

Adult Abuse

Effective Date:	April 1, 2023
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Issuing Authority:	Sheriff Steve A. Hall

314.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for the investigation and reporting of suspected abuse of certain adults who may be more vulnerable than others. This policy also addresses mandatory notification for St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office members as required by law.

314.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Vulnerable Adult Abuse - Any offense or attempted offense involving violence or neglect of an adult victim when committed by a person responsible for the adult's care, or any other act that would mandate reporting or notification to a social service agency or law enforcement.

314.2 POLICY

The St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office will investigate all reported incidents of alleged adult abuse and ensure proper reporting and notification as required by law.

314.3 MANDATORY NOTIFICATION

Members of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office shall notify the local Adult Protective Services (APS) when there is reason to believe that an adult who lacks the physical or mental capacity to provide for his/her own daily needs has been subjected to abuse, neglect, self-neglect or exploitation (Md. Code FL § 14-302(a)).

314.4 QUALIFIED INVESTIGATORS

Qualified investigators should be available to investigate cases of adult abuse. These investigators should:

- (a) Conduct interviews in appropriate interview facilities.
- (b) Be familiar with forensic interview techniques specific to adult abuse investigations.
- (c) Present all cases of alleged adult abuse to the prosecutor for review.
- (d) Coordinate with other enforcement agencies, social service agencies and facility administrators as needed.
- (e) Provide referrals to therapy services, victim advocates, guardians and support for the victim and family as appropriate.

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- (f) Participate in or coordinate with multidisciplinary investigative teams as applicable (COMAR 07.02.16.07(B)).

314.5 INVESTIGATIONS AND REPORTING

All reported or suspected cases of adult abuse require investigation and a report, even if the allegations appear unfounded or unsubstantiated.

Investigations and reports related to suspected cases of adult abuse should address, as applicable:

- (a) The overall basis for the contact. This should be done by the investigating deputy in all circumstances where a suspected adult abuse victim is contacted.
- (b) Any relevant statements the victim may have made and to whom he/she made the statements.
- (c) If a person is taken into protective custody, the reasons, the name and title of the person making the decision, and why other alternatives were not appropriate.
- (d) Documentation of any visible injuries or any injuries identified by the victim. This should include photographs of such injuries, if practicable.
- (e) Whether the victim was transported for medical treatment or a medical examination.
- (f) Whether the victim identified a household member as the alleged perpetrator, and a list of the names of any other potential victims or witnesses who may reside in the residence.
- (g) Identification of any prior related reports or allegations of abuse, including other jurisdictions, as reasonably known.
- (h) Previous addresses of the victim and suspect.
- (i) Other potential witnesses who have not yet been interviewed, such as relatives or others close to the victim's environment.

Any unexplained death of an adult who was in the care of a guardian or caretaker should be considered as potential adult abuse and investigated as such.

For procedures related to Investigations and Reporting, see the Saint Mary's County Sheriff's Office LE Procedures Manual: [Investigative Resources](#).

314.6 PROTECTIVE CUSTODY

Before taking an adult abuse victim into protective custody when facts indicate the adult may not be able to care for him/herself, the deputy should make reasonable attempts to contact APS. Generally, removal of an adult abuse victim from his/her family, guardian or other responsible adult should be left to the welfare authorities when they are present or have become involved in an investigation (Md. Code FL § 14-307).

Generally, members of this office should remove an adult abuse victim from his/her family or guardian without a court order only when no other effective alternative is reasonably available

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and immediate action reasonably appears necessary to protect the victim. Prior to taking an adult abuse victim into protective custody, the deputy should take reasonable steps to deliver the adult to another qualified legal guardian, unless it reasonably appears that the release would endanger the victim or result in abduction. If this is not a reasonable option, the deputy shall ensure that the adult is delivered to APS (Md. Code ET § 13-709(a)).

Whenever practicable, the deputy should inform a supervisor of the circumstances prior to taking an adult abuse victim into protective custody. If prior notification is not practicable, deputies should contact a supervisor promptly after taking the adult into protective custody.

When adult abuse victims are under state control, have a state-appointed guardian or there are other legal holdings for guardianship, it may be necessary or reasonable to seek a court order on behalf of the adult victim to either remove the adult from a dangerous environment (protective custody) or restrain a person from contact with the adult.

314.7 INTERVIEWS

314.7.1 PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

Absent extenuating circumstances or impracticality, deputies should audio record the preliminary interview with a suspected adult abuse victim. Deputies should avoid multiple interviews with the victim and should attempt to gather only the information necessary to begin an investigation. When practicable, investigating deputies should defer interviews until a person who is specially trained in such interviews is available.

314.7.2 DETAINING VICTIMS FOR INTERVIEWS

A deputy should not detain an adult involuntarily who is suspected of being a victim of abuse solely for the purpose of an interview or physical exam without his/her consent or the consent of a guardian unless one of the following applies:

- (a) The adult cannot adequately provide for his or her own care or protection and exigent circumstances exist, such as:
 - 1. A reasonable belief that medical issues of the adult need to be addressed immediately.
 - 2. A reasonable belief that the adult is or will be in danger of harm if the interview or physical exam is not immediately completed.
 - 3. The alleged offender is a family member or guardian and there is reason to believe the adult may be in continued danger.
- (b) A court order or warrant has been issued.

314.8 MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

When an adult abuse investigation requires a medical examination, the investigating deputy should obtain consent for such examination from the victim, guardian, agency, or entity having legal custody of the adult. The deputy should also arrange for the adult's transportation to the appropriate medical facility.

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In cases where the alleged offender is a family member, guardian, agency or entity having legal custody and is refusing to give consent for the medical examination, deputies should notify a supervisor before proceeding. The supervisor should consider other government agencies or services that may obtain a court order for such an examination.

For procedures related to Medical Examinations, see the Saint Mary's County Sheriff's Office LE Procedures Manual: [Investigative Resources](#).

314.9 DRUG-ENDANGERED VICTIMS

A coordinated response by law enforcement and social services agencies is appropriate to meet the immediate and longer-term medical and safety needs of an adult abuse victim who has been exposed to the manufacturing, trafficking or use of narcotics.

See attachment: [Drug Endangered Checklist Form](#)

314.9.1 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The Criminal Investigations supervisor should:

- (a) Work with professionals from the appropriate agencies, including APS, other law enforcement agencies, medical service providers and local prosecutors to develop community-specific procedures for responding to situations where there are adult abuse victims endangered by exposure to methamphetamine labs or the manufacture and trafficking of other drugs.
- (b) Activate any available interagency response when a deputy notifies the Criminal Investigations supervisor that he/she has responded to a drug lab or other narcotics crime scene where an adult abuse victim is present or where evidence indicates that an adult abuse victim lives at the scene.
- (c) Develop a report format or checklist for use when deputies respond to drug labs or other narcotics crime scenes. The checklist will help deputies document the environmental, medical, social, and other conditions that may affect the adult.

314.9.2 DEPUTY RESPONSIBILITIES

Deputies responding to a drug lab or other narcotics crime scene where an adult abuse victim is present or where there is evidence that an adult abuse victim lives there should:

- (a) Document the environmental, medical, social and other conditions of the adult, using photography as appropriate and the checklist or form developed for this purpose.
- (b) Notify the Criminal Investigations supervisor so an interagency response can begin.

314.10 STATE MANDATES AND OTHER RELEVANT LAWS

Maryland requires or permits the following:

314.10.1 RECORDS SECTION RESPONSIBILITIES

The Records Section is responsible for:

- (a) Providing a copy of the adult abuse report to APS as required by law.

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- (b) Retaining the original adult abuse report with the initial case file.
- (c) Providing copies of a report of alleged abuse at a facility that cares for adults as required by law (Md. Code HG § 19-347).

314.10.2 RELEASE OF REPORTS

Information related to incidents of adult abuse or suspected adult abuse are confidential and may only be disclosed pursuant to state law and the Records Maintenance and Release Policy. However, law enforcement and participating agencies involved in the investigation may share information (Md. Code FL § 14-303(e)).

314.10.3 INVESTIGATION ASSISTANCE

On request of APS or any law enforcement agency, the handling deputy shall assist in investigation of adult abuse (Md. Code FL § 14-303(c)).

If, in the course of an investigation, an APS representative believes that an emergency exists, the representative may request law enforcement assistance. Responding deputies shall accompany the representative. If the deputy believes that an emergency exists as described in Md. Code ET § 13-709(a), the deputy shall ensure that the individual is transported to an appropriate health care facility (Md. Code FL § 14-304).

314.11 TRAINING

The Office should provide training on best practices in adult abuse investigations to members tasked with investigating these cases. The training should include:

- (a) Participating in multidisciplinary investigations, as appropriate.
- (b) Conducting interviews.
- (c) Availability of therapy services for adults and families.
- (d) Availability of specialized forensic medical exams.
- (e) Cultural competence (including interpretive services) related to adult abuse investigations.
- (f) Availability of victim advocates or other support.

Attachments

Drug Endangered Checklist Form.pdf

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Drug-Endangered Child/Adult Checklist

Controlled substances and hazardous materials

- Presence of any illegal or controlled substances or hazardous materials
 - Description of location of any controlled substances or hazardous materials
- Drains and sinks checked for contamination or drainage problems
- Measurements relevant to the reach of a child
- Smells that may indicate fume, chemicals, vapors
- Improperly labeled and incompatible chemicals
- Kitchen surfaces and utensils examined, or samples taken (normal cleaning may not remove controlled substances or hazardous materials)
- Presence and location of plastic containers that are indicative of drug manufacture

Living conditions/environment

- Dangerous animals or observations related to animals, such as animal feces and filth
- Inoperable utilities and appliances (gas, electricity)
- Description of beds or sleeping areas
- Available food
- Kitchen and bathroom sanitation
- Unsafe play areas or toys
- Choking hazards
- Fire hazards
 - Combustible materials
 - Inoperable smoke detectors
 - Unsafe heaters
 - Evidence of previous fires

Social factors

- Exposure to pornography or sexual activity
- Whether a child cried or showed emotion when separated from parents
- Social skills and/or peer relations
- Delinquency from school
- Teen pregnancy
- Whether a child exhibited any criminal or violent behavior
- Performance at school

Physical description and health of children

- Height, weight and reach measurement of each child
- Wounds, punctures, bruises (including bottom of feet)
- Possible chemical burns, particularly to eyes, mouth, and nose
- Insect bites
- Known or obvious significant medical conditions, such as cancer, damage to the brain, liver, kidney, spleen, immunologic system, birth defects
- Headache, nausea, dizziness fatigue, shortness of breath or coughing
- Medical exam information, if available
- Indicators of alcohol or drug abuse