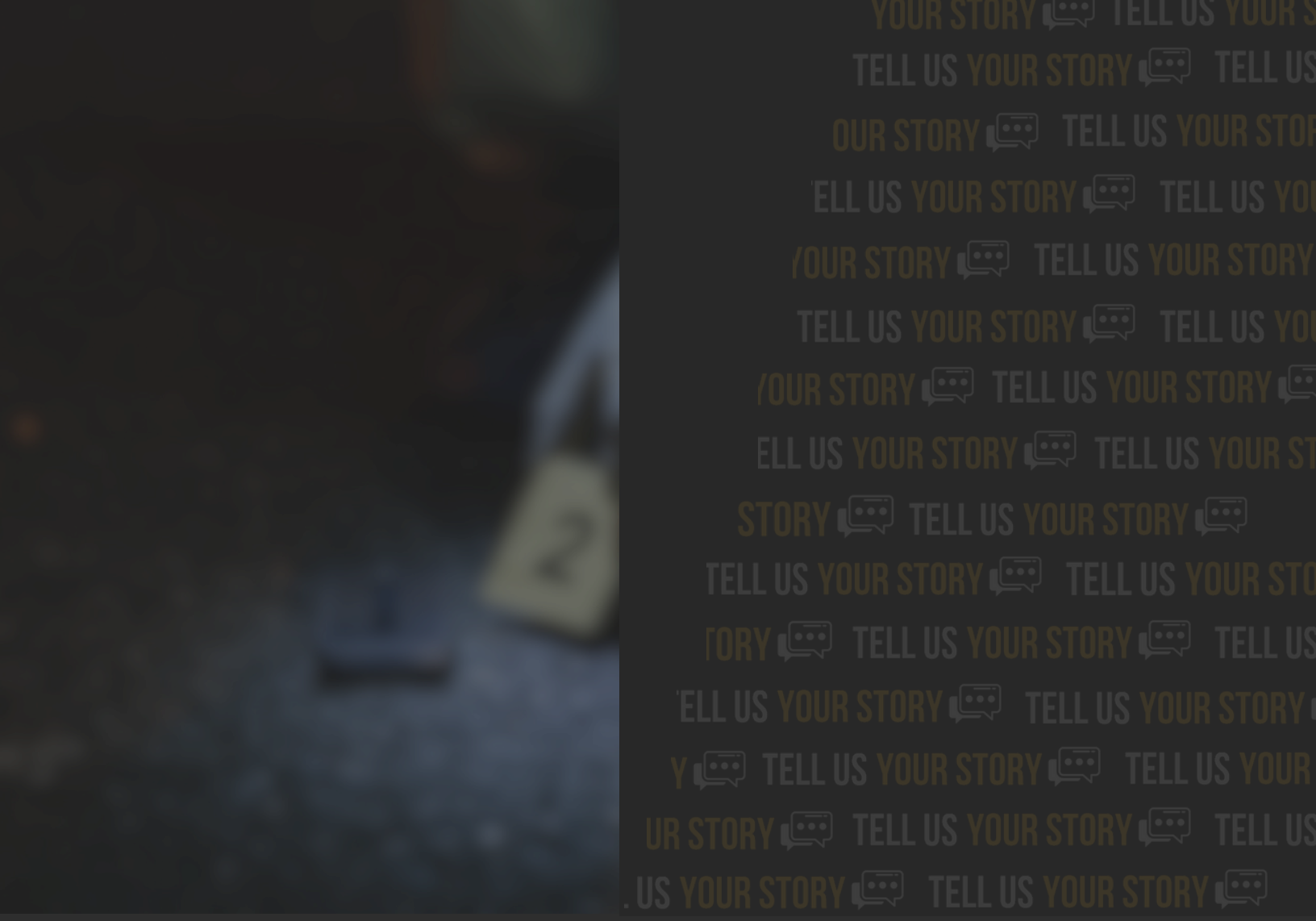


EPISODE #4

Detective Sergeant Brian Barber
Major Crimes Unit | City of Erie Police Department

Sensitive content advisory: This article discusses child abuse cases and death investigations, which may be difficult for some readers. Please read with care.

NCJTC National Criminal Justice Training Center *of* Fox Valley Technical College

Content is current as of publication - May 2026

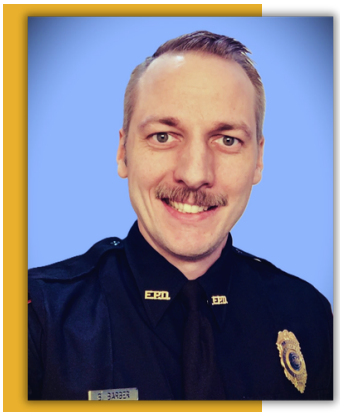
EPISODE #4

Agency Spotlight: City of Erie Police Department | Major Crimes Unit

TELL US YOUR STORY

MEET Detective Sergeant Brian Barber

Major Crimes Unit | City of Erie Police Department (EPD)



For Detective Sergeant Barber, the job is about more than investigations—it's about advocacy. As a member of the City of Erie Police Department's Major Crimes Unit, he focuses on crimes against children, including sex offenses, abuse cases and unexplained child deaths. For the past four years, he and one other detective have worked out of the Erie County Children's Advocacy Center, alongside forensic interviewers and child protective services professionals, as part of a multidisciplinary team built around one goal: protecting children.

"These are the most vulnerable victims," Barber says. "A lot of times with children under four, they aren't even able to communicate. You are advocating for somebody who really can't advocate for themselves."

Barber's commitment to that mission began long before he became a detective. Before joining the Erie Police Department, he spent a decade as an EMT, where he learned firsthand the weight of mandated reporting and the responsibility that comes with recognizing signs of suspected child abuse. Today, with 15 years in law enforcement, he brings that early foundation into every case. Beyond his primary role, Barber also serves on the department's Crisis Negotiation Team and is a certified Critical Stress Voice Analyzer operator, lending specialized skills during both investigations and critical incidents.

HIGH-IMPACT TRAINING Knowing *What* to Say *When* it Matters

Barber remembers his early cases clearly, through a lens of growth. When he first began investigating unexplained child deaths, he was searching for answers without a clear roadmap. "I kind of fumbled my way through the first few investigations," he says. "I didn't really know the proper questions. I didn't know what I was looking for, or what questions to ask. **That shifted when I connected with NCJTC."**

His first course, *Child Abuse: From Suspicion to Disclosure*, changed how he approached cases. But he shares the most impactful training for him came later: NCJTC's *Conducting Unexplained Child Death Investigations*, a weeklong course he attended in Cleveland. With his department handling three to four unexplained death cases each year, the training quickly proved essential.

One lesson stood out—how to talk with grieving parents. "When you show up, parents think you're there to accuse them of a crime, when that is not necessarily the case. This can be hard to overcome," Barber says. The course, he adds, taught him "how to break the ice, how to be informed, how to get the best information you can right at the beginning."

Barber's growth continued through a professional connection with NCJTC associate instructor Chris Kolcharno, a deputy chief detective in Lackawanna County. Their shared Pennsylvania jurisdiction made collaboration natural. "He really helped me out," Barber says. "You can tell he really cares. You can tell he's done a lot of investigations."

"We wrapped up training on a Friday and by Sunday we had an unexplained head trauma call come in and *I was using everything I'd learned in class…from A-Z.* Helped immensely."



NCJTC Associate Chris Kolcharno (left) leading an interview role play during a recent Conducting Unexplained Child Death Investigations training.

RESULTS Addressing the Increase in Reports

Beyond the specific techniques, NCJTC training reshaped the way Barber thinks about the work itself. What's been most invaluable, he says, is learning how essential multidisciplinary teamwork is to child abuse investigations. "These types of investigations are unique and you really work as a team," he says. "NCJTC really hits that nail on the head."

Today, Barber's multi-agency network includes dedicated prosecutors, forensic interviewers, child protective services caseworkers, and medical professionals—all of whom come together in monthly case reviews to evaluate suspected abuse cases side by side. For investigators who haven't yet worked within that kind of model, Barber believes NCJTC training is the fastest path to understanding how *(and why)* it works.

In his discussion with the NCJTC team, Barber provided greater insight into the breadth of his unit's responsibilities and how departmental preparation has changed over time. **In 2025, EPD received 567 ChildLine referrals—an increase of 10.5 percent from 2024.** While the rise may seem concerning at first glance, Barber views it as evidence that the system is functioning as intended. He does not believe child abuse is necessarily becoming more prevalent; instead, he attributes the increase to improved training that helps more individuals recognize the signs of abuse and report them appropriately.

> *"We're being better trained, we're recognizing it, and we're doing something about it," he says.*

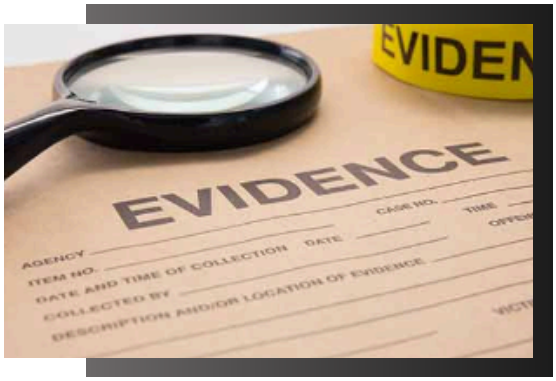
That heightened awareness, Barber explains, directly influences how cases are identified, investigated, and ultimately resolved—and the effects of training are tangible. He told the NCJTC team that many of his cases conclude with plea agreements because investigators are able to develop overwhelming evidence or secure confessions before charges are ever filed.

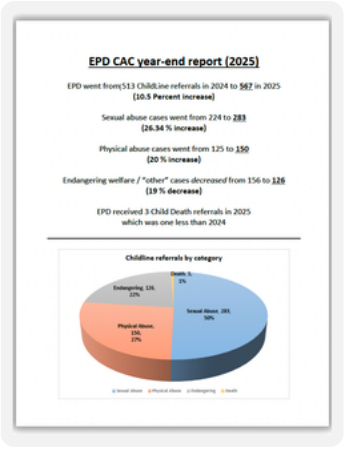
"I make anywhere from 30 to 50 arrests a year, but I ultimately charge only about 20 percent of my cases," Barber says. "Our focus is on protecting vulnerable children the right way—making sure we have the evidence needed to win, or continuing the investigation until we do." It's a striking ratio, and a deliberate one. In Barber's view, filing charges too early means failing a child twice.

That level of discipline has produced tangible results. Barber, the Erie Police Department and their interagency partners have drawn regional attention for several recent investigations that, taken together, highlight the effectiveness of a victim-centered approach, strong multi-agency collaboration, and prosecutions built squarely on evidence.

ChildLine is a 24/7 hotline through the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare that takes reports of suspected child abuse. The information provided is sent to the local Office of Children and Youth to investigate.

Erie PD saw 567 reports in 2025 (up 10.5% over 2024)







REAL-WORLD IMPACT Cases Solved, Children Protected

The impact of NCJTC training on the City of Erie Police force didn't stay in the classroom. Police Chief Rick Lorah recently told local reporters his department had logged more child deaths in the first quarter of 2026 than in some full years prior — a sobering backdrop for the work their team is doing every day (YourErie, April 2026).

In Barber's words, the techniques learned during NCJTC training have directly contributed to finding resolution in cases such as:

- **A felony child neglect arrest in Erie, Pa.**, after officers found a 5-year-old who had fallen from a second-story window and a second child unattended inside the home — *YourErie, Feb. 2026*
- **An Erie mother charged with felony endangerment** after her 1-year-old child overdosed and required emergency Narcan treatment before transfer to Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC — *Erie Times-News, April 2026*
- **Guilty plea to involuntary manslaughter and felony child endangerment** in the 2024 hypothermia death of an Erie toddler who wandered from the home while both parents tested positive for meth —*YourErie, Dec. 2025*
- **A fatal Erie apartment fire that claimed three children's lives**, underscoring the careful and thorough work of determining cause and manner of death in pediatric fatalities — *Erie News Now*



City of Erie Police Chief, Rick Lorah speaks to local media on the rise in child death cases his department is seeing. Photo credit: YourErie & W-JET TV

These cases, Barber says, are only a fraction of what his team encounters — but each one reinforces a single truth: sound investigative decision-making saves lives. NCJTC's training, he explains, sharpens an officer's ability to read risk factors early, respond with the right tools at the right moment, and avoid the kind of missteps that can compound harm to a child already in crisis.

"You owe it to the family, and you owe it to the child, to get it right — whatever 'right' turns out to be" Barber said.

That preparation is what allows investigators to keep their focus where it belongs — on intervening when it counts, on making sure children are safe, and on connecting families with the resources that can stop the next tragedy before it starts.

RECOGNITION Positively Impacting the Families He Serves

Detective Sergeant Barber's dedication to training, robust interagency collaboration, and a profound sense of purpose drives his commitment to safeguarding the most vulnerable members of the community and advocating for justice on their behalf.

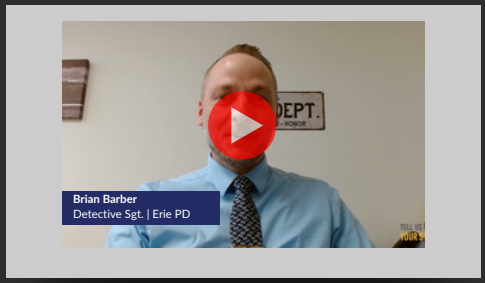
His remarkable efforts have gained recognition not only within the Erie community but also beyond. Barber was recently awarded the 2026 Champion of Hope and Healing Award at the *20th Annual Pittsburgh Conference on Child Maltreatment*. This distinguished award recognizes the hard work and positive impact he's had on the families he serves.







Detective Sergeant Brian Barber, joined by his wife Christine, receives the 2026 Champion of Hope and Healing Award at the 20th Annual Pittsburgh Conference on Child Maltreatment (April 30–May 1, 2026).



Watch Barber's full VIDEO interview in Ep. 04 of the *Tell Us Your Story* series!

ncjtc.org/episodes

DIG DEEPER Here's What Worked for EPD

Detective Sgt. Barber and his partners have taken a proactive approach to training for several years, and we are proud to continue supporting their professional development. Barber himself has completed a wide range of virtual and in-person courses, self-paced learning, and live webinars across multiple disciplines. This sustained commitment to training and real-world application has strengthened the department's ability to protect children and families and reduce harm through informed, effective investigations.

Review the course listing for information on the specific NCJTC training Barber has applied in his work—and explore the impact, services, and resources available through our Missing and Exploited Children Training and Technical Assistance Program (MEC TTA)*

- **Conducting Unexplained Child Death Investigations** - Learn More
- **Conducting Child Abuse Investigations** - Learn More
- **Additional virtual or in-person courses including:**
  - Child Sex Trafficking: From Suspicion to Disclosure
  - NCJTC Sexual Assault Investigation Academy
  - Following the Evidence in Child Abuse and Exploitation Cases
  - Multidisciplinary Response to Child Sex Trafficking and more.
  - View all at **ncjtc.org/training**
- **Webinars** on topics like: child homicides, child abuse trials, delayed disclosure, digital evidence / electronic search warrants - Watch Now
- **Self-paced courses** in the areas: of missing children, child abuse cases, interviewing at-risk children and more - See Courses

Some of the training we provide is made possible with funding awarded under the Missing and Exploited Children Training and Technical Assistance Program provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

LEARN MORE About the City of Erie Police Department

The Erie Police Department - Major Crime Unit is comprised of one lieutenant, three detective sergeants, and seven detectives who investigate serious crimes against persons. The unit handles cases including homicides, assaults, robberies, missing persons, kidnappings, shootings, and other complex or high-risk incidents. Detective Sergeant Barber and one additional detective are assigned to a satellite office at the Children's Advocacy Center, where **they specialize in sexual assaults and crimes against children.** The unit also includes a detective sergeant serving as the department's Criminal Intelligence Officer.

CITY OF ERIE POLICE

For more information on Major Crimes Unit within the Erie Police Department, please visit their website

Children's Advocacy Center
Working together. Overcoming abuse.

Explore vital support services from the Erie Children's Advocacy Center

More on ChildLine - a 24/7 child abuse reporting hotline through the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare

ABOUT THE SERIES

In 2025, NCJTC launched *Tell Us Your Story* to build community, celebrate success, and highlight how law enforcement and criminal justice professionals bring training to life. This impact series creates space for practitioners to share real-world moments when preparation, teamwork, and dedication translated into meaningful outcomes for the communities they serve.

Each 10-minute video interview offers a behind-the-scenes perspective—showing not just what happened, but how they applied their training, navigated challenges, and made critical decisions that saved lives, solved cases, strengthened teams, and protected those most vulnerable.

BE FEATURED

We invite you to continue the story - fill out **this brief form** to submit your own story of impact.

WATCH FULL EPISODES

- Visit **ncjtc.org/episodes**
- Subscribe to the NCJTC **YouTube channel** for episode previews, full interviews and more.

Contact Us:
tuys@ncjtc.org | (855) 866-2582 | ncjtc.org