

# Common Mistakes to Avoid

Law enforcement officers may inadvertently escalate a situation when placing a child in protective custody. Experienced officers have learned to avoid three common mistakes:

- **Making premature accusations.**

Making an accusatory statement to a parent, guardian, or custodian that a child is being taken into protective custody because someone has abused the child places the police officer in a situation of serious liability. A more appropriate statement is, "Because of questionable injuries, marks, or allegations about inappropriate activity, the child is being taken into protective custody until a complete and thorough investigation into the situation can be conducted."

- **Attempting to rationalize a child's removal.**

Some officers attempt to rationalize with the parent about their decision to remove a child. However, the best tactic is to remove the child and leave the situation as quickly as possible, after ensuring that everyone's rights are protected. The fact is that no amount of explaining will lessen the pain, fear, and anger involved in removing a child. Officers should be aware that heightened emotions can lead to a dangerous escalation of the situation.

- **Failing to provide all required forms.**

Police officers must be familiar with all forms that the parents must complete at the time their child is placed in protective custody. For example, many states require that the parents receive a form explaining that the child has been placed in protective custody within 24 hours after the child has been removed from the home. The form must state that the placement was made in accordance with a particular statute and must describe the parents' rights in the matter. States vary in regard to who should provide this form to the parents. Law enforcement officers and social service workers must know what is required in their state.

U.S. Department of Justice. (2014). *Law Enforcement Response to Child Abuse*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/243907.pdf>