

## IMPROVING LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BY IDENTIFYING AND PREVENTING GENDER BIAS

The Department of Justice announced issuance of [revised guidance](#) designed to help law enforcement agencies (LEAs) improve their response to sexual assault and domestic violence. Originally issued in December 2015, this guidance examines how gender bias can undermine LEA response and provides a set of basic principles for LEAs to integrate into their policies, training, and practices. The guidance reflects lessons learned from the Department's investigations of police departments and its ongoing partnerships with LEAs. Law enforcement officers (LEOs) at all ranks, in communities across the country, work tirelessly to ensure safety and justice for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

Through a months-long process of engaging with stakeholders in the law enforcement, victim advocacy, and civil rights communities, the Department identified ways in which the 2015 guidance could be updated, improved, and made more valuable for LEAs. The guidance has been revised to account for the impact of bias based on factors other than gender, incorporate new resources and research, provide improved case examples illustrating a trauma-informed approach to victims, and emphasize the need to address and prevent police misconduct.

### Purpose of the Guidance

- Examine how gender bias can undermine the response of LEAs to sexual assault and domestic violence.
- Provide a set of basic principles that – if integrated into LEAs' policies, trainings, and practices – will help ensure that gender bias, either intentionally or unintentionally, does not undermine efforts to keep victims safe and hold offenders accountable.

### Key Principles in the Guidance

The guidance advises law enforcement agencies to incorporate the following principles – which have been revised and strengthened – into clear policies, comprehensive training, and effective supervision protocols:

- ***Recognize and address biases, assumptions, and stereotypes about victims.*** When myths and misperceptions about sexual assault and domestic violence influence law enforcement's response, LEOs can blame victims and fail to hold offenders accountable.
- ***Treat all victims with respect.*** Use interviewing strategies that are trauma-informed and support the victim's disclosure of facts about the incident.
- ***Ensure that policies, training, supervision, and resource allocation support thorough and effective investigations.*** Collect, preserve, and analyze evidence.
- ***Appropriately classify reports of sexual assault or domestic violence.*** And appropriately document and clear them after a complete investigation.
- ***Refer victims to appropriate services.*** Make timely and suitable referrals for healthcare, advocacy, shelter, legal, and other services.
- ***Properly identify the predominant aggressor in domestic violence incidents.*** Distinguish between an assailant's violence and a victim's self-defense actions.
- ***Implement policies to prevent officer-perpetrated sexual assault and domestic violence and hold offenders who commit these offenses accountable.*** Address the prevention of, and response to, sexual assault and domestic violence perpetrated by LEOs in clear, stand-alone policies.
- ***Maintain, review and act upon data regarding sexual assault and domestic violence.*** Regularly examining data helps LEAs and their community partners get a clear picture of the strengths and gaps in the justice system's response.

### New Resources

The Department issued two new resources to support LEAs seeking to implement the guidance:

- An [abbreviated version of the guidance](#) for use by patrol officers and other first responders
- A [comprehensive, annotated list of resources](#) to guide LEAs' response to reports of sexual assault and domestic violence