



## Prioritizing De-Escalation

One common topic of discussion is police-public interaction during confrontations in the field. This can include scenarios like arrests, crowd control, and investigations. With increased scrutiny from the public, improving techniques to handle these situations can positively benefit a department's reputation and police officer safety.

De-escalation is defined as a method to prevent potential violence; using an approach aimed at reducing intensity to resolve conflicts. It involves purposeful actions, verbal communication, and body language to stabilize, slow or reduce the intensity of a potentially violent situation without using physical force or reducing necessary force.[1] De-escalation training is well known and has been introduced into officer schooling at the police academy. It should be common knowledge for any academy graduate and especially seasoned officers. Everyone can benefit from improved de-escalation knowledge.



The appropriate use of de-escalation techniques can go a long way in keeping officers and their colleagues safe. Beginning encounters with de-escalation tactics benefits both officers and citizens. Officers should work to de-escalate before a situation spirals into adverse or demanding conditions. Proper training and the use of de-escalation techniques can calm hostilities before they become violent or make potentially violent conditions manageable. These techniques are vitally important to a police officer's protection in the field and are another means of officer protection.

An officer should have an understanding of the following:

- De-escalation is a method to prevent potential violence.
- Your safety and the safety of others around you is the highest priority.
- Know your limits and where the confrontation is going.
- Obtain help from other officers and move to a safe location.

As part of a de-escalation training program for your department, purposeful actions include:

- Slow down and observe the initial situation. Take a second to evaluate the conditions and the environment around you and hold off on an immediate intervention.
- Remain calm and composed and maintain a safe distance to respect personal space.
- Use verbal communication. Be compassionate but firm in defusing a tense situation. Speak calmly but directly, avoid raising your voice, and slow down your speech to be understood.
- Maintain positive body language. Keep relaxed but alert, slow down your actions, use deliberate movements, and maintain a neutral and attentive facial expression.

[1] U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Not all situations can be de-escalated. Active shooter situations require law enforcement to actively seek and neutralize the threat. While it is preferred that an officer attempt de-escalation when warranted, sometimes a suspect's actions require harsher responses and interactions.

Police officers who effectively use de-escalation in the field have been found to have reduced stress, as encounters are often resolved without physical interactions. When public interactions are successfully resolved without conflict, the department's reputation is improved throughout the community. Update policies, practices, and training on de-escalation techniques to improve officer safety and reduce workplace injuries.

