

# **Sexual Assault Investigations and Training**

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## **Issue**

Describe the (1) sexual assault investigation training offered by the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POSTC) and (2) role of forensic investigators in sexual assault investigations conducted by the State Police.

## **Summary**

POSTC's basic training program includes a four-hour course on sexual assault investigations and rape crisis intervention. Officers must also take a two-hour version of this course every three years for recertification. The course covers topics such as specific methods and concerns for investigating sexual assault cases, interviewing victims, and collecting and preserving evidence. POSTC also recently approved a statewide Policy Concerning Adult Sexual Assault Investigations that is reviewed during basic training. The policy includes guidelines for sexual assault medical forensic examinations, evidence collection, and victim interviews and rights, among other things.

In addition to these trainings, POSTC noted that it is currently reviewing requests for proposals for specialized sexual assault investigation training through its in-service programs. Depending on the outcome of that process, it may offer this training in the future.

According to the State Police, while there is no role entitled "forensic investigator" within the division, they use both forensic examiners and forensic interviewers, though neither are mandated by law.

# **POSTC Sexual Assault Investigation Training**

## ***Basic Police Training Courses***

By law, each police basic training program conducted by POSTC, the State Police, or municipal police departments must include a course on sexual assault investigations and rape crisis intervention ([CGS § 7-294f](#)). POSTC's current [basic training curriculum](#) specifically requires four hours of sexual assault and rape crisis training for recruits. (For recertification purposes, officers are required to take two hours of this course every three years.)

The course is designed to introduce recruits to (1) Connecticut's sexual assault statutes, (2) special concerns in interviewing sexual assault victims, (3) rape crisis intervention techniques, (4) specific investigative methods for sexual assault cases, and (4) collecting and preserving sexual assault evidence. Among other things, the course's performance objectives include:

1. explaining the methods of interviewing and obtaining statements from sexual assault victims and the priorities involved;
2. identifying and applying sexual assault and related criminal statutes;
3. recognizing the methods of identifying, collecting, preserving, and maintaining evidence in sexual assault cases and autoerotic incidents; and
4. identifying the various components of the Connecticut Sexual Evidence Collecting Kit.

In addition to this specific course, other courses included in the basic training curriculum also cover sexual assault-related topics. For example, the child abuse and neglect course teaches recruits to (1) recognize suspected cases of neglect, abuse, and sexual abuse of children; (2) interview children appropriately; and (3) learn the appropriate child protection reporting procedures. Similarly, the prostitution and human trafficking course teaches recruits how to recognize suspected cases of modern-day slavery and the related offense activities of physical and sexual abuse of women and children, among other topics.

## ***Statewide Policy on Adult Sexual Assault Investigations***

POSTC's basic training also includes a review of the council's 2024 [Statewide Policy](#) Concerning Adult Sexual Assault Investigations, the purpose of which was to establish a standard or best practice by which investigations are conducted to create a trauma-informed response. POSTC stated that this policy would be covered during basic training. The policy includes guidelines for many subject areas, including:

1. sexual assault medical forensic examinations,

2. sexual assault evidence collection kit retrieval and testing,
3. victim interviews,
4. victim rights, and
5. forensic examination for the collection of evidence from suspects.

The policy also recommends that all officers receive basic training in victim centered and trauma-informed responses. It further recommends investigators assigned to sexual assault cases receive advanced training, including trauma-informed investigative techniques, victim-centered approaches, and forensic evidence collection.

### ***Trauma Informed Responses***

*According to POSTC's Adult Sexual Assault Investigations Policy, a trauma informed response is one that involves recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma and understanding that victims of sexual assault may respond differently than victims of other crimes, and differently to other victims of sexual assault.*

*An objective of a trauma informed response is to avoid re-traumatizing the victim and may include formulating questions to not assign guilt or responsibility but instead empower victims to help with police efforts.*

## **Forensic Investigators**

### ***Forensic Examiners***

The Division of Scientific Services (DSS) within the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) is statutorily required to provide technical assistance to law enforcement agencies in various areas of scientific investigation ([CGS § 29-7b\(b\)](#)). Among its responsibilities are:

1. in its discretion, investigating any physical evidence or evidentiary material related to a crime upon the request of any federal, state, or local agency;
2. in its discretion, conducting or assisting in scientific field investigations at the scene of a crime and providing other scientific technical assistance and training upon request;
3. ensuring the safe custody of evidence during examinations;
4. giving expert testimony when requested; and
5. conducting forensic science research ([CGS § 29-7b\(c\)](#)).

According to DESPP, forensic examiners and DSS do not get involved in specific State Police on-scene investigations. However, DSS has participated in the [Commission on the Standardization of the Collection of Evidence in Sexual Assault Investigations](#) and the [Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Working Group](#). Through these groups, DSS has conducted trainings at POSTC in the past related to sexual assault evidence testing and tracking.

Additionally, the [Forensic Biology Unit](#) within DSS examines biological evidence, including identifying the presence of bodily fluids, as well as collecting samples from objects for “trace DNA” tests. For more information concerning DSS, please visit their webpage [here](#).

### ***Forensic Interviewers***

According to DESPP, forensic interviewers are trained to interview both adults and minors that have experienced trauma. They conduct interviews in a controlled, neutral environment that can be recorded, which can prevent repeated interviews. While there is no statutory requirement to use forensic interviewers, the State Police highly recommended their use as a best practice.

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