

There are many excellent “time of arrest” protocols available. For law enforcement agencies drafting their own protocol, SFY has distilled key features of existing protocols, combined them with the results of youth surveys, into a set of elements for an agency’s protocol. It is an obligation of law enforcement to reduce the trauma of an arrest, as it is the opportunity to forge positive, memorable bonds with children witnessing arrests of parents/caregivers. The reaction a child has in this situation may vary, but the long-term impact it has on a child is universal. In order to minimize this trauma and increase the positive effect on the community perceptions of law enforcement.

Prior to Arriving at the Scene:

- Request dispatchers to ask for information regarding presence of children at the scene
- Consider carefully where children may be located in the house before using weapons,
- Conduct “predeployment” checklists to reduce risk of harm to children during raids and execution of arrest warrants

Upon Arriving at the Scene:

- Ascertain whether there are children on the premises or likely to return; scan for clues,
- Ensure all children are accounted for; locate them and anticipate that some children may hide,
- Ascertain location of children who may return later to the scene to properly ensure that the child will be cared for during the absence of the parent/caregiver
- Check all children for signs of injury/harm, especially at incidents, involving domestic violence or exposure to drugs or their production,
- Observe children for signs of trauma,
- Allow parent to comfort the child and explain what will happen next and how child will be cared for,

Interactions with Children & Youth:

- Take a developmentally informed approach to conversations with the child as a function of their age, the reason for the arrest, and their emotional response to the situation,
- To the extent possible, avoid interacting with the offending adult in the presence of children;
  - Do not question children in the presence of the arrested parent
- Make efforts to speak and explain to both the child and adult what is happening and explain what will happen *next*
- Do not aim weapons at children;
- Help children and youth self-regulate and calm the situation by giving them a distraction and, where age appropriate, something to hold.

When Arrestee is Sole Caretaker

- Follow local protocol for transferring custody of child to state agency.
- Develop follow-up to ensure transfer of custody occurred as required.

When Another Caretaker Is Available

- Inform remaining parent/caregiver that children are often traumatized by observing and hearing about such events and provide referrals
- Where possible, provide referrals to child, family and youth services to address the trauma of the experience and help mitigate its effects.

After Resolution of Incident

- Where appropriate, the officer should return to the home and visit child/youth to demonstrate concern for their safety and well-being.