



CRISIS INTERVENTION LAW ENFORCEMENT POLICY GUIDE

PUBLIC SAFETY TELECOMMUNICATORS ADDENDUM

(CIT FOCUSED)

Revised 2023

This manual was completed by staff at the Ohio Criminal Justice Coordinating Center of Excellence in cooperation with Ohio's CIT Coordinators and community partners.

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Overview

This addendum to the *Ohio Crisis Intervention Team Law Enforcement Policy Guide* is designed to assist Public Safety Telecommunicators (PSTs) and those responsible for leading/managing Emergency Communications Centers with the construction and publication of policies and procedures to process and handle service calls involving persons in crisis. The definition of “persons in crisis” is outlined within the primary guide and will not be defined in this addendum. This addendum is not designed to be used independently but in conjunction with the primary policy guide.

Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs) are defined as locations receiving 911 calls for service (or text-to-911 requests if enabled) from the public. These ECCs may also handle service calls on non-emergency or administrative phone lines or circuits, commonly called ten-digit lines. An ECC may be large and handle major metropolitan areas or combined jurisdictions and have a substantial staff, or it can be small and only one or two persons handle all tasks, including non-traditional job tasks. ECCs in Ohio are acknowledged to be operated and controlled in various methods, including:

- Operated by a law enforcement agency,
- Operated by a fire/EMS agency or one that specializes only in fire service or EMS,
- Operated as a stand-alone center within a single jurisdiction, or
- Operated by a regional authority or jointly controlled by multiple governmental entities or a governmental entity-created board of directors.

The acronym “PST” is defined within the primary guide and refers to call takers, dispatchers, or personnel who take calls and dispatch public safety resources. They may have other job tasks independent of supporting responding public safety personnel. These personnel receive calls, text messages, or other forms of data as requests to obtain services. Personnel then dispatch the appropriate resources available to them to the service call, redirect and transfer the call to the appropriate agency if the call does not involve an immediate threat to public safety, or transfer the call to the relevant jurisdiction where the incident is occurring. PSTs may only process and dispatch calls for police services or fire/EMS services. Some PSTs process all public safety calls for service. Some PSTs process service calls for a single jurisdiction, and some process calls for multiple jurisdictions. This variation in ECC operation, control, and personnel tasks and workloads requires a more generalized set of policies and procedures for the ECCs in Ohio.

Users should recognize that this addendum concentrates on handling service calls involving a person or persons in crisis within the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) framework. CIT is more expansively defined and discussed in the primary policy guide.

The roles of PSTs within CIT are:

- PSTs know what CIT is, how CITs and the CIT programs operate within their jurisdictions, and how CIT officers are identified and dispatched, even if immediately unavailable.
- PSTs can effectively interact with persons in crisis and obtain sufficient information to identify the service call as one involving a person or persons in a crisis.
- PSTs can classify the service call as one involving a person in crisis.

- PSTs can dispatch CIT officers and others to a person in crisis call and relay all known information to all responders.

Additional integration points and duties may include:

- PSTs can evaluate a service call involving a person in crisis to determine which resources should respond, such as CIT officers and co-responder units, and know if the call can be diverted to others, such as crisis lines, mobile crisis teams, or other non-law enforcement responders.
- PSTs can de-escalate callers while actively listening to the caller and gathering pertinent information about the call involving a person in crisis.
- PSTs can classify the service call as one involving a person in crisis and then add a secondary code if the call detail provides reason to assign a higher priority. This coding allows data to be extracted and used to create formal reports for individual CITs and CIT program partners.

Finally, this addendum is structured to help ECC leaders, managers, and staff members create policies and procedures for handling persons in crisis calls within the CIT framework. The addendum will provide commentary for each policy and procedure category, along with the elements that should be included. The main elements for policy and procedure creation are provided. Sample policies are not included due to the complexity and variation of ECCs, and duties performed by PSTs within those ECCs.

The addendum is organized into the following categories:

- Taking and Processing the Call
- Resolution of the Call
- Dispatching the Call
- Training and Outcomes
- Miscellaneous Policy Concerns and Guidance

Revisions

In 2021, this Public Safety Telecommunicators Addendum to the *Crisis Intervention Law Enforcement Policy Guide (CIT Focused)* was released. It was designed to assist law enforcement agencies with direct control over an Emergency Communications Center (ECC) or agencies contracting with an ECC for services to create policies to respond to service calls involving a person in crisis and coordinate the response. The addendum is role-focused for PSTs.

Two years later, this is the first revision to the addendum, aligning with the first revision to the policy guide. Revisions are essential to ensure that the policy guide and any addendum address new issues or concerns and that terminology is current, accurate, and appropriate. Although this addendum has some revisions to ensure that terminology is current, the most significant ones and the reasons for the changes are listed below.

Ohio Crisis Intervention Team Law Enforcement Policy Guide

This change to the title of the addendum corresponds with the change to the primary guide.

Overview

The overview has added language to identify that not all calls come in via 911 and that some come in through administrative or non-emergency lines, most often identified as ten-digit lines.

Resolution of the Call

This section has added language identifying the implementation of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and that calls can be transferred to that number, or other identified local resources, when appropriate. Calls can also be transferred to 211 when information about community and social services is sought, and there is no reason to send any responder. The last change reflects the removal of the term “excited delirium syndrome” and the replacement of that term with “Agitated Chaotic Event” (ACE). A brief description of an ACE is also provided.

Dispatching the Call

Language was added to identify that service calls can be diverted to non-law enforcement responders when such responders exist and when there is a low safety risk. The ECC may dispatch them when applicable.

Training and Outcomes

As in Dispatching the Call, language was added to identify that non-law enforcement responders may handle some service calls. In addition, PSTs must be trained to know which responders exist in their communities and that, in some cases, responders may not respond immediately.

Miscellaneous Policy Concerns and Guidance

A standard created by the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International titled *Crisis Intervention Techniques and Call Handling Procedures for Public Safety Telecommunicators* has been formally published. It is available to those holding an APCO International membership. The standard was previously identified as awaiting final publication. The publication is also updated by name and numerical identifier in the References list.

Taking and Processing the Call

Commentary

Taking and processing a service call is a critical job task for a PST. One crucial task is determining if a call for service needs to be classified as a person in crisis. This determination may be apparent or may be difficult based on available information. To determine the appropriate classification for a call, a PST must take in real and perceived information from a caller, interpret it, and make sense of it before selecting an appropriate classification and assigning a priority or escalating the pre-existing priority (Simpson, 2020). Once a call is classified as involving a person in crisis and prioritized, the PSTs should dispatch the call to a CIT officer or divert it to another unit or service.

Calls for service involving a person in crisis, whether on an emergency line or a non-emergency line, can come from the person in crisis or someone else. The PST may have to begin de-escalating the caller while gathering information and interacting with the caller in a manner that does not purposely or inadvertently escalate the caller's emotions or actions. When the PST can reduce emotion-based behaviors, communication is more effective and produces better information to determine which option best resolves the service call.

When a call does involve a person in crisis, the information provided to responders or entered into the call-taking or Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system must clearly state that the call is about a person in crisis or suspected to be in crisis, contain details about current dangerousness to self or others, and include prior history, if any, about the person in crisis. The call should be classified to allow it to be extracted later for research purposes. Information and data from the ECC about persons in crisis calls can be extracted, compiled, and analyzed. This analysis can reduce future service calls, aid stakeholders with how to most effectively and efficiently use their finite resources, and show community members how public safety services respond to and resolve persons in crisis calls.

Policy Main Elements

- Directions to PSTs to obtain the most accurate incident location (should be part of the general policy and formal training for PSTs).
- Requirements that the PST gather all pertinent information from the caller to determine if the call involves a person in crisis (should be part of the general policy). If the call concerns a person in crisis, the PST must classify it that way.
- Instructions to the PST to use de-escalation techniques when handling persons in crisis calls and gather information in a manner that does not elevate the emotions or behaviors of the caller. The PST should attempt to gain rapport with the caller when able to do so.
- Directions to the PST to use information gathered to determine the appropriate classification for the call and decide if the call requires immediate intervention by law enforcement or if it can be directed to another available and appropriate resource (e.g., crisis phone lines).
- Requirements that the PST ask about present dangerousness to the person in crisis or others, any weapons or access to weapons, injuries, ingestion of medications and/or substances, recent threats made, any history of responses to that person or location, and any other details that will

aid responding law enforcement officers or other responders in assessing their own risk and assessing the risk to the person in crisis or others in the community.

- Directions for the PST to enter all available information and data into the call-taking/CAD system and use the language/terminology known and understood by all responders and stakeholders.
- Requirements that PSTs document all calls into the ECC suspected to be crisis-related, enter all available information about these calls, and document how calls were resolved.

Resolution of the Call

Commentary

The resolution of a call is a logical extension of taking and processing a call. The resolution will often depend on the seriousness or acuity and the resources available in the community or various communities the ECC serves. PSTs must know their options to divert or deflect the call away from a response by law enforcement if such a response is unnecessary.

Communities with few or no emergency mental health resources have come to rely on law enforcement as the primary responders to mental health concerns and service calls involving persons in crisis. Some communities have access to co-responder units that pair a law enforcement officer with a clinician or crisis worker. Some communities have a non-law enforcement mobile crisis response unit or team to respond to low safety risk calls involving a person in crisis. Still other communities have local mental health crisis lines that allow for a “warm” handoff from an ECC to that line for evaluation and assistance for a person in crisis. All ECCs can now redirect a call to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline if an immediate response is unnecessary and local numbers and services are unavailable. Some ECCs have embedded clinicians who can take over the crisis calls from PSTs and divert low-risk and low-acuity calls to mental health services, both immediate and scheduled for a later time. Based on available information, the PST handling the call involving a person in crisis should select the best option to resolve the call. If the call cannot be safely diverted, a law enforcement response may be the most sensible resolution based on gathered information or when safety risk is unknown.

Finally, ECCs that divert calls away from law enforcement response must document how and why the call was redirected and to whom. This information must be entered into the appropriate systems to be retrieved later and used to evaluate the diversion’s efficacy.

Policy Main Elements

- Directions that, if available, PSTs should dispatch a CIT officer or officers when it is evident that the call involves a person in crisis and the received information warrants a law enforcement response.
- Guidance to PSTs that persons in crisis who are reportedly dangerous or engaged in significant criminal activity should cause the dispatch of law enforcement officers. If available, at least one CIT officer and one or more additional officers should be dispatched to the scene for support.
- Directions to PSTs that a person in crisis call that is acute but not immediately dangerous or involving criminal activity should be rerouted to a local crisis line, 988, a designated service provider, or a resource that can provide pertinent information, such as 211 when appropriate. If the call is transferred back to the ECC, the receiving PST should re-evaluate the previous response and select a different response based on available data.
- Guidance to PSTs that alternative methods of resolving a person in crisis call should be considered when the crisis call does not require the involvement of law enforcement officers on patrol. When such alternatives exist, a co-responder unit, non-law enforcement mobile crisis response units or personnel, or clinicians could handle those service calls.

- Directions to PSTs that EMS should also be dispatched to respond or stage nearby for persons in crisis calls when injuries have occurred to the person in crisis or others. EMS should also be dispatched to stage near the scene if the situation involves a person in a known or unknown physical health crisis, such as someone in an Agitated Chaotic Event (ACE). An Agitated Chaotic Event (ACE) is typically of an unknown physical, psychological and/or substance use origin and may be indicated by any or several of the following concerning behaviors:
 - High levels of agitation, bizarre and/or aggressive behavior, paranoia, increased potential for violent behavior, possible demonstration of “super-human” strength, grunting and/or making unintelligible noises, non-responsiveness to verbal commands or de-escalation, and/or non-response to less-lethal intervention tactics
- Requirements that calls not handled by law enforcement officers, whether CIT or otherwise, must be entered into the call-taking/CAD system to be tracked and evaluated. This information must briefly describe why the call was diverted and to which agency.

Dispatching the Call

Commentary

Dispatching the call is the next step in the process. General dispatching guidelines are not discussed in this addendum as it only includes the issues of dispatching the appropriate resources to a person in crisis call within the CIT framework. These guidelines include dispatching CIT officers, non-CIT law enforcement officers, co-responder units, or other non-law enforcement responders that the ECC can dispatch. The need to alert a supervisor or dispatch a supervisor to the scene is included for incidents when appropriate resources are unavailable or when CIT officers or other necessary units must be released from lesser priority service calls or obtained from other areas or agencies.

Policy Main Elements

- Directions that a PST assigned to dispatching will identify and send the nearest available CIT officer to the call based on the call's classification. The PST will then clearly state that the call involves a person in crisis or is suspected to involve a person in crisis based on the information entered by the call-taking PST. The same PST may take the call and dispatch the appropriate resources. Systems used by the PST must be able to identify CIT officers on duty and any co-responder or non-law enforcement responder unit that may be available.
- Directions that the dispatching PST will relay all initial information to the responding CIT officer or officers, other law enforcement officers, co-responder units, or non-law enforcement responder units and will continue to update those officers or units as new information becomes available. Information that impacts safety will be immediately conveyed to responders. PSTs can verbally communicate safety concerns or alert responders that additional information is available for review within CAD or electronic systems used by those units.
- Requirements that the PST will alert a supervisor if a CIT officer is not available for a call concerning a person in crisis call that requires a law enforcement response so that a CIT officer can be located to respond. That supervisor may need to respond to the scene or re-prioritize workloads for co-responder units or other officers to respond to persons in crisis effectively.

Training and Outcomes

Commentary

Training for PSTs is vital and gives them the knowledge, skills, and abilities to recognize persons in crisis calls and handle them effectively. PSTs are often the first contact point for persons in crisis or those seeking help for a person in crisis when that person or another calls 911 or a non-emergency police or fire/EMS number. PSTs must recognize a call that involves a person in crisis, effectively process the call, and connect the person in crisis with the appropriate resources or have the right resources sent to the person's location. PSTs must also use their skills to calm or de-escalate callers, actively listen to the caller, and ask appropriate questions to obtain information to maximize safety for all involved and choose the best resolution for the call. If the proper solution is to dispatch CIT/other law enforcement officers or other resources available to the location, information about those resources and how they can be obtained must be included in the provided training.

Public safety personnel must always be trained to policy. Training PSTs to established policy should also provide them with guidance to appropriately classify a call for service involving a person in crisis, to enter sufficient information into the call system/CAD so that others can obtain that information for use in prioritizing resources, and to evaluate current responses to determine if they need to be enhanced, changed, or eliminated. Any changes to the policy or Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) manuals for handling persons in crisis calls must be relayed as soon as operationally possible to PSTs. If training is required, it should be expedited.

Finally, training for PSTs must include knowing the signs and symptoms of a mental illness or other reasons that a person could be in crisis. A portion of the training must be about recognizing when a person is saying or doing things that would lead the PST to believe that the person in crisis has attempted or is contemplating suicide. Job aids and guides should be provided during the training so that PSTs know what services are available and who provides those services. Information about those services and service providers can be given to callers, family members, or responders as needed.

The training policy must identify what training will be provided to new PSTs during their initial training phase and what additional training will be provided as PSTs gain tenure. This identification must include topical content, the length of the training sessions, and how often continuing training/education is provided. External guidelines or requirements from regulatory agencies may help establish timelines for required training, what topics are needed, and when training/education must be completed.

Policy Main Elements

- Requirements that PSTs be trained in policies and procedures involving persons in crisis service calls. Training will include instruction that PSTs must know all policies and procedures and where to find policy/procedure manuals or documents for reference.
- Requirements that PSTs be trained to access and use available job aids about persons in crisis service calls and that managers/supervisors will keep those job aids accessible and updated.
- The direction that PSTs and all supervisors/managers within an ECC be trained to know what CIT is, how CITs and the local CIT program(s) function, and the role and responsibilities of PSTs within CITs and CIT programs.

- Requirements that PSTs be trained to know and recognize signs and symptoms of a mental illness or other reasons that would cause the PST to understand that the service call is about a person in crisis.
- Requirements that PSTs be trained to know and recognize signs and symptoms of persons who have attempted or are contemplating suicide and determine if the information received requires an immediate response.
- Requirements that PSTs be trained to appropriately classify (assign or select a call type) and process the call to get the right resource for a person in crisis. The right resource may be a non-law enforcement resource and may not be an immediate responder.
- Requirements that PSTs be trained to remain calm during persons in crisis calls, apply techniques during the call to de-escalate the caller when possible, and use active listening techniques to gather information.
- Requirements that PSTs be trained to ask appropriate questions to determine a disposition for a person in crisis call and ask additional questions for clarification.
- Requirements that PSTs involved with dispatching be trained in locating CIT officers, dispatching those officers, and dispatching other officers or resources as needed in addition to CIT officers or instead of law enforcement.
- Requirements that PSTs be trained on agency policies and how they allow CIT officers to be dispatched within a jurisdiction's boundaries and between agencies or jurisdictions.
- The direction that the training provided to PSTs includes the need to enter sufficient information into call-taking/CAD systems so that data can be extracted later for reports and shared with others to prioritize resources and enhance CITs and CIT programs.
- The direction that changes to policies or SOP manuals be conveyed at the first opportunity, and that training on those changes occurs as soon as possible.
- The direction that ECC managers provide introductory training for new PSTs in handling calls involving persons in crisis.
- The direction that ECC managers provide Continuing Education Training (CET) to PSTs about persons in crisis calls. This direction should include the amount of time to be allocated for training, the topics to be covered in training, and how often CET should be provided. This policy language should also mention that regulatory entities such as the Ohio 911 Program Office may require introductory training and CET.

Miscellaneous Policy Concerns and Guidance

Commentary

This addendum does not address general requirements for a PST in call-taking and dispatching and the training needed to be proficient for either or both. PSTs must be trained to a minimum set of standards. In Ohio, those standards are set by regulatory agencies such as the Ohio 911 Program Office. Additionally, ECC managers and public safety officials who operate ECCs can seek and obtain recommended standards from organizations such as the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International and the National Emergency Management Association (NENA). ECCs with PSTs certified in Emergency Police, Emergency Medical, or Emergency Fire Dispatch (EPD/EMD/efd) may also be subject to standards set by the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED).

This policy guide addendum also recognizes that some ECCs use guide card systems to classify call types and prioritize all service calls, including those for persons in crisis. Those guide card systems may use manual flipcharts or electronic platforms. ECC supervisors and managers may use the information in this addendum in addition to those guide cards to develop policies and procedures for persons in crisis calls.

This addendum does not identify the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for PSTs to process service calls involving persons in crisis successfully. These skills and outcomes should be addressed in training curricula and materials. Various resources are available for ECC managers to create and provide this training. ECC managers are encouraged to review, if accessible, the APCO International standard titled *Crisis Intervention Techniques and Call Handling Procedures for Public Safety Telecommunicators*. This standard is comprehensive and identifies skills and elements needed to handle calls involving persons in crisis, whether due to an underlying mental illness or any other condition.

Policy Main Elements

- A requirement that any training provided to PSTs about persons in crisis calls incorporates relevant standards and procedures – The training should include how those standards and requirements intersect with CIT.
- A requirement that training in the use of guide card systems for PSTs includes how those systems intersect with CIT.

References

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