

## **Tips for a Police Ride Along**

Each police department will likely have its own rules and procedures for participating in a Ride Along with an officer. Be sure to request that information when initially contacting a department about accompanying an officer during a shift. A department will have some restrictions related to age and other criteria for who is eligible to participate in a Ride Along.

Visiting a department's website may provide you with some of this information, or at least with contact information for inquiring about a Ride Along. Below are some general points to consider, but be sure to inquire with the department you contact about whether they have a set of guidelines.

### **Logistics**

- Inquire about and complete the required paperwork, which usually includes signing a release of responsibility and provides the department with information they need from you to determine eligibility for a Ride Along. Also included will be rules and/or requirements for participating in the Ride Along.
- When participating in a Ride Along, you will be perceived as representing the department even though you will not be in uniform. Be neat in appearance, and consider wearing business casual clothing with comfortable footwear in which you can move quickly and easily. You may find that officers keep their squad cars on the cool side, so plan accordingly with an extra layer that you can shed if it gets warm.
- It's important not only to follow each officer's lead, but also to follow their instructions about whether and when to leave the squad car, handling equipment, and any other directives. You are an observer and are the responsibility of the officers whom you are accompanying.
- Ride Along shifts are generally four hours. Inquire ahead of time about the duration, and prepare accordingly in regards to food, sleep, and other considerations.

### **Preparation for the exchange**

- A ride along is not best suited for an interviewer/observer who is in "investigation mode." The value of a Ride Along is that it is an exchange. Prepare to be in listening mode, as opposed to being on a fact-finding mission.
- If there is a lack of trust between parties, the amount of meaningful dialogue that can happen in the exchange will be limited. Establishing rapport early will go a long way towards having meaningful interaction over the course of the shift.
- A Ride Along is an opportunity to experience firsthand what makes up an officer's day during a shift in a squad car. Follow the officer's lead, and use the opportunity to take in and learn about the experience.

*Adapted from information from Police Link: The Nation's Enforcement Community. 10 Tips for Ride Alongs.*

*Are We Making a Difference? Sexual Assault Response Teams Assessing Systems Change: A Resource for Multidisciplinary Team Leadership* (p. 71) by Emily Goff, Sharon Haas, Laura

Pejsa, and Jessica Jerney, 2015. Retrieved from <http://resources.svji.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/SVJI-evaluation-resource-for-Web-10.19.16.pdf> Reprinted with permission