CHILD STRANGULATION TRAINING

Brad Eith (Glendale Child Crimes)
Chris Schopen (Forensic Interviewer Specialist)
Cindy Nannetti (Retired Division Chief-MCAO)
Jill Rable (RN, MSN-ED, AFN-BC, CPN, SANE-A)
HOW MANY OF YOU HAVE BEEN INVOLVED ON A CHILD STRANGULATION CASE?
TYPES OF STRANGULATION

- Hanging
- Manual
  - Chokehold
  - Other objects (foot, bat, etc)
- Ligature
  - Rope
  - Cords
  - Bra etc.

Resulting in:

- Vessel Occlusion (Jugular, Carotid)
- Airway Occlusion (Tracheal)
STRANGULATION

- Strangulation- is a form of asphyxia characterized by closure of the blood vessels and air passages of the neck as a result of external pressure on the neck.

- Differentiate from “choke” which means to have the trachea blocked partly or entirely by a foreign object (i.e. food).
PHYSIOLOGY

- Human brain and body needs oxygen to live.
- Oxygen Supply
  - Airway of mouth and nose allows oxygen to travel to lungs for oxygenated blood supply.
  - Body must continue to inhale and exhale for oxygen supply to the lungs
- Blood Flow Containing Oxygen
  - The entire body requires oxygen containing blood to live. It is delivered by arteries. (carotid artery supplies blood to brain)
  - Blood that has been delivered is returned to the lungs by veins for more oxygen (jugular vein returns blood flow from brain)
PHYSICAL IMPACT OF STRANGULATION

BLOCKED BLOOD FLOW
- Blocking of the carotid arteries
- Depriving the brain of oxygenated blood
- Blocking of the jugular veins
- Prevents de-oxygenated blood from leaving the brain

BLOCKED AIRWAY
- Closing off the airway
- Causing the victim from being unable to breathe
N.U.R.S.E

Neck
Unconscious
Restricted Airway
Strangulated or Suffocated
Eyes and Ears
STRANGULATION INVOLVES THE NECK, WHY ARE WE LOOKING AT THE EYES AND EARS?
WHAT IS PETECHIAE?

Pinpoint red or purple spots
Flat, not raised
Not painful
Caused from pressure build (jugular compression)
Other causes of petechiae are possible
PETECHIAE
STRANGULATION INJURIES

Less than 50% have photographable injury
STRANGULATION SYMPTOMS

Symptoms or “how it feels” can’t be photographed but should not be ignored
OTHER SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:

**Voice Changes**
- Hoarseness
- Change of pitch
- Raspy voice
- Partial or total loss of voice

**Swallowing Changes**
- Difficult but not painful
- Painful when swallowing
- Pain to throat
- Coughing or clearing of throat

**Breathing Changes**
- Hyperventilation
- Having trouble catching breath
IMPORTANCE OF FORENSIC EXAM

- Strangulation is a life threatening medical priority.
- Specialized medical care of a victim of trauma.
- Head to toe evaluation looking for trauma.
- Complete documentation
  - Medical history
  - History of event
  - Documentation of injury.
- Medical corroboration that the event occurred.
- Medical evaluation for potential emergency medical follow up, referral or higher level of care
CHILD STRANGULATION FACTS

- Children exposed to violence may experience
  - General fearfulness, nightmares
  - Hypervigilance (constant fear of danger)
  - Feelings of powerlessness and defensive response
  - Exaggerated sense of guilt and need to protect a parent and/or sibling
  - Increased physical aggression, acting out

Women’s Center Inc.
CHILD STRANGULATION FACTS

• Secondary Abuse or Indirect Abuse
• Child is a witness to the assault/strangulation
  • Child sees or hears the strangulation
  • Child attempts to defend mother/victim during assault/strangulation
  • Child is also physically assaulted during parental assault
  • Child is held during assault/strangulation
CHILD STRANGULATION FACTS

- Research has shown that the more severe the abuse of the mother-the worse the child is abused.
- Nationally, 75% of battered women say their children are physically or sexually abused.
- 90% of children from violent homes witness their fathers beating their mothers.
- 63% of all boys, age 11-20, who commit murder, kill the man who was abusing their mother.
- Children in homes where violence occurs are physically abused or neglected at a rate of 1500% higher than the national average.

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
VULNERABILITY FACTORS IN CHILDREN

• No power or control over situation
• Not uncommon for children to view officers/investigators same as they view the suspect
  • Both imply power and control
• Risk is increased (42%) with military families during combat-related deployment
TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

- When approaching:
  - A Young Child
    - Be a friend who wants to help keep everyone safe.
  - Preteen
    - Talk to her/him and not at her/him…respectfully.
  - Teenager
    - Acknowledge what s/he says and treat her/him with genuine concern.
  - Older Teenager
    - Be honest, but do not put responsibility on her/him.
VIOLENCE AND THE BRAIN

- In the face of high stress or trauma, our brains seem to slow down time. Even though an incident may occur within several seconds, our brains take snippets and break them up so that we may process the information rapidly and respond accordingly.
- Prolonged flood of stress hormones can cause shrinking in certain brain areas, including the hippocampus, which is responsible for memory.
- Children exposed to aggression and violence early on can increase the risk of impulsivity and high blood pressure.
CHILDREN’S ADAPTIVE RESPONSES

- Hyperarousal (Fearful Response)
  - Defiance/Willfulness/Controlling Behavior
    - Primitive Regression and Combative State
- Dissociation
- Continuum: Daydreaming to Avoidance to Dissociative Amnesia

FROM DR. BRUCE PERRY’S CONTINUUM OF ADAPTIVE RESPONSES
INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

• Ask about the senses:
  • Things the child heard
  • What child could see
  • How child’s body felt
  • Things the child may have smelled
## VICTIM INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### ADULT
- Did you feel faint, dizzy or lose consciousness (pass out)?
- Any voice changes (hoarse, raspy, loss of)?
- How were you strangled, positions?
- Where were you strangled?
- How long? ______ seconds, ______ minutes?

### CHILD
- Tell me more about how you felt.
- Could you talk/say something? Help me understand that better.
- Tell me more about where you were when (suspect) strangled/choked you.
- Tell me more about where (suspect) was when you got strangled/choked.
- After these questions, if not sufficient information is given, then may ask if sitting standing or doing something else when strangled/choked.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADULT</th>
<th>CHILD</th>
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<td>• The suspect use his right or left hand?</td>
<td>• May ask child to demonstrate with bear/doll how the incident occurred.</td>
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<td>• What did you think was going to happen?</td>
<td>• Tell me all about what you thought when (suspect) strangled/choked you.</td>
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<td>• What was suspects demeanor? Statements?</td>
<td>• Did (suspect) say something? Tell me all about that.</td>
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<td>• Did you have trouble breathing during or after?</td>
<td>• Tell me how (suspect) looked when this happened.</td>
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<td>• Any prior incidents of strangulation? Domestic violence?</td>
<td>• Could you breathe when (suspect) choked you? Tell me about that.</td>
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<td>• Has this happened one time or more than one time?</td>
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<td>• Has some yelling/hitting/fighting ever happened some other time?</td>
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On a Monday afternoon the Glendale Police were called about a possible Child Abuse. The allegation was a young female was strangled by her father. The person reporting was a bus driver.
INFORMATION GIVEN TO DETECTIVE

• The child is an only child and her father is the suspect.
• Father is divorced, lives alone with the child, and has full custody.
• The alleged incident happened the Monday prior. School was made aware that Thursday.
• Bus driver took photographs.
• Child told Officer her father strangled her for getting in trouble at school.
FORENSIC INTERVIEW

- CPS responded to the school with police. CPS transported the child to the Glendale Family Advocacy center for a Strangulation Exam and Forensic Interview.
VIDEO
THE STATUTE

• Aggravated Assault by impeding the breathing (13-1204.B) became law as a class 4 felony and added to the Domestic Violence Statute in July 2010.

• The statute defines strangulation as either intentionally or knowingly impeding the normal breathing or circulation of blood of another person by applying pressure to the throat or neck or by obstructing the nose and mouth either manually or through use of an instrument.

• The statute also requires the presence of a relationship as defined in the DV Statute 13-3601
PROSECUTION CHALLENGES

- Little or no visible corroborating evidence
- Victims appear unscathed
- No eyewitnesses
- No admissions by the suspect
- Victims tend to recant later because they need the offender for emotional support
- Jurors are reluctant to convict in child abuse cases
PERCENTAGE OF JURORS WHO AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS
CRIMES WHICH TAKE PLACE OUTSIDE THE HOME ARE MORE DANGEROUS THAN AN ASSAULT WITHIN THE HOME

![Bar chart showing percentages of responses to the statement.]

- **Strongly Agree**: 20%
- **Agree**: 13%
- **Disagree**: 40%
- **Strongly disagree**: 27%
GENERALLY SPEAKING, I FEEL IT’S WRONG FOR THE STATE TO GET INVOLVED IN DOMESTIC DISPUTES AND ASSAULTS
I BELIEVE IT SHOULD NOT BE A FELONY TO STRANGLE OR CHOKE SOMEONE IF THEY ONLY USE THEIR HANDS
I HAVE STRONG NEGATIVE FEELINGS ABOUT THE LAWS IN ARIZONA AS THEY PERTAIN TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- Strongly Agree: 15%
- Agree: 17%
- Disagree: 33%
- Strongly disagree: 35%
IT IS NECESSARY FOR ME TO SEE PHYSICAL SIGNS OF STRANGULATION - SUCH AS BRUISES - IN ORDER TO VOTE TO CONVICT OF A FELONY
HAVE YOU OR ANYONE ELSE CLOSE TO YOU EVER EXPERIENCED AN EPISODE OF BEING CHOKED OR STRANGLES
EVALUATING THE CASE

- LE is doing a great job, how can we improve?
  - Work with Child Protection Workers and Victim Advocates
  - Consider attempting a confrontation call.
  - Document the victim’s injuries accurately.
  - Ask about shaking while being strangled as it shows “intent” to cause injury.
  - Follow-up photographs. Try to obtain photos a few days after the incident.
  - When running the address for prior DV arrests, run the address for “calls” not just “arrests.” Also ask for prior addresses. It’s possible the victim just moved.
  - Document all statements made out of excitement or present sense impression.
  - Officer’s detailed observations of victim’s injuries.
  - Witness statements.
  - Victim’s statements to officer and FNE
EVALUATING THE CASE

- Defendant’s statements (doesn’t have to be a full admission)
- Confrontation call
- Text messages from offender to victim
- Look for video of altercation
- Photographs taken by First Responder, Detective, FNE
- Forensic Nurse Examination
HEARSAY

• Hearsay is an out of court statement coming in to court to prove the truth of the matter asserted.
• The general rule is hearsay is not permitted at trial.
• Exceptions to the Hearsay Rule:
  • Present Sense Impression: a statement describing or explaining an event during or immediately after the person perceived it.
  • Excited Utterance: a statement relating to a startling event while the person was under the stress/excitement of the event.
QUESTIONS