
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 and trauma-informed 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, mental health providers, 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, domestic violence advocate, social worker, or 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. A victim/survivor may choose an individual not defined as a Victim Advocate to serve as their support person,

as long as the individual is not involved in any capacity with the case.

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.

1. General Information Collection.

i. **Adult Victims.** After medical aid has been offered, members should attempt to collect general information from the victim (or witness, in case if victim is incapacitated to provide the information directly), without the need for in-depth details. The general information to be collected includes but is not limited to:

1. Type and elements of crime(s).
2. Location and timeframe of the incident.
3. Suspect information, description, and/or whereabouts.
4. Potential crime scene and/or evidence information.

ii. **Juvenile Victims.** Members shall follow the procedures as outlined below in DGO Section 6.16.04 (D) (2) [Juvenile Victim Interviews].

2. Notifications.

i. **Notification to Child Protective Services (CPS)/Child Welfare Agency (CWS):** If the victim is juvenile and CPS/CWS is not notified/engaged already, members shall notify CPS/CWS as soon as practical.

ii. **Notification to SVU:** In all cases of reported sexual assault, 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.

1. **Business Hours:** In all cases where an individual alleges that a sexual assault has occurred, even if an arrest is not made, members shall notify the SVU by calling the main telephone number and speaking with a live person as soon as practical. If a live person within the SVU cannot be reached, members shall notify the Department Operations Center (DOC).
2. **Outside of Business Hours:** Members shall notify the DOC. DOC shall review the mandatory response criteria and

telephone the on-call SVU teams.

B. 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 medical staff at the Rape Treatment Center (RTC)/Child and Adolescent Support, Advocacy, and Resource Center (CASARC) located within Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital.
3. SVU or designee shall take custody of the SAEK from the RTC/CASARC no later than two business days after the forensic examination is conducted.
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 RTC/CASARC staff.
5. If an outside law enforcement agency has completed a courtesy report for a sexual assault occurring within San Francisco, or if the RTC/CASARC has completed and collected the SAEK for a sexual assault that occurred in another jurisdiction, the SVU or its designee shall be responsible for collecting the SAEK from the outside law enforcement agency or from RTC/CASARC, respectively, no later than two business days after the forensic examination. Members should direct outside law enforcement agency representatives to contact SVU directly regarding the collection of the SAEK.

C. 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 make reasonable efforts to allow the victim to select a private and comfortable location for the interview that is free from distractions.
 - b. If the on-call SVU team determines they will respond to take over the investigation, members shall limit the initial interview to questions that establish only the basic facts of the assault. This includes information necessary for the immediate needs of the investigation and the safety of the victim, such as the suspect's identity and elements of the crime, when reasonable and practical. Members should tailor their questions to the victim's emotional and physical state.
 - c. If the on-call SVU team determines they will NOT respond to take over the investigation at the time of incident reporting, members

shall continue to collect any additional information as necessary, as directed by their patrol supervisor or SVU investigator, that is reasonably possible. This will occur before a thorough follow-up interview is conducted at a later time.

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.

D. 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.

E. 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.

F. 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.

G. 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.

H. 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