Reducing Domestic Violence in Chula Vista, CA

Herman Goldstein Award Submission 2018

Reducing Domestic Violence in Chula Vista, CA: Summary

Scanning

In 2013, domestic violence (both non-crime domestic disputes between intimate partners and physical violence) was Chula Vista's second most common call for service (CFS) type, exceeded only by false burglar alarms. While non-DV CFS fell 10% from 2007-2014, the yearly number of DV CFS had remained steady. The Chula Vista Police Department (CVPD) had partnered with the DV-advocacy organization South Bay Community Services (SBCS) to provide 24/7 on-scene services for DV victims for more than 15 years, but had not seen a reduction in DV CFS. DV incidents were negatively affecting the involved parties, their children, their neighbors.

<u>Analysis</u>

The DV problem was analyzed and researched in a variety of ways, including a comprehensive literature review; an analysis of CFS, crime, arrest, jail, district attorney, and officer survey data; and the collection of partner perspectives and expert field advice. The primary findings of the problem analysis included: DV had been successfully addressed in at least three other cities through tiered, focused deterrence; non-crime intimate partner disturbances far outnumbered physical violence incidents; few suspects spent more than a day or two in jail and few could be prosecuted. The vast majority of repeat DV incidents occurred three days after the initial CFS incident.

Response

Working together, police, SBCS, probation, child welfare services, and the district attorney's office implemented a 3-level, tiered focused deterrence model for responding to DV CFS in just one geographic area of the city (Sector 1):

- Non-crime DV CFS: consistent, verbal in-person educational message from officer
- First DV crime incident after start of project: verbal and written warning of suspect; and an in-person unannounced officer follow-up with victims and suspects three days after the initial DV CFS
- Chronic suspects/verbal abuse customized problem-solving plan

Assessment

- Following a 1-year implementation period, DV crime dropped 24% in the experimental sector (Sector 1) and increased 3% in a matched comparison sector (Sector 2)
- Following a 1-year implementation period, DV CFS went down 3% in Sector 1 and increased 10% in Sector 2
- 97% of DV victims in Sector 1 were satisfied with the police response compared to 81% of DV victims in Sector 2

- Only 8% of DV subjects said they would not be willing to call police again; 88% said things had gotten better since the police response
- 77% of project officers said the initiative was effective
- 67% of project officers said the initiative should be expanded citywide

Project Description

Reducing Domestic Violence in Chula Vista, California

SCANNING

Chula Vista is a very diverse city of 267,000¹, located seven miles south of San Diego and seven miles north of the Mexican border. Chula Vista is not a high-crime city, but like many communities across the country, domestic violence (DV) dominates the call for service (CFS) landscape. In 2013, with 3,886 CFS, DV was the second most common call type in Chula Vista; that year, DV CFS exceeded the combined total of all robbery, residential burglary, vehicle theft, and vehicle burglary calls.

The same year, false burglar alarms was the top call type and homeless-related calls was the third most common. In 2013, the Chula Vista Police Department (CVPD) passed an ordinance aimed at reducing false alarms and initiated a special project to address homeless-related concerns. DV had not yet been systematically addressed, however, despite the fact that more patrol hours were spent responding to DV CFS than to both false alarms and homeless-related calls together.

For more than 15 years, South Bay Community Services (SBCS), which provides DV victims with resources on a 24/7 basis, has been an active partner with the CVPD in efforts to reduce DV. South Bay advocates provide crisis intervention services to victims and their children, helping plan their immediate and long-term safety. SBCS staff are housed in the CVPD building, and patrol officers routinely call advocates to the scene of DV crimes to assist victims face-to-face during the aftermath of incidents. This high functioning SBCS-CVPD partnership had helped thousands of victims over the years, but together we had not been able to reduce DV CFS levels. In fact, DV CFS levels remained

¹ Chula Vista is 59% Hispanic; 19% white; 15% Asian; 5% African American; and 2% other races.

steady from 2007 through 2014, while non-DV CFS went down 10% throughout the city of Chula Vista during the same period. Given the long-standing efforts between SBCS and the CVPD to address the problem of DV, we were disappointed, to say the least, that DV calls did not also go down 10% between 2007 and 2014. SBCS staff were interested in working with the CVPD to try a new approach to reduce this problem.

Finally, DV incidents negatively affect not just the two parties, but children who are present, involved relatives and friends, and neighbors who may be concerned and frightened by loud arguments. Focusing on DV was an opportunity for us to positively impact the broader Chula Vista community. It was also important to us to focus on officer safety. Domestic violence calls are among the most dangerous types of incidents officers respond to, and the most likely to result in an officer fatality.

ANALYSIS

Literature Review. We conducted an extensive review of the existing literature, starting with the POP guide on domestic violence, which served as a guiding document for the problem analysis. The project analyst team attempted to answer as many analysis questions as possible that were listed in the guidebook. However, only findings pertinent to the development of the CVPD response are described in the pages that follow.

As part of the literature review, the project team identified three communities that had measurably reduced DV or its severity: Fremont, CA; West Yorkshire, England; and High Point, NC. In the mid-1990s, Fremont patrol officers began conducting several unannounced follow-up visits with couples at addresses where police had been dispatched on DV CFS at least three times. Fremont was able to reduce repeat CFS to these locations by 67%. In the late 1990s, West Yorkshire officers implemented a tiered response to DV

couples based on whether officers had been dispatched to their address once, twice, or three times or more in the past. Although the West Yorkshire response did not reduce CFS, it reduced the number of couples who "graduated" to higher levels due to repeat incidents. Finally, in 2009, High Point personnel began using a focused deterrence model, mixed with some elements of West Yorkshire's tiered response initiative, in an effort to reduce DV. The High Point project reduced DV CFS, injuries, and homicides. We thought elements of all three models might be applicable to the problem of DV in Chula Vista. Through our problem analysis, we sought to identify which aspects of the different responses implemented in the three cities might be most effective for us.

Officer Focus Groups and Surveys. In March of 2014, Deborah Lamm Weisel, our external research partner, conducted two focus groups of approximately five CVPD officers each. The focus group questions were based on several themes that had emerged in the academic literature about police officer attitudes towards DV. Based on the results of the focus groups, Weisel developed a written survey that was administered at all six patrol roll calls and at a monthly investigative meeting. A total of 82 sworn personnel completed the written survey, which respondents placed in a sealed ballot box². Eighty-seven percent of respondents expressed frustration with responding repeatedly to the same couples involved in non-crime intimate partner disturbances. A large segment of officers were skeptical about traditional criminal justice responses to DV. Approximately 70% said they did not think restraining orders or mandatory treatment for batterers was effective; almost 50% said arresting DV offenders seldom prevented future DV.

² The 82 respondents represented 46% of all sworn personnel assigned to patrol and investigations; however, more than three quarters of the respondents were patrol officers.

CFS and Crime Data. To identify call patterns, a team of three CVPD analysts (Nanci Plouffe, Kristen Miggans, and Karin Schmerler) reviewed 10,180 DV-related calls for service received by the department from January 2012 through June 2014. An analysis of CFS data indicated that non-crime intimate partner disturbance calls were more common than calls involving physical violence. In fact, more than 70% of DV CFS in Chula Vista did not result in a crime report, and this subset of DV calls – non-crime intimate partner disturbances – had increased 18% between 2007 and 2014.

We also found that repeat DV was a problem. The call and crime analysis showed that just 6% of unique residential DV addresses in one geographic sector – only 23 unique residential addresses – accounted for 19% of unique residential DV CFS over a six-month period. Although most residential addresses did not experience repeat DV calls, when repeat calls did occur, the vast majority (86%) reoccurred after three days had elapsed.

From a review of a sample (N=97) of the 2,612 DV-related crime cases logged from January 2012 through June 2014, Miggans estimated that children were present during 33% of DV crimes, and 56% of couples had children under 18 (either in common or not in common) who could potentially be present in future DV incidents. Miggans also found that the offender was under the influence of alcohol in about 30% of cases. About half the time, offenders fled the scene of DV crimes and were not subsequently arrested. The police department did not have the resources to track down low-level DV offenders. More than half of all DV incidents were misdemeanor batteries without injuries, and the majority of felony DV assaults did not involve serious injuries³.

³ In California, a DV assault is considered a felony with an injury as long as the injury is visible, which may include such injuries as scratches and redness.

Plouffe mapped the home addresses of victims and suspects to see if follow-up contacts, similar to Fremont's efforts, would be feasible. She found that 83% of victims lived in Chula Vista and 64% of suspects lived in Chula Vista, but most of the remainder of victims and suspects lived within easy driving distance of the city. More than half of couples lived together all the time, or least some of the time. Most victims and suspects were on the young side; more than 75% were aged 40 or under.

Jail Data. The San Diego County Sheriff's Department shared approximately 2.5 years of jail data with Chula Vista analysts to enhance the problem analysis. The analysts found that the median time in jail was just 1.5 days for misdemeanor DV offenses and 3.7 days for felony offenses; 42% of DV offenders bonded out of jail, and 80% of those who posted bond were out of custody within 24 hours.

District Attorney Data. The San Diego County District Attorney's Office shared 2.5 years of their data to help round out the picture on the final outcomes of DV cases. Linking crime, arrest and district attorney data enabled the analyst team to determine that only about 20% of DV crimes resulted in a guilty plea or finding. Fewer than 2% of offenders arrested on DV charges went to prison; 21% or fewer were believed to have been sentenced to local custody, with a median sentence of 180 days. Because so few of the people involved in DV CFS received any formal sanctions, it was clear we needed to focus the bulk of our efforts on the police response (see Appendix 1).

Expert Field Experience. One of the original architects of the project, Agent Osvaldo Cruz, had conducted in-person 3-day follow-ups with DV victims and suspects when he worked patrol as a K-9 officer a decade earlier. He had conducted these follow-ups on his own initiative when he was particularly concerned about a specific victim. At

first, he tried conducting follow-ups the day after the DV incident, but if the suspect fled, he or she was typically still in hiding. Cruz found that the second day after the incident, the suspect was sometimes still not welcome at the residence and/or was in the process of trying to make up with the victim. But by the third day, the suspect had often reconciled with the victim and was back at the home. DV suspects were unhappily surprised to see Cruz again at the 3-day point, particularly since no one had called police. Suspects were unnerved by ongoing police interest in the violence, the victims and themselves. Victims seemed to appreciate Cruz's unannounced follow-ups to check on their safety.

Partner Perspectives. We worked with four formal partner organizations – SBCS, child welfare services (CWS), probation, and the district attorney's office – to help us understand the problem and enhance the way the criminal justice system handled DV in Chula Vista. The CVPD convened several large-scale meetings with representatives from all four formal partnership agencies during the analysis phase of the project, as well as 1-on-1 meetings with each partner agency, to discuss their perspectives and ideas. These meetings were invaluable in terms of gaining additional knowledge about each agency's needs, frame of reference and recommendations on ways of reducing DV. For example, CWS personnel explained that loud arguments (not just physical assaults) between adult intimate partners caused real damage to children in the vicinity. Further, CWS shared research indicating that the youngest children are the most vulnerable to fear/trauma caused by intense arguments because their brains are still in critical stages of development.

RESPONSES

Based on the problem analysis findings, we developed a new tiered response model that drew on the three successful prior initiatives identified, but was customized to the

specific dynamics of the DV problem in Chula Vista. The goal of the response model was to reduce domestic violence by changing social norms and behavior – without traditional legal interventions – unless repeated, customized, and increasingly intensive police contacts were not effective. Our problem analysis indicated that suspects were relatively unlikely to be arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced to jail or prison, so we needed to employ interventions that did not rely in large part on any of these three traditional consequences.

CVPD command staff decided to test the new response model in just one of four geographic areas of the city (Sector 1) and compare the results with a similar area of the city (Sector 2) (see Appendix 2). (Initially, the plan was for 6 patrol officers to staff a special assignment, 24/7 "DV car," but it quickly became clear that a DV car approach would not be feasible from a staffing perspective and would not be scalable citywide if the project were to be successful. We also considered implementing classic focused deterrence call-ins, but concluded we did not have the resources to do so (also, few DV offenders were on probation, so formal leverage over them was limited.)

Based on the focus groups and survey results that indicated officers were frustrated with repeat verbal-only DV incidents and skeptical of the effectiveness of traditional criminal justice responses, command staff anticipated there would be enough interest among patrol officers to form a special team (dubbed the Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART)) to test the new response model. A captain sent out a department-wide email seeking sworn personnel who would be willing to test the new response model and approximately 30 sworn officers (about 1/3 of all officers assigned to patrol) volunteered⁴. Several sworn personnel also competed to serve as the project's coordinator. Agent Xanthe Rosario was selected for this position and transferred from patrol to investigations to help ⁴A second wave of about 30 additional patrol officers volunteered to join the DART team about six months after the field test began.

bridge enhanced suspect-focused efforts in both divisions. No new personnel were hired to work on the DART project.

The DART officers began implementing the tiered response protocol in Sector 1 only in August 2015. However, DART officers were regularly rotated by their supervisors throughout the city, to all four sectors. When DART officers were assigned to Sector 1, they followed the new response protocol for DV CFS, but when they were assigned to any of the other three sectors, they provided the standard, traditional response to DV CFS. Below is a description of the experimental response model, which essentially had three non-emergency levels⁵.

LEVEL 1 (Non-Crime DV Calls): Consistent, In-Person Educational Message at Time of Response. Because more than 65% of DV CFS did not result in a crime report, we knew it was critical to develop a specific response to these types of calls. In the test area, if officers responded to a non-crime intimate partner disturbance call, they provided both parties with a consistent verbal message and a professionally designed educational brochure to reinforce the message (see Appendix 3)⁶. Chula Vista officers told both parties in the dispute that police take these disturbances seriously. They said everyone has disagreements, but not ones so loud that police are called for help. Based on the research CWS shared with us regarding the negative impact of intense intimate partner arguments on kids, officers explained that children of all ages are scared when they hear adults yelling at each other. The educational brochure also included a link to a video: "First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and a Child's Developing Brain," as well as advice related to avoiding arguments when either party is under the influence of alcohol.

⁵ Initially, non-crime DV CFS were separated into two levels, but these were ultimately collapsed into one. ⁶ All printed DART project documents were in both English and Spanish.

Finally, officers said that police would be back in touch in the future to check in on everyone's welfare. Since the target population was predominantly under 40, a civilian police employee later sent both parties a follow-up text with a short survey to make sure they were okay. The follow-up text message was a novel response to DV subjects. The consistent in-person, verbal educational message delivered during every non-crime DV call response was not tried by other police departments identified in our literature review⁷.

LEVEL 3: (First DV Crime After Start of Project) DV Suspects: Written

Warning. If officers responded to a domestic violence-related crime, they dialed the response up a notch, delivering a stern 8-point warning to the suspect. Officers told suspects that they could expect future unannounced visits from police, and would receive a great deal of attention from a special task force of police, probation, prosecutors, and child welfare if they did not stop the abuse. Officers told suspects they would be tracked down if they committed future DV offenses and fled the scene (see Appendix 4). Rosario, the project coordinator, also directly involved a CWS social worker assigned to the project if children were present during the DV crime. If either subject was on probation, CVPD requested an in-person follow up visit be conducted by probation officers⁸.

LEVEL 3: DV Victims and Suspects: 3-Day Follow Up. Cruz's field experience coupled with the findings about the typical length of time suspects spent in jail, and the data that demonstrated most repeat calls occurred after three days, led us to believe a 3-day follow-up with victims and suspects would be ideal. Rosario coordinated the assignment of

⁷ West Yorkshire sent follow up letters to people involved in non-crime DV CFS; High Point delivered follow up-letters in person to the dominant aggressor and victim in non-crime DV incidents, if a dominant aggressor could be identified (approximately 10% of non-crime DV incidents).

⁸ All DV CFS involving probationers – whether a crime had occurred or not – triggered a request for a follow up by probation officers.

3-day follow-ups with specific patrol officers through dispatch⁹. If enough officers weren't available to conduct the follow-ups, Rosario conducted them with an investigator or a patrol officer; she ended up personally conducting about 20% of the 3-day follow ups. The 3-day follow up attempt was different from the Fremont project in that the target follow-up date was based on an analysis of the time between repeat incidents. The 3-day follow up was also different from the High Point project in that it was a standard unannounced appearance by police officers at the couples' home, in addition to a warning administered to the suspect in jail.

If no one was home during the 3-day follow up attempt, officers left a colorful, eyecatching card on the door that said "We stopped by to check on your safety," along with their contact information. This card let the victim, suspect, and concerned neighbors know the police were actively working to prevent problems at the home (see Appendix 5). The follow-up attempt card was a new response, not tried by other police departments.

LEVEL 4: Chronic Suspects/Ongoing Verbal Abuse Situations. Finally, for those suspects who did not listen to the offender warning and continued to abuse their partners, Rosario implemented a customized problem-solving plan for the suspect and victim or subjects. In some cases the plan involved working with the district attorney to prioritize a suspect for prosecution. In other situations (ongoing verbal abuse, or crime cases with little evidence), Rosario met with the subjects, victims, suspects, and people with influence over the parties, such as parents, siblings, employers, neighbors, and landlords, to try to stop the behavior. On one occasion, Agent Rosario worked with a severely disabled suspect who was confined to a wheelchair, but physically abused his wife. To remind the suspect that police would continue to check on her safety, his wife

⁹ Two patrol officers were required to conduct 3-day follow ups.

taped a Chula Vista project flier to their bathroom wall with a note that said the detective would continue to come by until the violence stopped (see Appendix 6). The victim told Agent Rosario that the situation eventually improved to the point that she was able to take the flier down.

ASSESSMENT

During the full 18-month implementation period (September 2015-Febuary 2017), officers administered more than 450 in-person Level 1 messages to people involved in non-crime DV calls; gave 287 formal warnings to DV suspects; and made more than 280 three-day follow-up attempts in Sector 1. Rosario worked on more than 60 customized problem solving plans with victims, suspects, and subjects involved in repeat crimes or chronic verbal abuse situations.

Crime Reduction. Following a 1-year implementation period, DV crime dropped 24% in the experimental sector (Sector 1), and increased 3% in the matched comparison sector (Sector 2). DV crimes initially increased in Sector 1, but showed a clear drop after the project was fully implemented. The impact of the project on DV crime did not occur abruptly, but was a gradual impact with a cumulative effect. This is logical because officers implementing the DART protocol did so over a year, making contact with new subjects, victims, and offenders only as each new call occurred. The reduction in DV crime was statistically significant at the 99% confidence level¹⁰. In terms of displacement, the drop in DV crime in Sector 1 did not cause a statistically significant rise in DV crime in Sector 2. The experimental and comparison sectors were very closely matched. Both had between 50,000 and 69,000 people and were about 70% Hispanic, and

¹⁰ 269 weekly DV crime means for both sectors were calculated for the period from January 2012 through February 2017, to provide a more sensitive measure of impact.

the two sectors had almost identical trends in the number of DV calls and DV crimes during the 15-year period before the problem solving effort was launched.

CFS Reduction. Following a 1-year implementation period, DV CFS went down 3% in the experimental sector (Sector 1), and increased 10% in the matched comparison sector (Sector 2); the 3% reduction in calls in Sector 1 was not statistically significant, but the 10% increase in calls in Sector 2 was statistically significant (p=.041). DV calls initially increased in Sector 1, but showed a clear drop after the project was fully implemented. Notably, the non-crime intimate partner disturbances in Sector 1 had essentially flattened out since 2014, while the same types of calls had increased 13% in Sector 2.

Harm Reduction. While the DART project did not have a statistically significant impact on DV calls in Sector 1, the more important reduction in DV crime suggests a reduction in the harm associated with calls. Stability of DV calls levels also provides evidence that the initiative did not suppress DV calls. That interpretation is also supported by evidence from two additional sources of data – feedback from DV call subjects and DV victims.

DV Subjects Reported Positive Outcomes. As noted earlier, people involved in non-crime intimate partner DV disturbances were sent follow-up texts after 30 days had elapsed. Text recipients were asked to complete a 3-question online survey. Overall, 88% of subjects who responded said things had gotten better since the incident, and 81% said police had helped the problem. A relatively low percentage of subjects – 8% – said they would not call police again for help. This provided more evidence that the DART project

reduced DV crime and did not have the unintended consequence of suppressing calls to police.

DV Victims More Satisfied with Police. Because the text survey was limited to Sector 1 – and since the responses solicited by the police department may not have been candid – an independent survey was conducted with all DV crime victims in the city. This survey also consisted of a limited number of questions but was administered not by police but by DV advocates working for SBCS. The survey questions were "add-ons" to the victim contacts made by DVRT advocates after DV crimes occurred. Based on the DVRT survey, 97% of victims in Sector 1 reported being "satisfied" with the police response compared to 81% of victims in Sector 2. While there were a limited number of surveys completed, the administration of the surveys by DV advocates increased the validity associated with the findings and provided further evidence that the DART initiative did not suppress calls to police or reporting of crime.

DART Officers Supportive. Late in the project, DART officers were surveyed about their perception of the initiative. A large majority (77%) thought the project was effective in reducing repeat DV, and most (67%), said the project should be expanded in patrol.

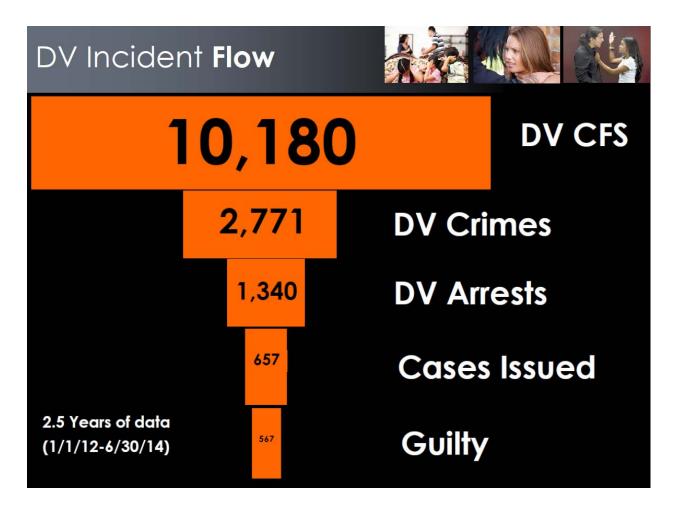
Agency and Officer Information

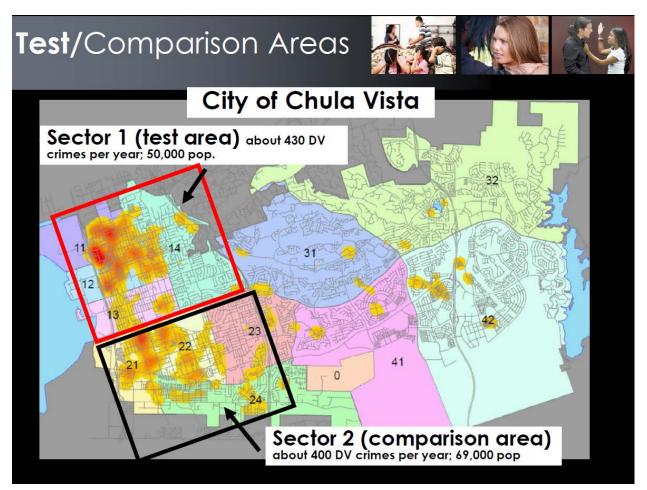
Key Project Team Members

Chief Roxana Kennedy Captain Gary Ficacci (retired) Captain Lon Turner (retired) Captain Fritz Reber (retired) Agent Xanthe Rosario Agent Osvaldo Cruz (retired) Agent Norene Andersen Senior Public Safety Analyst Karin Schmerler (retired) Senior Public Safety Analyst Nanci Plouffe (retired) Public Safety Analyst Kristen Miggans Deborah Lamm Weisel, North Carolina State University

Project Contact Person

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Domestic Disturbances & Loud Arguments

The police were called because of a

domestic disturbance. Everyone has disagreements, but not ones so intense that the police are called for help. What happened today is not okay.

The Chula Vista Police Department is taking new actions when responding to domestic violence. We will be checking in with you both in the future to make sure everyone is okay. If you ever need immediate help, CALL 911. The safety and well-being of everyone involved is our priority.

Police take this seriously.



Advice from Police:

Take a Time Out: If you are upset, step away from the situation and take as much time as you need. Leave the room or home and allow your partner to do the same. Don't continue a heated conversation!

Avoid Alcohol and Drugs: Avoid arguments when either of you have been drinking or are under the influence of drugs. Things can quickly get out of hand!

Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children

Just hearing adults yelling is very scary for children of all ages. Babies and young children are affected the most. The fear caused by these arguments is bad for the development of their brains.

For more information, please watch "First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and a Child's Developing Brain."



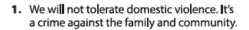
Español: Solution: S

Police Department 315 Fourth Avenue Chula Vista, CA 91910 www.chulavistapd.org



Need immediate help? Call 911

WARNING to Domestic Violence Offenders



- 2. The Chula Vista Police Department, District Attorney's Office, and Probation Department are working together to prevent domestic violence.
- 3. Unless you stop abusing your partner, you'll receive a great deal of attention from the Chula Vista Police Department.
- 4. You're now subject to future unannounced police visits.
- 5. Any future incident involving you will be a priority for us. We'll track you down if you flee the scene of a crime.
- 6. We'll see what else you can be prosecuted for, including old cases that were dismissed.
- 7. This new approach is being driven by us, the POLICEnot the victim.
- You have been admonished and warned.

ARRESTEE / SUSPECT

Sign to acknowledge warning:

Print name:

Date: _

WARNING SUSPECT ADVISEMENT [POLICE OFFICER ONLY]

On _____/___, I spoke with ____ in this NAME OF SUSPECT

case about our Offender Focused Domestic Violence Initiative. I advised the suspect that I was there to only talk about the initiative, not the suspect's case. The suspect was given a copy of this warning.

Case #:

The officer should explain to the suspect this is not a Miranda rights admonishment.

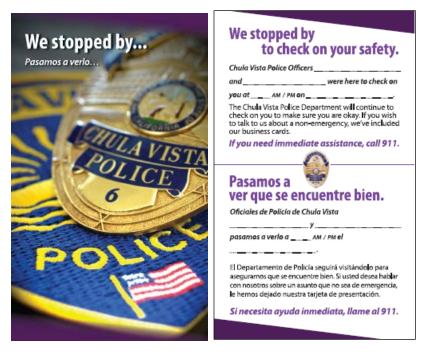
Officer ID#:

Police Department 315 Fourth Avenue Chula Vista, CA 91910 www.chulavistapd.org

Initials:



Need immediate help?



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