

July 12, 2021
CAC - De-Escalation - Ad Hoc
Draft Recommendations to Sonoma County Sheriff's Office
TOPIC: De-Escalation

TO BE SUBMITTED AS PART OF NEW SCSO POLICY 436 - DE-ESCALATION:

Keeping the people of Sonoma County safe is unquestionably of paramount importance to the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office.¹ In performance of their duties, the guiding principle for all deputies shall be reverence for the sanctity of every human life.² This office recognizes that members of law enforcement derive their authority from the public and therefore must be ever mindful that they are not only the guardians, but also the servants of the public.³ This office is committed to fostering a culture of de-escalation practices and compassion among all personnel, so the practice can be mirrored when interacting with the public.⁴

The authority conferred upon deputies to use physical force is a serious responsibility that shall be exercised judiciously and with respect for human rights and dignity.⁵ As such, whenever feasible, deputies are required to utilize de-escalation techniques as an alternative to force with the goal of resolving encounters without force.⁶ De-escalation is always preferred to its alternative.⁷ Police legitimacy is greatly affected by the use or non-use of de-escalation techniques.⁸

The term de-escalation generally refers to the act of moving from a state of high tension to a state of reduced tension.⁹ De-escalation strategies, tactics, and procedures can result in the peaceful resolution of a situation without the use of force.¹⁰

De-escalation, broken into the sum of its own parts, is skilled communication, conflict resolution, crisis intervention, and influence.¹¹ Those skilled at de-escalation are persuasive and

¹ De-escalation Strategies and Techniques for California Law Enforcement, California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training ["POST"], pg. i.

² LAPD 556.10 Use of Force Policy Preamble; Cal Pen. Code section 835a(a)(1).

³ LAPD 556.10 Use of Force Policy Preamble.

⁴ De-escalation Strategies and Techniques for California Law Enforcement, California Commission on POST, pg. 63.

⁵ Cal. Pen. Code section 835a(a)(1).

⁶ Cal. Gov. Code section 7286(b)(1); Camden County Police Department Use of Force Policy, pg. 3. In consultation with the NYU Policing Project.

⁷ De-escalation Strategies and Techniques for California Law Enforcement, California Commission on POST, pg. ix.

⁸ POST LD 20: Chapter 2 - De-Escalation, pg. 2-5.

⁹ Richards, K. J. (2007). De-escalation techniques. In M. T. Compton and R. J. Kotwicki (Eds.), Responding to individuals with mental illnesses (pp. 160–174).

¹⁰ National Consensus Policy and Discussion Paper on Use of Force 2017, pg. 2.

¹¹ De-escalation Strategies and Techniques for California Law Enforcement, California Commission on POST, pg. v.

understand how to defuse aggression, anger, unlawful defiance, or uncontrolled emotions.¹² De-escalation achieves control verbally before action should be taken to accomplish control physically.¹³ De-escalation techniques also include non-verbal action or communication during a potential force encounter in an attempt to stabilize the situation and reduce the immediacy of the threat.¹⁴

De-escalation strategies include, but are not limited to, using time, distance, communications, and other available resources to resolve a situation without the need for use of force.¹⁵ Deputies should attempt to control an incident by using time, distance, communications, and available resources in an effort to de-escalate the situation, whenever it is safe, feasible, and reasonable to do so.¹⁶

The four core concepts of de-escalation include:

1. Self-control - understanding of physical and psychological reactions of the public and how law enforcement officers may assist in maintaining self-control.¹⁷
2. Effective communication - clear command and questions, good observation and listening skills, and appropriate terminology will enhance the likelihood of success.¹⁸ Voluntary compliance requires clearly communicated instructions using de-escalation techniques.¹⁹ Remember the importance of voice, neutrality, trustworthiness, and respect.²⁰ Show respect for the subjects involved and be culturally aware of all subjects involved.²¹ Internal and external communications at every organizational point of contact is important; from the front desk or dispatch, where the public makes their initial contact with the Sheriff's Office, to the incidents in the field.²²
3. Scene assessment and management - when possible, provides deputies with an accurate picture of what is occurring and assists in the management of force options.²³ Creating distance may calm an irate individual and help reduce the person's intensity.²⁴ But if doing so poses a loss of situational control, or officer or public safety are further jeopardized, then adding distance may be counterproductive to achieving a positive

¹² Id.

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ National Consensus Policy and Discussion Paper on Use of Force 2017, pg. 2

¹⁵ LAPD 556.10 Use of Force Policy Preamble.

¹⁶ LAPD 556.10 Use of Force Policy Preamble; Cal. Gov. Code section 7286(b)(1).

¹⁷ POST LD 20: Chapter 2 - De-Escalation, pg. 2-5.

¹⁸ Id.

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ Id.

²¹ De-escalation Strategies and Techniques for California Law Enforcement, California Commission on POST, pg. 67.

²² Id. at pg. 64.

²³ Id.

²⁴ POST LD 20: Chapter 2 - De-Escalation, pg. 2-8.

outcome.²⁵ Situational awareness is a critical consideration in de-escalation.²⁶ Recognizing what may be an immediate threat, seeing people or items causing agitation to a violent suspect, or understanding how some stimuli are altering behavior will aid an officer in responding well to an incident.²⁷

4. Force options - reasonable use of force techniques may reduce situational intensity for the safety of all parties.²⁸

The collection of information prior to and during the use of de-escalation and a threat risk assessment may be considered while using de-escalation techniques.²⁹ De-escalation should be an integral and standardized part of call intake prioritization and protocols.³⁰ Dispatch and other personnel will be trained to communicate the de-escalation plan and process prior to the arrival of field personnel.³¹ Dispatchers may have opportunities to de-escalate events prior to officer arrival, lessening the risk to officers and the public.³² Supervisors should give personnel sufficient time to safely use de-escalation techniques.³³

Pre-engagement techniques and tactics should include:

1. Planning and discussion of strategies and tactics.
2. Situational awareness and background.
3. Pre-load and manage available resources for appropriate and timely deployment as necessary.
4. Gather reliable intelligence and effectively share available information through the most efficient means:
 - a. Radio transmission or phone.
 - b. Computer Aided dispatch (CAD).³⁴

De-escalation techniques that are attempted or actually utilized should be documented in the appropriate reports related to an incident.³⁵

De-escalation techniques that can be documented include, but are not limited to:

1. Information gathered prior to arriving at the scene

²⁵ Id.

²⁶ Id.

²⁷ Id.

²⁸ Id.

²⁹ POST LD 20: Chapter 2 - De-Escalation, pg. 2-6.

³⁰ De-escalation Strategies and Techniques for California Law Enforcement, California Commission on POST, pg. 68.

³¹ De-escalation Strategies and Techniques for California Law Enforcement, California Commission on POST, pg. 72.

³² De-escalation Strategies and Techniques for California Law Enforcement, California Commission on POST, pg. 91.

³³ Id.

³⁴ Id. at pg. 66.

³⁵ Id.

2. Use of distance
3. Use of additional officers or a mental health/addiction support team, if available
4. Communication and verbalization techniques utilized
5. The level of success or failure of each de-escalation technique³⁶

When documenting de-escalation practices among agency personnel:

1. There should be post-incident follow-up with line-level personnel, whether the outcome is positive or negative (Debriefing).
2. The Sheriff's Office will use a tracking process to identify trends and assess deputy perceptions of whether their use of de-escalation techniques is effective.
3. Supervisors should not fill in gaps in reports:
 - a. Hold subordinates accountable and correct their reports, not by just correcting the mistake, but by teaching the correction.
 - b. Require full descriptions of the decision-making process and associated actions taken.³⁷

Supervisors should identify any policy or training issues resulting from an incident.³⁸

³⁶ Id.

³⁷ De-escalation Strategies and Techniques for California Law Enforcement, California Commission on POST, pg. 74.

³⁸ Id. at pg. 75.