

SEXUAL ASSAULT INVESTIGATIONS

6.16.01 PURPOSE

The purpose of this order is to establish general policies and procedures when responding to and investigating reports of sexual assault cases.

The San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) is committed to a victim-centered approach in sexual assault investigations: ensuring respectful and empathetic interactions, building trust, minimizing re-traumatization, and understanding victims' varying life circumstances often requiring additional awareness and resources.

6.16.02 DEFINITIONS

- A. Sexual Assault.** Any crime or attempted crime of a sexual nature, which includes, but not limited to, sexual assault, sexual battery, sexual molestation, unlawful intercourse involving a minor and incest cases.
- B. Sexual Assault Response Team (SART).** A multidisciplinary team working collaboratively to meet the medical and emotional needs of the sexual assault victim and the forensic needs of the criminal justice system. This team includes, but is not limited to, advocates, law enforcement officers (including prosecutors), forensic interviewers, Human Services Agency (HSA) protective services workers, and Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFEs).
- C. SART Examination.** A forensic-medical examination conducted by a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE). During a SART Examination, the victim is offered: 1. Forensic documentation of injuries as well as collection of evidentiary products for purposes of a law enforcement investigation, and 2. Medical evaluation and treatment.
- D. Special Victims Unit (SVU).** A unit in the Investigations Bureau responsible for the investigation of sensitive crimes including all reported cases of sexual assault regardless of the age of the victim.
- E. Sexual Assault Evidence Kit (SAEK).** The evidentiary products of a SART Examination packaged for analysis and evidence storage.
- F. Victim Advocate.** A service provider, rape crisis counselor, social worker, victim witness provider within a governmental or non-governmental agency, who is trained to assess and address the needs of the victim as well as to provide counseling, advocacy, resources, information, and support.

- G. Consent.** [The California Penal Code 261.6](#) defines consent as positive cooperation in act or attitude pursuant to an exercise of free will. The person must act freely and voluntarily and have knowledge of the nature of the act or transaction involved.

6.16.03 POLICY

The San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) members shall treat all sexual assault reports as genuine, follow proper procedures to apprehend and assist in conviction of perpetrators, and ensure the safety of victims and the community.

6.16.04 GENERAL PROCEDURES

- A. Patrol Initial Response.** After medical aid has been offered, members should attempt to collect general information from the victim, without the need for in-depth details. Such details should include:
- Type and elements of crime(s).
 - Location and timeframe of the incident.
 - Suspect information, description, and/or whereabouts.
 - Potential crime scene and/or evidence information.
 - Notify the Special Victims Unit as soon as practical to begin the SART process.
- B. Notifications.** Notifications are made to inform investigators of the potential need for their response and guidance on the case and should be made as soon as possible to ensure an expeditious response. Investigators will gather pertinent information to determine if their response is mandated.
- In all cases where an individual alleges that a sexual assault has occurred, even if an arrest is not made, members shall notify SVU main telephone number as soon as practical.
 - In the event the notification is made after normal business hours, members shall notify the Department Operations Center (DOC). DOC shall review the mandatory response criteria and telephone the on-call SVU teams.
- C. Forensic Examination and Medical Treatment**
1. All sexual assault victims, regardless of age, shall be taken, with the victim's consent, to Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center - Emergency Department.
 2. All sexual assault victims, regardless of age, shall be afforded the opportunity to have a Sexual Assault Examination Kit (SAEK) performed by specially trained nursing staff at the Recovery/Rape Treatment Center (RTC) located within Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital.
 3. Once notified by the Recovery/Rape Treatment Center, a member assigned to SVU shall respond to the Recovery/Rape Treatment Center and take custody of the SAEK no later than two business days from the date of notification.

4. The SVU member or designee who collects the SAEK shall transport and book the SAEK into evidence at the Property Control Division. Pursuant to [California Penal Code Section 680](#), SAEKs are required to be delivered to the Crime Lab within 5 days after the evidence has been collected from the victim by the Recovery/Rape Treatment Center staff.
5. In the event an outside law enforcement agency has completed a courtesy report for a sexual assault occurring within San Francisco, and the sexual assault victim has had a SAEK performed in another jurisdiction, it shall be the responsibility of the SVU to collect the SAEK from the outside law enforcement agency.

D. Victim Interviews. Members shall prioritize the victim's physical and emotional well-being, remain non-judgmental and respectful of the victim.

1. Adult Victims

- a. If the victim is reporting a sexual assault, members shall provide as much privacy as reasonably possible, including the use of an interview room if available.
- b. Members should conduct a preliminary interview and obtain statements to establish the nature of the crime committed.
- c. If it is determined by the on-call team at SVU that SVU is responding to take over the investigation, members shall not conduct an in-depth interview of the victim.
 1. Victim dictates the time of the interview depending on their trauma, in some cases requiring a period of 24 hours before they can articulate the details of the reported sexual assault.
- d. If it is determined by the on-call team at SVU that SVU is NOT responding to take over the investigation, members shall conduct an in-depth interview of the victim.

2. Juvenile Victims

- a. Due to the sensitive nature of these types of investigations, it is not recommended that responding officers conduct in-depth interviews with juvenile victims.
- b. A SVU Investigator may ask the responding officer to conduct a preliminary interview of the victim to establish the nature of the crime committed, if it hasn't already been disclosed.
- c. The responding officer shall obtain as much information as possible from the adult family member, social worker, hospital staff, or teacher regarding the assault prior to conducting minimal facts interview or questioning the child.
- d. The responding officer shall only ask the necessary questions to enable them to determine if the reported crime is of a sexual nature and not question the juvenile victim in detail about the reported offense.

- e. When a juvenile has been sexually abused or assaulted by a stranger or known person, a joint investigation including but not limited to SFPD SVU, Child Protective Services, and Children Advocacy Center, shall be conducted. It is important to note that SVU's investigative focus may differ from that of the social worker.

E. Suspect Interviews

1. Adult Suspects

- a. If SVU responds to the investigation, patrol officers shall not conduct a suspect interview and shall follow the instructions and guidance provided by the assigned SVU investigator.
- b. If SVU does not respond to the investigation, patrol officers shall follow all current Department policy and procedures. Members shall ensure the Miranda Advisement is provided prior to conducting a suspect interview.
- c. If probable cause *does not* exist to place an adult suspect under arrest, patrol officers shall not attempt to interview the suspect as this may compromise the integrity of the investigation. Patrol officers shall notify an SVU Investigator as soon as practical. SVU Investigators will provide instructions and guidance to the reporting officers.

2. Juvenile Suspects

- a. See DGO 7.01 Juvenile Policies and Procedures for Youth Non-Psychological Detention, Arrest, and Custody.

F. Evidence Collection. It is the responsibility of the officer who first arrives on scene to isolate and protect the crime scene from contamination until relieved by the direction of a superior officer (see DGO 6.02, Physical Evidence).

- 1. Do not leave any evidence with the nurse or doctor examining the victim. However, as stated above, all SAEKs collected by medical staff will be retained at the Recovery/Rape Treatment Center.

G. Other Duties/Services

- 1. If requested, provide the victim with transportation to their residence or another appropriate location within San Francisco.
- 2. In addition to providing the victim with a SVU Follow Up & Referral Card (SFPD 142) and the *"Your Rights as a Survivor of Sexual Assault"* card, provide the victim a Follow up form with the incident case number, and a Victims of Crime Form (SFPD 369).
- 3. If an individual responds to a District Station to report they were the victim of a sexual assault, members shall follow all guidelines set forth in this order. Members shall advise the victim of their right to have a victim

advocate and a support person of their choosing present during the report taking at district stations.

- H. **Incident Reports.** Members shall complete an incident report for any reported sexual assault. Whether or not a SVU Investigator responds to an incident or is notified, the responding officer is expected to submit an initial and/or supplementary report indicating information reported, observations, statements, evidence, and other related information.
- I. **Data Collection and Reporting.** SVU and the Crime Lab shall partner to compile a semiannual and annual report, pursuant to Police Commission Resolution 16-28. The report shall be submitted to the Chief of Police for review and submission to the commission office. These reports shall include at the minimum:
- a. SFPD Crime Laboratory number
 - b. Date evidence collected from victim by Trauma Recovery/Rape Treatment Center
 - c. Date evidence collected from the custody of Trauma Recovery/Rape Treatment Center
 - d. Date evidence submitted to the Crime Lab
 - e. Analysis start date
 - f. Analysis completion date
 - g. Whether or not a DNA profile of the assailant was developed and if so, the date the DNA profile was developed
 - h. Whether or not a DNA profile of the assailant was uploaded into CODIS and if so, the date this occurred
 - i. Whether or not there was a match between the DNA profile of the assailant and a DNA profile contained in CODIS, and if so, the date this match was discovered, and the date this information was provided to the Special Victims Unit
 - j. Any other outcome information such as arrests and convictions, provided that disclosure would not impede or compromise any ongoing investigation
 - k. Whether or not sexual assault victims were notified of developments of forensic testing and the investigation of their cases, including the date and manner of notification. In cases where notification was not provided to the victim, an explanation as to why notification was not provided
- J. **Airport Bureau Operations.** Airport Bureau members shall follow Airport Bureau General Orders and San Mateo County Protocols.

6.16.05 LEGAL GUIDELINES

- Pursuant to [California Penal Code Section 293\(a\)](#), members shall inform victims that their name, “will become a matter of public record unless the person requests

that it not become a matter of public record.” Members shall offer victims confidentiality for incident reports.

- Pursuant to [California Penal Code Section 680.2](#), members shall provide the victim with SFPD Form 540 “Your Rights as a Survivor of Sexual Assault” information card.
- Pursuant to [California Penal Code Section 679.04\(a\)](#), a victim has the right to have an advocate and support person of the victim’s choosing present during any interview with law enforcement. Members may exclude a support person from an interview if the member determine that the presence of that individual would be detrimental to the purpose of the interview. A victim has the right to have a person of the same or opposite gender present in the room during any interview unless no such person is reasonably available. [California Penal Code Section 679.04\(b\)\(4\)](#).
- Pursuant to [California Penal Code Section 679.04\(d\)](#), a member shall not discourage a victim from receiving a medical evidentiary or physical examination.
- Pursuant to [California Family Code Section 6228](#), SFPD shall provide, upon request and without charging a fee, one copy of all incident report face sheets, one copy of all incident reports, a copy of any accompanying or related photographs of a victim’s injuries, property damage, or any other photographs that are noted in the incident report to any victim, or the victim’s representative (as defined by 6228) of a sexual assault no later than 5 working days after request. Face sheets shall be made available no later than 48 hours after being requested. Members shall direct victims to CISU to submit a request for their report.

References

Field Training Manual, SFPD

SFPD 142 SVU Follow Up and Referral Card

SFPD 369 Victims of Crime

SFPD Form 540 Your Rights as a Survivor of Sexual Assault

SFPD DGO 7.01

SFPD DGO 6.02