The experience instilled in her son a fear of law enforcement, she said, and he cried when he saw police cars or heard sirens. He became hypervigilant about his car seat being buckled, as someone had told him it was against the law for children to ride in cars unbuckled.

Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, “Report,” 29.  
Burnson, C, 2019: <https://www.evidentchange.org/blog/how-witnessing-parents-arrest-affects-child>



## Families and First Responders: Research Base



### *What is the child's experience?*

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- 40% of incarcerated parents reported that their children were present for the arrest
- 27% reported that police drew their guns during the arrest
- When children were present, police avoided handcuffing the mother in front of her child(ren) 30% of the time, while this only occurred with 3% of the fathers.
- Police did not typically explain to the child why their parent was being arrested (this occurred in 20% of arrests).



## Families and First Responders: Research Base



**Children who witnessed the arrest of a household member were**

**57%** more likely

to have elevated post-traumatic stress symptoms  
compared to children who did not witness an arrest.

(Philips & Zhao, 2010)





## Stress of “Only” Watching Is Written on the Body

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- Analysis of stress hormones in children’s hair samples after witnessing their father’s arrest showed elevated levels of cortisol and cortisone.
- Witnessing a parent’s arrest is also significantly associated with greater mental health challenges later on.
- Racism is a source of ongoing trauma that negatively impacts health and well-being.



Muentner et al., 2021, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/dev.22113>

Humenay Roberts et al., 2014, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4016966/>

AAP, 2019, [The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health | American Academy of Pediatrics](#)



## Families and First Responders: Exacerbating Factors



- **Two factors can exacerbate traumatic responses in children:**
  - Use of surprise in raiding a home.
  - Lack of community trust in the police.
- **What can help?**
  - Protocols to help officers interact effectively with children.
  - Most departments lack these resources (IACP, 2014).



Thurau, L. OJP Diagnostic Center | First, Do No Harm: Model Practices for Law Enforcement Agencies When Arresting Parents in the Presence of Children



## First Responders See a Need for Guidance



- Survey of police officers (n=75) found:
  - 95% believe that it is “*moderately*” to “*very*” important to address the needs of children when their caregiver/ close-family member is arrested

### Yet:

- 64% reported that they don’t typically ask an arrestee if they are caring for a child under 18
- 69% reported that their department *does not* have a written protocol about how officers should respond when a child is present at the time of his/her caregiver’s arrest
- Of the 31% that reported having a written protocol related to children, **the only protocol described was to call child welfare**

International Association of Chiefs of Police/Bureau of Justice Assistance. 2014. *Safeguarding children of arrested parents*.  
[https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Safeguarding-Children-of-Arrested-Parents-Final\\_Web\\_v3.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Safeguarding-Children-of-Arrested-Parents-Final_Web_v3.pdf)



## Families See a Need for Change



### Respect the arrested caregiver's knowledge of and relationship with their child

- Parent/caregiver is the best person to provide reassurance to their child
- Place children with natural supports (e.g., grandmother) rather than foster parents whenever possible
- Availability of on-site psychiatric/counseling services at the moment of arrest could be beneficial

### Provide best-practice training for law enforcement

- Training on methods to limit or reduce the use of force
- Arrests should occur away from and out of the child's sight

Lang & Bory, 2012, *A Collaborative Model to Support Children Following a Caregiver's Arrest: Responding to Children of Arrested Caregivers Together*.



## Compassionate Response Goal



*To minimize children's exposure to trauma,  
and ensure that all young children in the  
City of New York have the opportunity to  
grow and thrive  
in their family, community, and city.*



## Development of *Compassionate Response*



Conduct literature review

Meet to gain consensus on goals

Develop draft(s) for review cycle(s)

Demo training for stakeholders

Internal marketing and promotion

Allow flexibility for new stakeholders



## Looking at the World Through a Child's Eyes



### How might young children experience First Responders?

- Surprise entry into the home—fear when strangers enter the home (yelling, force, weapons, protective gear, handcuffing parent(s) in front of the children)
- Shouting/disrespectful language
- Witnessing use of force
- Lack of community trust
- Young children's unique cognitive and emotional processes—e.g., consider what protective gear or a surprise entry of uniformed strangers may look like from the perspective of a child

OIP Diagnostic Center & [Thurau](#), n.d.

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## *Compassionate Response* Learning Objectives



- Gain an understanding of the **unique developmental needs** of very young children
- Understand **how stressful or traumatic events can influence young children's** short- and long-term health and well-being
- Learn **strategies that can be used to mitigate traumatic impact on scene**





## Key Messages of *Compassionate Response*



1. Both First Responders and Family-Facing Staff can use strategies to minimize children's exposure to traumatic events.
2. How you respond when young children are present is one factor to consider when on scene or working in a family-facing role.
3. Using these strategies can minimize children's fear and support children's sense of safety during interactions with First Responders and family-facing staff.
4. Children's healthy development depends on responsive and nurturing adults.
5. Working with families during stressful or frightening interactions is demanding work, intellectually and emotionally. Taking care of oneself minimizes the risk of burn-out and secondary trauma.



## Discussion of Strategies to Consider *When Safe and Feasible*



### Making Challenging Situations Better for Young Children

#### Strategies to Ensure Children's Safety and Limit Their Exposure

- Ensure safety.
- Then – Consider strategies such as the following:
  - Appeal to the adult at the scene as a parent: “I see your child is here. I’d like to talk to you about this situation, so she doesn’t get scared. Can we do that?”
  - Use a calm, respectful tone of voice with parents.
  - Use a calm, kind tone of voice with children.
  - If parent and child must be separated while you are working with the parent, allow parent to say good-bye and explain what is happening to the child. Tell the child where parent will be. Assign child a caregiver who will stay with them throughout the experience.

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## Case Studies Offer the Chance to Apply Knowledge



### CASE EXAMPLE



#### Through the eyes of a young child

Maya, who is 3 years old, wakes up to the smell of smoke in her room and loud sirens. Suddenly, daddy opens the door, picks Maya up in his arms, and runs out of the apartment and down the stairs to the front door. Maya feels something stinging her arm and her throat and chest hurt. It's dark outside, but Maya sees a neighbor coming towards them. Daddy hands Maya to the man, asks him for help, and then falls down onto the sidewalk. Daddy is coughing so hard.

- What could be done to minimize the child's fear?
- What age-appropriate messages could be shared?

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## Provide Direct Guidance on Soothing Young Children



### Breathing/Relaxation Exercises Appropriate for Young Children

#### **Snowglobe Breath**

- Shake a snowglobe for a child.
- Sit with them, modeling deep, relaxing breaths, until all of the snow has settled on the floor of the globe.
- This provides a visual, relaxing “timer” of how long to breathe.



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## Lessons Learned



1. **Collaboration takes time.** Allow 18-24 months for development phase.
2. **Regularly convene** an advisory group that is charged with children's issues that represents key audiences. In NYC this included:
  - Police, fire, EMTs, health, education, child welfare, social services, emergency management, youth and community development
3. **Center the resource on promoting child health** and well-being, rather than remediating existing practices, to engage partners.
4. **Understand and align with what's already been done**—e.g., the NYPD already had guidelines that helped to inform this resource.
5. **Look for an entry point** that can meet the greatest staff need.

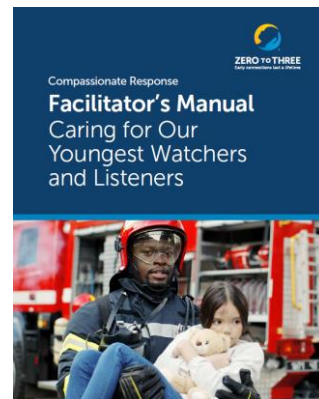


## Download for Use in Your Community



- ***Compassionate Response* Facilitator's Guide and PPT are available for free download at:**

**[www.zerotothree.org/compassionate](http://www.zerotothree.org/compassionate)**



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What do *you* want First  
Responders to know about  
young children who are present  
during calls?





Questions?





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## Additional Resources

- **Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents:**  
<https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/Publications/IACP-SafeguardingChildren.pdf>  
<https://www.theiacp.org/resources/safeguarding-children-of-arrested-parents-toolkit>
- **First, Do No Harm: Model Practices for Law Enforcement Agencies When Arresting Parents in the Presence of Children:** [https://strategiesforyouth.org/sfysite/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/First\\_Do\\_No\\_Harm\\_Report.pdf](https://strategiesforyouth.org/sfysite/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/First_Do_No_Harm_Report.pdf)
- **A Collaborative Model to Support Children Following a Caregiver's Arrest: Responding to Children of Arrested Caregivers Together:** <https://strategiesforyouth.org/sfysite/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/CHDI-Arrest-Protocol-CT-Inst.-for-Mun-Reg-Policy.pdf>

