

Speaker 1: (Upbeat Instrumental Music)

One other thing; everything you do around here is done with speed, intensity, and volume. You understand that?

Group: Sir, yes, sir!

Narrator: When you have a calling, rarely does it just come to you. No one is going to give it to you. You have to work for it. You make it happen by bringing forth greatness from within. When you reach your goal, that's when the hard part starts. Putting on that uniform means you are part of something bigger than yourself; something that requires true selflessness. Because, as an officer, you are part of a greater community. A community with many needs. Whatever the day calls for, you rise to the challenge, because you are the strength for those in need. You know the challenges are real, the needs are many, and with the passion to serve comes the need to safeguard those who are most vulnerable.

When parents are arrested, children can pay the price. The shock, fear, confusion, anxiety, and anger generated during an arrest may negatively affect their emotional, mental, social, and physical health. Treating the children of arrested parents with compassion and thoughtfulness, is not only the right thing to do, it is a hallmark of good policing. Considering their needs before, during, and after an arrest is critical in minimizing trauma and ensuring their safety.

Travis: One day I was at home and all the sudden, there's a knock on the door and two policemen just rushed in and just arrested my mom. At first, they told us that they were just going to bring her right back, so I wasn't really mad. Then, when the day passed, and then two days passed, I was wondering, like, where's my mom? Then I seen the news, and I seen her picture, and the other person she was arrested with. The news just said first degree murder, and so, I just broke down.

Brendan Cox: When we have these cases, where a parent is arrested, I need to take an extra couple of minutes, and go talk to that young child to make sure that they're okay, and that they understand that they've done nothing wrong here. That we can help them out. We can, maybe, get some services to follow up with them. The training piece is really huge because young officers may not have that context. This might be the first time they're engaged in a situation like this. They're not necessarily going to know, off the top of their head, how to react to that. We really need to provide that training of, hey, here's some things you can do to help alleviate the trauma that that child's going through.

Rachel Coleman: I think it's important that it starts in the Police Academy. You can start putting into the recruits' minds, look there are other avenues that you can use, that you can reach out to. Then, I think once you get on the job, it's important that you find out, as a police officer, specifically who you can turn to if you need shelter for people, or you need counseling or services.

Eddie Levins: The ability for police departments to partner with agencies that are the professionals that deal with many things, whether it be social service work, or mental health work. It's critical, if we expect to do our job right. We can't do this by ourselves.

Renee Doninguez: If you know you're going to make an arrest on a warrant or any circumstance ... If you know that you can do it when the children are in school, or if you can have a person already in place that's going to be able to take that child after the arrest. The less they have to see, that makes it easiest on the children.

Narrator: As officers, you often have to perform your duties in difficult or even chaotic situations. Plain and simple, your job is dangerous. Securing the suspect, maintaining safety, and preserving evidence are at the core of what officers do during an arrest. Finding the right balance between meeting these obligations and minimizing trauma to innocent children is critically important.

Janaisa: The cops, they started grabbing on him and stuff. He started fighting them. At first, it was one cop he was fighting, and then the other cop jumped in and he was fighting both of them at the same time. Then, the third cop jumped in and then they maced him, and it was a lot of kids in the living room; there was five of us in the living room. They didn't tell us that they was going to throw the mace.

Steven Marans: Most people don't understand what it's like to respond to calls for service. Whether they turn out to be as awful as they may sound on a broadcast, one doesn't know, but you never know. It is every officer's responsibility, on arriving at a scene, to ensure their own safety first, because if they can't do that, they can't go about the business of securing the safety of those to whom they're responding. But, also I do think that when officers are equipped with knowledge and understanding about the ways that they can help kids, that officers can better take the blinders off, because they don't feel like there's nothing they can do.

Narrator: Arrests that involve parents and children bring unique challenges that require officers to use a well-defined set of best practices. These practices help officers safeguard children during arrests. Each arrest starts with securing the scene, and ensuring the safety of all those involved. Only when this has happened can an officer focus on the needs of any children. The first step is to determine if any children are present.

Officers need to take a proactive approach. Indicators like diapers, toys, and school materials can help in doing so. However, it is essential for the officer to ask individuals directly if children are present. In the rush to secure an arrest, the presence of children can easily be missed.

Linda: I was in school and I found out when my brother came to pick me up from school, because usually my mother does. We were walking and I was asking for

my mother and he wouldn't answer me. Then, when I got in front of my building, my mother was getting put in the car, and she was yelling my name. She was like, I love you.

Narrator: Minimizing the trauma experienced by children during a parent's arrest has the potential to lessen the risk of negative outcomes in adulthood, and increase confidence in the police, and the fairness of the system during childhood and adolescence. Children of all ages are vulnerable to potential trauma following the arrest of a parent, and reactions vary somewhat by age. Teenagers are particularly vulnerable. Perhaps, because they are viewed as being able to manage on their own, or because they state that they can cope on their own, or with the assistance of friends or other persons. Children are not always present during a parent's arrest, and could come home from school to an empty house. Officers need to identify this situation when arresting a parent, and make arrangements to place these children with a responsible adult. If possible, consult with the parent on who should pick their children up, and who will provide temporary care.

Eddie Levins: We have a very strict regimen of things that we have to do to make sure that we do the law enforcement function of this job. What we also have to do is the policing function and the community service function of this job, also. What we ask officers to do is don't be so over-focused just on the perpetrator and the victim, but look at a broader picture. Look and see what is actually going on in this household to include whether the children are there. Even if they're not present during the actual incident, it's important that officers must ask the question whether children are going to be there, do they live there, do they come there. People need to know that we care about the children.

Narrator: When children are located, it is important to let them know that they have done nothing wrong. When possible, allowing the parent to talk with their child can create this reassurance. If a parent is unable, or unwilling to do so, this responsibility falls to the officer, or a trained representative from a partner organization. Speak to the child in an age appropriate manner, recognizing that this is a traumatic situation, to explain what has happened and that arrangements are being made to care for them.

Each arrest will be very different based on the location, environment, people present, and reactions of those involved. The majority of arrests will be more chaotic than what is depicted here. However, regardless of your situation, safeguarding the children who are involved is of paramount importance.

Sarah Greene: When police officers respond, and they make an arrest, it's important for them to ask, are there children that live in this home? Do you have children, even if they live somewhere else, because the impact on those kids is huge and all it takes is a simple question. Do you have children?

Narrator: Once parents have been given an opportunity to reassure their child, they should be included in identifying who will care for the children, if possible. At the same time, the officer should let the child know that they will wait together until a designated caregiver arrives. Officers can also ask children if they feel comfortable with the proposed caregiver. Regardless of the input officers receive, it is their responsibility to make sure the children are placed with a responsible caregiver. This is true whether the children are present or not during the arrest. Officers also need to work with arrested parents to determine if their children have any special needs, as a result of physical or mental limitations, allergies, and any medications they require.

Eddie Levins: It's always very difficult for officers to be in a position where they have to take a child from a parent. What I ask officers a lot is, if you were in that same position, and those were your children, what would you want to happen? How would you want them to be treated? Who would you want them to go with? That gives them an opportunity to look at it from their perspective, their life, and say how I would want it done, and they should handle it the same way. They should handle it just like they were their children in making sure that they get to the safest place that they can be.

Willie Hughes: A child is always going to feel safest when they're at home. If there is another parent that is available, or another guardian that's available, we want to elicit that information from the parent being arrested, and try to work with them when it comes to safeguarding their children.

Narrator: When it is time to take the parent into custody, take all reasonable steps to minimize the children's exposure to the arrest. This includes handcuffing and questioning parents outside the child's presence whenever possible. Processing is another point in the arrest, where officers can inquire as to whether an arrestee has a child who would be affected. Even parents who have not identified a child previously, when asked, may have second thoughts when they realize they will be held in confinement for an indefinite period of time. If the arrest creates an interruption in a child's supervision and care, the arrestee must be given reasonable opportunities to make alternative arrangements. If this has not already been addressed by the arresting officer, or other personnel, allowing the arrestee to use his or her cell phone increases the likelihood of the parent speaking directly with the child.

Susan: Hi, I'm Susan. I'm Christina's grandmother.

Officer: Hi. Come on in.

Narrator: Then, officers need to stay with the children until the responsible caregiver is present. The caregiver should always be asked for identification to verify they are who they say they are. When arrests are made outside the home, officers should inquire if the arrestee is responsible for a child. The officer can then determine if a caregiver is needed. The presence of children during arrests,

made during traffic stops, is common. Officers should acknowledge children on scene and interact directly with them in ways appropriate to the children's age and developmental level. Children may ally themselves with their parents, and feel shock, immense fear, anxiety, or anger towards the arresting officers, or law enforcement in general. Officers should identify ways to support children and caregivers. Officers must not only focus on the integrity of the arrest, but also ensure appropriate arrangements are made to care for the children, including arranging for transportation of the children to a safe location, if needed. Officers must not leave the scene until suitable arrangements have been made for the care of the children.

Willie Hughes: Some of the biggest benefits to this, is that that child feels okay. That they don't internalize a negative situation, that they don't respond in negative ways, they don't respond by being depressed, they don't respond by acting out, but that they know there's some hope in the melee. That there are people who are out there to help safeguard them.

Narrator: Every arrest is a challenge. When a child is involved, that challenge becomes a journey, because when the arrest is made, and a caregiver is secured, the job is not done. For these children to thrive, they need to end up in a safe and secure environment. Making sure that happens is the next step on the path.

Sarah Greene: It's really important for police officers to follow up. Whenever there's something that happens, and kids are involved, the police are the ones who know about the details of that and particularly, how horrible it may have been. For them to follow up, in uniform later, and check in and see how the kids are is huge.

Officer 2: There was an eighteen year old, a sixteen year old, and twelve year old siblings of one of these arrestees that was in the home ...

Narrator: To help law enforcement agencies meet the needs of children of arrested parents, with the Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police, has developed the Safeguarding Children of Arrested Parents model policy. It is a template agencies can use to develop or customize their own internal policies and procedures. The model policy also provides rationale behind its approaches and outlines best practices. You can review the policy at these links.

Brendan Cox: Our number one job is protecting the vulnerable. That's our number one job. Plain and simple. We can put it in any terms we want, but ultimately, if you ask me, our number one job is protecting the vulnerable. Who else is more vulnerable than the children in our society? We always look at things and say, on the call that I'm on, did I protect the most vulnerable there? If I can answer yes, then I did my job.

(Upbeat Instrumental Music)