

# Reading the Signs

For participants in the MNADV's Lethality Assessment Program for First Responders

## Training Bulletin

**Subject:**

**Purpose:** To remind officers how the LAP works and what its objectives are

**Instructions:**

- (1) Add your jurisdiction's domestic violence homicide information.
- (2) May read verbatim.
- (3) Footnotes are for reader's use and information.

**Goal of the LAP**

We participate in the Lethality Assessment Program. The LAP, as it's called, identifies victims of domestic violence who run the highest risk of being murdered and actively tries to get them help. The goal of the LAP is to prevent domestic homicides and to stop the recurrence of assaults in high risk situations.

**When to Initiate a Screen**

In domestic violence cases in which you are dealing with any kind of intimate partner situation<sup>1</sup> and (1) you believe an assault has occurred, (2) the names or location are repeats, or (3) you just feel that the situation is dangerous, initiate a Lethality Screen.<sup>2</sup>

**What to Say to a High Danger Victim**

If a victim "screens in" as being in "High Danger,"<sup>3</sup> tell her:

- (1) She's in a dangerous situation;
- (2) In situations like hers' people have been killed (*Be sure to say this to the victim*);
- (3) You are going to call the domestic violence hotline for advice (*The number is on the screen*); and
- (4) You would like her to speak with the hotline worker when you finish.

**Calling the Hotline**

Call the hotline for ALL High Danger victims, even though a victim initially indicates she doesn't want to speak with a hotline worker. If, at first, she says she doesn't want to speak with the hotline, encourage her to reconsider, both before making the call and after speaking with the hotline worker. That's your main task: trying to get the victim on the phone. If she doesn't get on the phone, the hotline can't work with her and encourage her to go into services. Getting the victim into domestic violence services is likely the victim's best chance of survival and the main objective of the program.

**Conclusion: Make Your Response Count!**

We haven't had a domestic violence homicide in a long time; let's try to keep it that way (*or, "we've had \_\_\_ domestic violence homicides over the past \_\_\_; let's try to have none."*) In 50% of domestic violence homicides, police had previously responded to the location. Make your response count!

<sup>1</sup> husband-wife, ex husband-wife, boyfriend-girlfriend, ex boyfriend-girlfriend, dating currently or in the past, children in common, same sex relationship

<sup>2</sup> Show the Lethality Screen and ask everyone if they have copies.

<sup>3</sup> The standards for scoring are on the Lethality Screen.

## The Numbers Speak for Themselves

### What the Numbers Say

Jackie and Dan applied the LAP screen to their national data set and reported that **87%** of those who were killed by their abusers and **92%** of those nearly killed would have screened in at high danger.

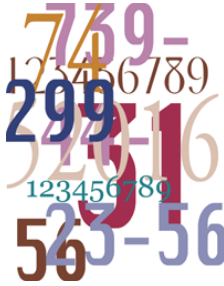
For first responders these numbers mean that

- it is vital to conduct a Lethality Screen when the danger standards are present,
- you should assume that victims who “screen in” are in extreme danger, and that their abusers are extremely dangerous and
- first responders should **take action**.

And **taking action can make a difference.**

How do we know?

- **Only 4%** of women who were killed by their abusers ever received domestic violence program services
- The risk of assault was reduced by **60%** if a victim went into shelter
- At least **50%** of victims who were killed had prior contact with law enforcement



**The Most Important Number:**  
**0**  
**Homicides in the Participating Jurisdictions Since Implementation**

## Meeting Outcomes

### The Tally

In Kent County, Queen Anne’s County, and Cambridge, between October 1 and December 7, 2005:

- 23 screens were administered
- 15 victims screened in (65%)
- 8 of those who screened in spoke with a counselor (53%)

### Reaching Out to New Jurisdictions

The initial reports from jurisdictions that have implemented Lethality Assessment are consistent with the results from the pilot study, and indicate that law enforcement agencies can manage the number of screens they will get. However, some participants noted that implementation by additional agencies in their jurisdictions would be needed to ensure that lethality is assessed on all domestic violence calls. In that regard, we applauded the efforts of **Ron Russum of Mid-Shore** to recruit all law enforcement agencies in Mid-Shore’s five county area, and **Don Pfouts of Cecil County’s Family Violence Program**, who obtained commitments from virtually all law enforcement agencies in Cecil County.

### New Items Programs Should Track

- Did victims know of domestic violence services previously?
- Did victims who did not come in for services immediately eventually come in?

### New Subcommittee

Because of requests to integrate the Lethality Screen into the Domestic Violence Supplemental Report, a subcommittee was formed to attempt to do that. The subcommittee will meet at the YWCA in Arnold on February 15<sup>th</sup>.

### An Effective Response

These numbers say that domestic homicides can be prevented. The Lethality Screen and Protocol offer specific ways to prevent homicides. How?

**Your presence on the scene** provides you with an important opportunity to encourage victims to seek assistance which has been shown to save lives.

Officers should strongly encourage—never demand—victims **to speak with a counselor**.

Counselors should strongly encourage those victims **to seek services**.

This is what Lethality Assessment is all about—getting victims in high danger access to services in order to reduce their risk. And always remember—just because a victim doesn’t screen in doesn’t mean she/he is not in danger! The numbers say that your presence, your taking action, and the victim getting services make a difference.

**Make a difference!**

## Remember To . . .

### Apply the Principles

Be committed to making Lethality Assessment work. Supervisors should:

- Remind officers that they are dealing with potential homicides and they should be ready to **“go the extra mile.”**
- Instruct officers to **go back** (at a safe time and location) to conduct a lethality screen if they did not or could not initiate one on the scene.



### Keep current

Read Dr. Campbell’s article, *“Lethality Assessment Approaches: Reflections on Their Use and Ways Forward,”* at [www.ndvfri.org](http://www.ndvfri.org) under “Publications”. Concerning lethality assessments tools, she states that: “However much we may worry about their lack of perfection in prediction, the way forward is to continue to improve, refine, and test their accuracy.”

**Let us hear . . .** about any stories that had positive or negative outcomes and whether they resulted in improved communication.

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