

ELIZABETH POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDERS



VOLUME: 3

CHAPTER: 38

OF PAGES: 5

**SUBJECT: STRANGULATION SUFFOCATION EMERGENCY
TEAM PROTOCOL**

EFFECTIVE DATE:

March 15, 2023

BY THE ORDER OF:

CHIEF GIACOMO SACCA

BY AUTHORITY OF:

**POLICE DIRECTOR EARL J.
GRAVES**

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS:

NJSACOP 3.5.7

SUPERSEDES ORDER #:

PURPOSE: Strangulation is one of the most lethal forms of domestic violence and is one of the most accurate predictors for subsequent homicide of domestic violence victims. Strangulation has also been linked to officer involved critical incidents, officers killed in the line of duty in intentional homicides, and mass murders. Many victims of strangulation exhibit no physical injuries, but because of underlying brain damage or other internal injury due to lack of oxygen during the strangulation, have sustained serious internal injuries. Even when victims exhibit injuries from strangulation, the injuries will likely appear minor and limited to the point at which pressure was applied. Forensic nurses are specially trained to gather evidence using various techniques and photographic equipment to play a critical role in the clinical examination and comprehensive documentation of the strangled victim. As a result, forensic nurse examiners of strangled and suffocated victims can provide critical medical services for victims and preserve evidence for future prosecution.

POLICY: The Union County Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE) program has designated the Union County Communications Center, telephone number 908-654-9800, as the mechanism to activate the Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE). Community agencies within Union County that come in contact with victims of strangulation or smothering will be notified, in writing of the procedure for referring these individuals. The above-mentioned agencies will include, but not be limited to:

1. All law enforcement agencies, including dispatch personnel, operating within the County boundaries;
2. All hospitals and emergency health care facilities operating within County boundaries;

3. All college healthcare departments and counseling services operating within the County boundaries.

All law enforcement agencies and hospitals operating within the County will be advised that any cases of strangulation or smothering meeting established activation criteria are eligible for Strangulation/Smothering Emergency Team (SSET) activation. Activation can be accomplished by contacting the Union County Communications Center, telephone number 908-654-9800. The Communication Center will be provided with a monthly on call schedule and directions for contacting the FNE'S.

PROCEDURE:

I. LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO NONFATAL STRANGULATION/SMOTHERING INCIDENTS

- A. When law enforcement responds to a physical abuse call, they shall ask the victim the following screening questions:
 - 1. Was pressure applied to your neck by any means or was your mouth and nose covered restricting your breathing?
 - 2. Are you injured or in pain?
 - 3. These questions, as well as the next steps to be taken, are contained on the Union County Forensic Nurse Activation process card, which will be provided to officers to guide them in the screening process.
- B. If the victim reports pressure being applied to their neck by any means or reports their mouth was covered, restricting his / her breathing, suggest that the victim be evaluated by emergency medical services (EMS).
- C. Once EMS arrives, provide the victim with information regarding lethality of strangulation. See Attachment I. Recommend victim be transported to emergency room for further evaluation.
- D. If the victim refuses medical care or transport to the emergency room, provide waiver for victim to sign refusing medical evaluation and/or transport to the hospital. See Attachment 2.
 - 1. The completed waiver should be uploaded to InfoShare.
 - 2. Proceed to investigate possible offense.
 - 3. The victims should be provided with the information regarding lethality of strangulation in all cases, whether the victim consents to be seen by EMS or transported to the hospital. The victim should be provided the information regarding delayed consequences of seeking medical assistance.
 - 4. If the victim consents to transport to a Union County hospital emergency room for medical evaluation, request FNE notification via Union County Communications Center.
 - 5. The FNE will be responsible for notifying the emergency room of a strangulation victim that will be arriving for evaluation.

II. FORENSIC NURSE ACTIVATION CRITERIA

- A. The Union County Strangulation/Smothering Emergency Team can respond to all reported cases of strangulation or smothering which meet the following criteria:
 - 1. The victim is seen in a Union County hospital emergency room which are;

- a. Overlook Hospital;
 - b. Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital-Rahway;
 - c. Trinitas Regional Medical Center; and
 - d. the incident occurred within the past five days.
- B. If a victim is transported to a hospital outside of Union County, the investigating officer shall contact the Union County duty FNE and advise the FNE what hospital the victim is being transported to. The Union County FNE will be responsible for contacting the duty FNE in the County where the victim is being transported to and request a response.

III. ACTIVATION PROCEDURE

- A. If both activation criteria are met, the Strangulation/Smothering Emergency Team will be activated in the following manner:
1. In situations where law enforcement is the first contact for the victim:
 - a. Law enforcement will request emergency medical service be called to transport the victim to the hospital if the victim request to be transported.
 - b. Law enforcement will then call the Union County Communications Center, relay basic details of the assault including victims age, date of assault, location of assault and location of examination and request that the FNE be called.
 - c. The dispatcher will notify the on call FNE of the location and scheduled time of the examination, as well as the officers contact number.
 2. In situations where a hospital is the victim's first point of contact:
 - a. A call would be placed to the Union County Communications Center and the caller will relay basic details of the assault including victims age, date of assault, location of examination site, and request that the FNE be activated. If requested by the patient police notification will also be requested at this time.

IV. POST EXAMINATION PROCEDURES

- A. At the completion of the examination, the FNE will contact the officer to return to the hospital to pick up the victim and any evidence.
- B. Upon completion of the examination and report, the FNE's report shall be emailed to Nicki Markowycz, the administrative assistant to the Domestic Violence Unit, at nmarkowycz@ucnj.org.

- C. The officer will continue with the investigation, including taking a statement from the victim, offering services, and assisting in any application of a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) should the victim wish to apply for one.
- D. The officer should advise every victim that signs of injury may appear at some later time, and that the victim should call within the next 48 hours if visible injuries develop within that time frame.

Victim's Guide to Choking/Strangulation



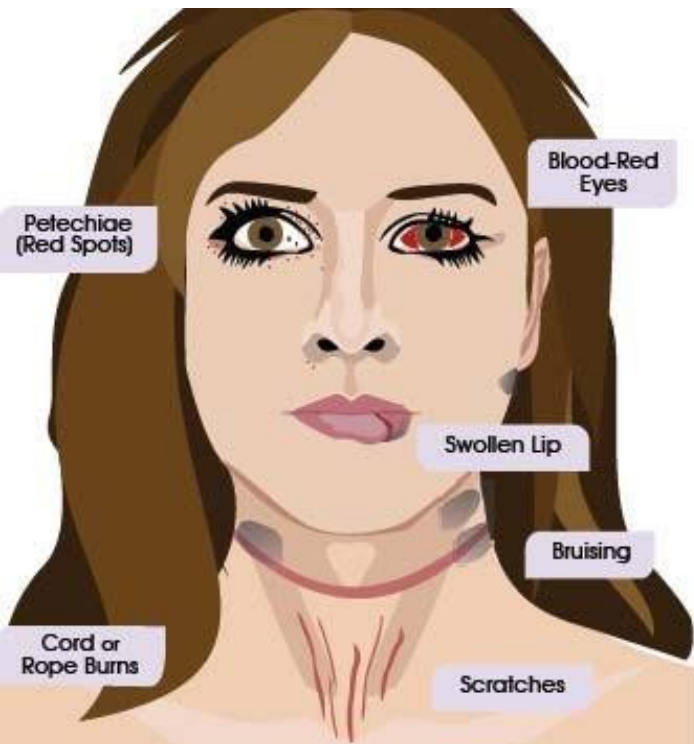
Observe Changes

Victims should photograph their injuries and document signs and symptoms, each day for several days, as injuries and symptoms may become more noticeable days after the assault. Keep a record.

Victims should seek immediate medical care if they experience difficulty breathing, speaking, swallowing or experience nausea, vomiting, lightheadedness, headache, involuntary urination and /or defecation, especially pregnant victims. If you are pregnant, report the strangulation and any of the following symptoms to your doctor immediately: • Decreased movement of the baby • Vaginal spotting or bleeding • Abdominal pain • Contractions
A medical examination may be lifesaving by detecting internal injuries that cannot be seen.

Visible Signs

A larger version of the graphic below (which contains signs and symptoms) is available for download at:
www.strangulationtraininginstitute.com/Esperanza



Losing Consciousness (Passing Out)

When pressure is applied to the neck or airway, blocking oxygen to the brain, it is *strangulation*.

Victims of strangulation may first feel terror and severe pain. If neck/airway pressure continues, the victim will become unconscious (“pass-out”).



Victims may lose consciousness by any one or all of the following methods:

- Blocking of the carotid arteries in the neck (depriving the brain of oxygen)
- Blocking of the jugular veins preventing oxygenated blood from exiting the brain)
- Closing off the airway, making breathing impossible.

Strangulation is one of the most serious forms of violence and is a criminal offense. A strangulation victim may pass out within seconds and may die in a little over 2 minutes if pressure is not released. It is the ultimate form of power and control and may have serious physical and psychological effects on the victim; including death.



Union County Prosecutor's Office
Strangulation/Smothering Emergency
Team
(SSET)

Monitor Your Signs

Using a piece of paper, make a chart like the one below to track your signs and symptoms of strangulation.

DATE & TIME	JOURNAL YOUR SIGNS

Signs of Strangulation

Head- pinpoint red spots (petechiae) on scalp, hairpulled, bump(s), skull fracture, concussion.

Face- red or flushed, petechiae, scratch marks.

Eyes and Eyelids- petechiae to the left or right eyeball, bloodshot eyes.

Ear- petechiae (external and/or ear canal), bleeding from ear canal.

Nose- bloody nose, broken nose, petechiae.

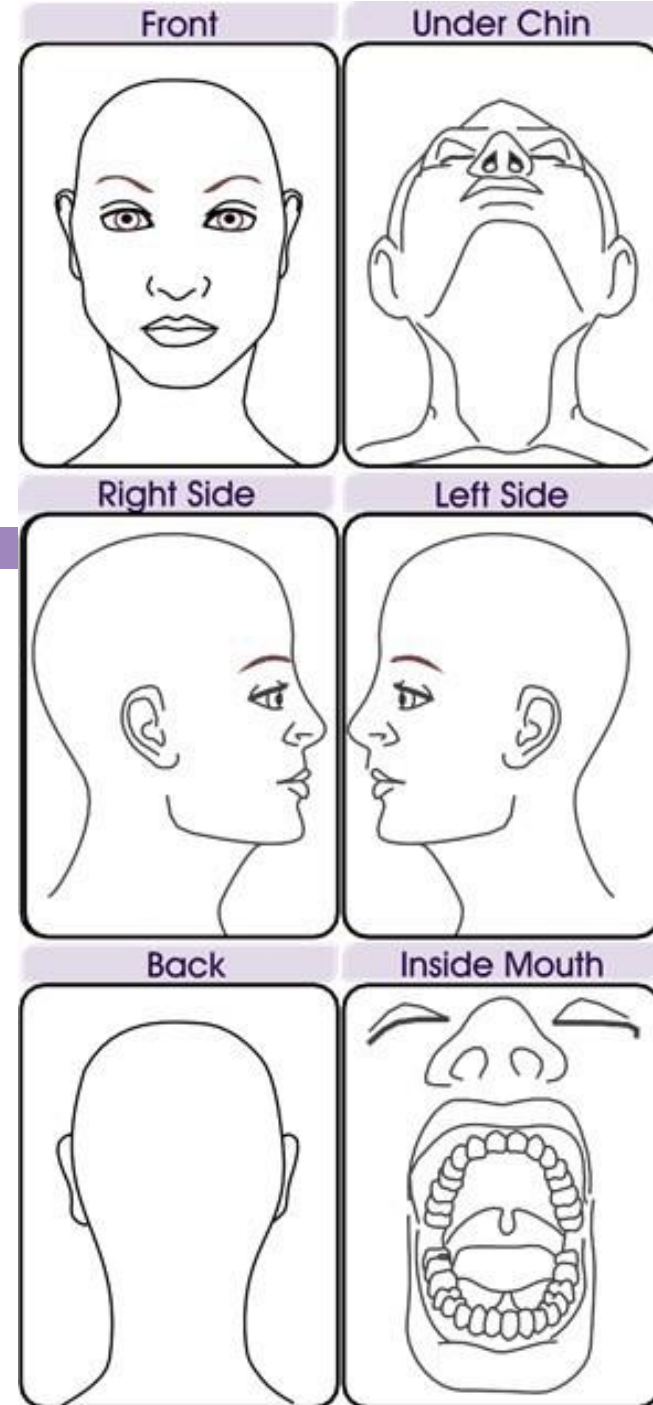
Mouth- bruising, swollen tongue, swollen lips, cuts/abrasions.

Under the chin- redness, scratch marks, bruise(s), abrasions.

Neck- redness, scratch marks, fingernail impressions, bruise(s), abrasions, swelling, ligature marks.

Chest and Shoulders- redness, scratch marks, bruise(s), abrasions.

Diagram to Mark Visible Injuries



Resources



10 Cherry Street
Elizabeth, NJ 07201
(908) 527-4980
www.unioncountyfjc.org

(908) 527-4596
www.ucnj.org/ovwa

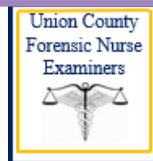


OFFICE OF
VictimWitnessAdvocacy
Union County Prosecutor's Office

24 Hour Hotline:
908.355.HELP(4357)
www.ywcaunioncounty.org

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca
union county

Union County
Forensic Nurse Examiners



Symptoms of Strangulation

Voice Changes- raspy and/or hoarse voice, coughing, unable to speak, complete loss of voice.

Swallowing Changes- trouble swallowing, painful swallowing, neck pain, nausea/vomiting, drooling.

hyperventilation, unable to breathe.

Behavioral Changes- restlessness or aggressiveness, problems concentrating, amnesia, agitation, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), hallucinations.

Vision Changes- complete loss or black & white vision, seeing 'stars', blurry, darkness, fuzzy around the eyes.

Hearing Changes- complete loss of hearing, gurgling, ringing, buzzing, popping, pressure, tunnel-like hearing.

Other Changes- Memory loss, unconsciousness, dizziness, headaches, involuntary urination or defecation, loss of strength, going limp.

COUNTY OF UNION
REFUSAL OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL EVALUATION
AND/OR TRANSPORT

I, _____ understand that an emergency medical evaluation and/or transportation to a hospital were offered to me to determine if an emergency medical condition exists by _____.

I, _____ decline said emergency medical evaluation and/or transportation to a hospital.

PATIENT (OR PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN) ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING:

- I was advised that such refusal may jeopardize my health or my life.
I assume the risks and completely understand the consequences of my refusal.
I understand that by refusing the services offered I am doing so against the advice of the Emergency Medical Technician and/or Police Officer.

RELEASE:

I release, indemnify and hold harmless the County of Union, its Police Department, employees, contractors and agents, from any and all liability whatsoever related to and arising out of my refusal of an emergency medical evaluation and/or transportation to a hospital.

Patient Signature

Patient's Parent/Guardian Signature

Name of Patient

Name of Patient's Parent/Guardian

Date

Date

Date: _____ Time: _____

Officer Signature/Badge Number: _____

Name of Police Officer: _____

Signature of Police Officer: _____



Strangulation/Smothering Assessment Card



CHECKLIST

- S** Scene & Safety: Take in the scene. Make sure you and victim are safe
- T** Trauma: The victim is traumatized. Be kind. Ask: What do you remember? See? Feel? Hear? Think?
- R** Reassure and Resources: reassure victim that help is available and provide resources
- A** Assess: Assess the victim for signs and symptoms of strangulation and TBI
- N** Notes: Document your observations. Put victim statements in quotes
- G** Give: Give victim information about delayed consequences
- L** Loss of Consciousness: Victims may not remember. Lapse of memory? Changed Location? Urination? Defecation?
- E** Encourage: Encourage medical attention or transport if life-threatening injuries exist.

SIGNS

- Red eyes or spots (petechiae)
- Neck swelling
- Nausea or vomiting
- Unsteady
- Loss/Lapse of memory
- Urinated
- Defecated
- Possible loss of consciousness
- Ptosis-droopy eyelid
- Droopy face
- Seizure
- Tongue/lip injury
- Mental status changes
- Voice changes

SYMPTOMS

- Neck pain
- Jaw pain
- Scalp pain
- Sore throat
- Difficulty breathing
- Difficulty swallowing
- Vision changes (spots/fashing light)
- Hearing changes
- Lightheadedness
- Headache
- Weakness/numbness in arm/leg
- Voice changes

ASK THE FOLLOWING

- Was any pressure applied to your neck by any means, or was your mouth and nose covered, restricting your breathing?
- Are you injured or in pain?
- If the answer is yes, suggest victim be transported to hospital
- If the victim refuses; advise them of the delayed consequences of strangulation and obtain signed waiver

DELAYED CONSEQUENCES

Victims may look fine and say they are fine, but just beneath the skin there could be internal injuries that can take a few hours to become visible. The victim may develop bruises, vocal cord immobility, delayed swelling from fractured larynx or hyoid bone, airway obstruction, stroke or even death from a carotid dissection, blood clot, respiratory complications, or anoxic brain damage. These can happen days later.

Credit: Alliance for Hope International
www.strangulationinstitute.com

UNION COUNTY
Forensic Nurse Activation Process



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INCIDENT OCCURS →

Police Officer Notified & Responds to Scene → Officers asks Strangulation Screening Questions

- If victim denies strangulation/suffocation, officer provides information sheet and proceeds with investigation
- If victim responds "YES", officer suggests EMS report to scene
- If victim requests medical services, officer requests EMS report to scene
- If victim refuses, officer advises the victim of the potential delayed consequences of obtaining medical assistance and provides victim with the strangulation information sheet. If victim still declines medical attention, officer obtains signed waiver

EMS ARRIVES →

Victim assessed and provided with information sheet → transport recommended

- If victim refuses, officer obtains signed waiver
- If victim consents, officer requests Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE) notification
- Notify FNE by call placed to Union County Police Dispatch at (908) 654-9800

FNE NOTIFIED →

FNE notifies Emergency Department of case and Team ETA

VICTIM IS TRANSPORTED TO THE HOSPITAL →

Victim is registered as an Emergency Department Patient