



Helen Police Department

Standard Operating Policies and Procedures

Chapter P-051 Mental Illness	Effective Date:	September 1, 2022	# of Pages:	7
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	Special Instructions:			

I. PURPOSE

To establish guidelines for officers to follow when dealing with persons exhibiting mental illness; also known as EDP (emotionally disturbed person). These guidelines should be followed in all contacts whether on the street or during a more formal interview or interrogation.

II. POLICY

It shall be the policy of the Helen Police Department to be committed to handling mentally ill persons in an effective manner to minimize injury to the person being dealt with as well as the employees involved. Only medically qualified professionals are qualified to diagnose and treat mental illness. Basic guidelines for the recognition of individuals potentially suffering from mental illness are offered in this directive as a resource for agency personnel.

III. DISCUSSION

Mental illness is the 4th leading disability in the United States with estimates of anywhere from 3% to 10% of the population affected. Unlike mental retardation, mental illness can occur at any time in a person's life. Dealing with individuals in enforcement and related contexts who are known or suspected to be mentally ill carries the potential for violence, requires an officer to make difficult judgments about the mental state and intent of the individual, and requires special police skills and abilities to effectively and legally deal with the person so as to avoid unnecessary violence and potential civil litigation. Given the unpredictable and sometimes violent nature of the mentally ill, officers should never compromise or jeopardize their safety or the safety of others when dealing with individuals displaying symptoms of mental illness. Officers shall use this policy to assist them in defining

whether a person's behavior is indicative of mental illness and dealing with the mentally ill in a constructive and humane manner.

IV. DEFINITION

Mental Illness - A disorder of thought or mood which significantly impairs judgment, behavior, capacity to recognize reality, or ability to cope with the ordinary demands of life. Mental illness can occur at any time during a person's life and may be long lasting, or it may be a short-lived episode. Some forms of mental illness are treatable and controllable.

V. PROCEDURE

A. Recognizing Abnormal Behavior

B. Mental illness is often difficult for even the trained professional to define in a given individual. Officers are not expected to make judgments of mental or emotional disturbance, but rather to recognize behavior that is potentially destructive and/or dangerous to self or others.

C. Listed below are recognition signs of possible mental illness in a person:

1. Significant changes in a person's behavior.
2. A statement by others that the impaired person is not acting like they normally do.
3. They may behave in a way dangerous to themselves or to others.
4. They may withdraw into themselves, talking only to themselves.
5. They complain of seeing visions, smelling strange odors or hearing voices.
6. The impaired person may have unrealistic ideas about themselves.
7. They may believe that they are someone they obviously are not.

8. They may believe that they are worthless (e.g. extreme depression).
9. They may have delusions (e.g. unrealistic ideas) about the world.
10. They may exaggerate events that occur.
11. They may have strange losses of memory or don't know the time, where they are or who they are.

D. Interaction with a Person Who May be Suffering From Mental Illness

When officers encounter someone who is exhibiting symptoms of mental illness or impairment they should:

- a. Take time to evaluate the situation.
- b. Not abuse or threaten the person.
- c. Avoid unnecessary excitement.
- d. Not become overly excited or emotional.
- e. Not lie.

E. Helen Police Department officers will follow the process below when accessing available community health resources:

1. The primary mental health treatment facility that Helen Police officers will access is Habersham Medical. A secondary facility will be any hospital system that operates an emergency room 24 hours a day 7 days a week.
2. Admission to Habersham Medical Mental Health Unit can only be granted after a screening process is performed at the Habersham Medical Emergency Room.

F. Officers should always be prepared to respond to sudden violent outbursts by persons with mental illnesses. The types of impaired behavior that are most dangerous are from persons who exhibit violence, are depressed/suicidal or where physical illness or loss of memory is involved.

G. Impaired behaviors seen most often by law enforcement officers are:

1. The psychopathic personality.
2. The alcoholic.
3. The drug addict.
4. The sex offender.
5. The mentally retarded.
6. The mental disorders associated with old age.

H. During field and in-custody interviews, officers should watch for persons displaying symptoms of mental illness.

VI. TACTICAL PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING MENTALLY ILL PERSONS

A. It is the policy of the Helen Police Department when dealing with a person who is possibly suffering from a mental illness to provide the person with immediate assistance, if the officer feels the person is a danger to themselves or others. The officer should first attempt to have the person voluntarily request and / or agree to assistance.

B. In incidents involving persons who refuse assistance or will not voluntarily request and / or agree to assistance, the officer may, depending on the circumstances:

1. Contact family member(s) and / or treating physician for release and information. In some cases, family members may seek authorization from a physician to have the person involuntarily committed.
2. Notify Adult Protective Services and follow their recommendations.
3. Be forced to place the person under arrest if a criminal violation has occurred, however this option should be used as final alternative in dealing with a mentally ill person.

C. The use of force should always be a last resort when handling a disturbed person. Law enforcement officers need to carefully plan their actions before using any physical restraints. Be sure to call for

assistance from fellow officers to ensure your own safety during the encounter. Reassure the person that you will not hurt him, but that you are there to get medical attention to him.

- D. The guiding principle for the officer using direct physical action is to have enough manpower available to quickly subdue and overwhelm the individual. Typically mentally disturbed persons will cease to struggle as soon as they believe it is hopeless to continue. In using overwhelming force, the probability of either the subject or the officers being injured is dramatically reduced.
- E. Officers should communicate with the subject requesting compliance using simple plain language that is easily understood. If action is required it should be completed as quickly and efficiently as possible, using reasonable force. Continue to talk to them, reassuring them that you understand that they are having problems.
- F. Finally, when using restraints it is important to not only know how to use them, but when to use them. Restraints are used for two purposes:
 - 1. To control an individual who is being physically aggressive, and;
 - 2. To remove a resistive person from his environment.
- G. When restraining a mentally ill person, you should use reasonable force necessary to control the individual. Police personnel will use reasonable force when force is used to accomplish lawful objectives as outlined in Helen SOP P-030, Use of Force.
- H. A Helen Police Use of Force report will be required whenever the officer applies less-than-lethal weapons, or use of control techniques or other force options to overcome resistance to the extent it is likely to lead to injury, claim of injury, or allegation of excessive force, as outlined by Helen SOP P-030, Use of Force.
- I. After gaining control of a mentally ill person, the officer then must decide:
 - 1. If the person requires medical attention;
 - 2. If the person is to be charged with a crime;
 - 3. If the person requires psychological/mental health attention;

4. In cases where an officer comes into contact with a mentally ill person, a written report shall be completed if:
5. The person has any injuries, even if prior to the officer's arrival;
6. If criminal warrants will be taken against the subject;
7. If any force is used against the subject.

J. The report should contain:

1. The initial reason for the contact;
2. Any indicators exhibited by the person or other information that lead the officer to believe the person was mentally ill;
3. Any restraint or force used to subdue the person to include justification for the level of restraint or force;
4. Justification for transporting the person to a healthcare facility for psychological, mental, and/or other medical treatment;
5. The final disposition of the person at the healthcare facility.

VII. PROCEDURES FOR TRANSPORTING MENTALLY ILL PATIENTS

- A. The White County Sheriff's Office is responsible for transportation of mentally ill patients from the Habersham Medical Center to other treatment locations, if they are not transported by ambulance.
- B. Officers will not transport mentally ill patients from community based mental health residences operated under the authority of the Georgia Department of Human Resources.
- C. In the event a request is received from a community mental health center, hospital, private citizen, or a physician's office requesting transportation of a mentally disturbed patient, the responding officer will have dispatch contact an ambulance from White County EMS. Once the ambulance is on scene, EMT personnel will determine if the mentally disturbed patient needs to be transported to an area hospital.

1. The caller should be made aware that the primary purpose of the officer's presence is to protect life and maintain order.
 2. If transportation of the patient is necessary, the officer will request an ambulance.
 - a. Officers will not ride in an ambulance with a person who is considered mentally ill unless the person is extremely violent.
- D. Officers will accompany an ambulance to Habersham Medical Center if the person has committed a crime for which they may be arrested in accordance with the laws of arrest for the State of Georgia or if the person is violent. A Helen Police officer will remain with the person until the screening process is completed or the security staff of the hospital agrees to take control of the person until transportation to another facility can be arranged.
- E. Officers will only guard patients who are involved in Helen Police cases. Officers will not guard an individual who goes to Habersham Medical Center on his/her own accord, brought by family members or other means. The responsibility to guard patients waiting to be committed rests with the White County Sheriff's Office or Hospital Security Staff.
- F. If a mentally ill patient is transported in a Helen Police vehicle, the person will be handcuffed per standard operating procedures.

VIII. TRAINING

Entry level training shall be accomplished with all new police officer recruits in the basic mandate police academy as outlined in the Georgia Peace Officers Reference Text, Section 3, Community Relations, Subsection 3.3, Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse. New officers also receive additional training during the FTO process. In-service refresher training will be completed for all agency personnel at least once every year in accordance with the Governor's Initiative Training.