



LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT
TACTICAL CONCEPTS
Tactics Training Overview

Tactical Concept No. 7

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TACTICAL DE-ESCALATION

PURPOSE

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is guided by the principle of reverence for human life in all investigative, enforcement, and other contacts between officers and members of the public. Officers are often called upon to detain or arrest suspects who are uncooperative, actively resisting, may attempt to flee, pose a danger to others, or pose a danger to themselves. When these situations occur, officers should consider tactics, techniques, and tools that may persuade a suspect to voluntarily comply or may mitigate the need to use a higher level of force to resolve the situation safely.

The purpose of this document is to define tactical de-escalation and provide guidance on techniques and tools that can be used to reduce the intensity of encounters in the field.

Note: This Tactical Concept is meant as a reference for field officers but does not address all techniques or tools that may be used to reduce the intensity of an incident.

Tactical de-escalation is defined as the use of techniques and tools to reduce the intensity of an encounter with a suspect and enable an officer to have additional options to gain voluntary compliance or mitigate the need to use a higher level of force while maintaining control of the situation.

Note: Tactical de-escalation does not require that officers compromise their safety or increase the risk of physical harm to the public.

While enforcing the law and protecting the public, officers are often forced to make split-second decisions in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, rapidly changing, and dangerous. In rapidly developing circumstances, especially when a suspect poses an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury, officers may not have sufficient time or reasonable options available to resolve the situation without the need to use objectively reasonable force.

In other circumstances, however, de-escalation techniques may enable officers to gain additional time and tactical options to potentially reduce the necessity of using force to take a suspect into custody, prevent escape, or address a threat while also maintaining control of the situation. Additionally, the use of intermediate force options may be considered a de-escalation technique.

PROCEDURE

The Department developed the PATROL acronym to assist with de-escalation during field situations. Each component of PATROL is explained below: Planning, Assessment, Time, Redeployment and/or Containment, Other Resources, and Lines of Communication.

Planning

Officers should attempt to arrive at scene with a coordinated approach based upon initial information and any pre-existing knowledge of the suspect(s) or the involved parties. The dynamic nature of most incidents will require tactical plans to be flexible, and officers need to adapt their plan(s) as additional information or factors become known to the officer(s).

Tactical De-Escalation Techniques

- Planning
- Assessment
- Time
- Redeployment and/or Containment
- Other Resources
- Lines of Communication

Assessment

Officers should continually assess the situation as circumstances change and new information is received. If a suspect is failing to comply with orders, officers should attempt to determine whether a suspect's lack of compliance is a deliberate attempt to resist or escape, or an inability to comprehend the situation due to environmental, physical, cognitive, or other conditions. If the suspect is unable to comprehend the situation, other tactical options may be more effective in resolving the situation safely.

Time

Distance + Cover = Time. Time is an essential element of de-escalation as it allows officers the opportunity to communicate with the suspect, refine tactical plans, and, if necessary, call for additional resources. If a suspect is contained and does not pose an imminent threat to officers, the public, or himself/herself, time can provide an opportunity for the suspect to reconsider his/her actions and decisions.

Redeployment and/or Containment

Redeployment and/or containment can afford officers the added benefit of time and distance while continuing to maintain control of the situation. The addition of time and distance may give officers an opportunity to re-assess, communicate, request additional resources, or deploy other tactics to reduce the likelihood of injury to both the public and officers while also mitigating any potential ongoing threats. Redeployment, however, should not enable a subject to gain a tactical advantage, arm himself/herself, or flee and pose a greater danger to the public or officers.

Other Resources

In the case of a tense or potentially dangerous encounter, requesting additional resources can provide officers with specialized expertise, personnel and tools to help control and contain an incident.

Lines of Communication

Maintaining open lines of communication between officers and communicating effectively with a suspect are critically important when managing a tense or potentially dangerous encounter. Communication between officers can improve decision-making under tense circumstances and increase the effectiveness of coordinated actions. In addition, when a suspect observes that officers are prepared, well organized, professional, and working as a team, he or she may be deterred from attempting to flee, fight, or actively resist.

Because every situation is fluid and unique, ongoing communication and coordination between officers is critically important to respond effectively in a tense and uncertain encounter. Communicating with a suspect may slow down the incident, creating time to plan. All or some of the following tactics may be used in the same incident as time or circumstances allow:

- Verbal warnings
- Persuasion
- Defusing
- Empathy
- Redirecting
- Advisements
- Building rapport
- Asking open ended questions
- Giving clear and direct orders

Intermediate Force

Officers may consider intermediate force options as a form of de-escalation. Use of an Electronic Control Device (e.g., TASER), Impact Device (e.g., Baton), Kinetic Energy Projectile (e.g., Beanbag Shotgun, 40mm Less-Lethal Launcher, FN 303 Less-Lethal Launcher), or certain Chemical Agents (e.g., Oleoresin Capsicum) is an appropriate force option when an officer reasonably believes either of the following:

- There is an immediate threat to the safety of the officers or others; or,
- If the threat is not immediately addressed, there is an articulable risk the incident could escalate to the use of deadly force.

Intermediate force options should not be used on a suspect or subject who is believed to be unarmed, and, is passively resisting or merely failing to comply with commands. Verbal threats of violence alone do not justify the use of an intermediate force option.

Other Considerations

When assessing the proportionality and reasonableness of intermediate force, it is critical for officers to consider whether the suspect or subject poses an immediate threat to the officers or others. Additionally, officers should consider the information known at the time and their evaluation of the situation (i.e., totality of the circumstances). There must be an articulable risk that the incident might escalate to the point where deadly force becomes necessary if the threat is not promptly addressed. While intermediate force options can serve as a means of de-escalation, it is essential that their use aligns with the concepts outlined in *Graham v. Connor*: objective reasonableness, totality of the circumstances, governmental interest/balance, and “20/20 hindsight” versus information reasonably known to officers at the time of the incident.

Techniques

Verbal Communication: Verbal communication involves the use of calm, respectful, and empathetic language when interacting with individuals in distress or crisis. The aim is to establish rapport and build trust through effective communication.

Active Listening: Active listening means attempting to understand the concerns and perspectives of the people officers encounter. This includes paying close attention to verbal/non-verbal cues, and acknowledging the emotions expressed by the person.

Time and Distance: Time and distance refers to the creation of physical distance between officers and the individual in order to reduce tension and allow for more time to assess the situation and formulate an appropriate response.

Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT)/Mental Evaluation Unit (MEU): These teams/units are composed of specially trained officers who are equipped with skills to de-escalate situations involving individuals experiencing mental health crises.

Cover and Concealment: Officers should use cover and concealment effectively to protect themselves and others while attempting to de-escalate a situation. This involves positioning themselves strategically to reduce the risk of harm.

Offering Options and Alternatives: Officers may offer individuals in crisis alternative options or solutions to help resolve the situation peacefully. This could involve suggesting resources, support services, or alternative courses of action.

Building Rapport and Trust: Officers can prioritize building rapport and trust with the community through positive interactions and engagement outside of crisis situations. This can help foster mutual respect and cooperation during potentially tense encounters.

Tools

De-escalation tools include but are not limited to: Electronic Control Devices (e.g., TASER), Impact Devices (e.g., Baton), Kinetic Energy Projectiles (e.g., Beanbag Shotgun, 40mm Less-Lethal Launcher, FN 303 Less-Lethal Launcher), certain Chemical Agents (e.g., Oleoresin Capsicum), Restraint Devices (e.g., Handcuffs, Hobble Restraint Device), and Department-approved firearms (e.g., Handgun, Shotgun, Patrol Rifle).

CONCLUSION

The overall objective of any tactical encounter is to gain control and safely resolve the situation. Tactical situations vary and there is no single solution to resolving every incident. In addition, some situations require an immediate response and de-escalation techniques are neither viable nor effective options. Nevertheless, employing tactical de-escalation techniques under the appropriate circumstances can improve officer safety, mitigate threats, reduce injuries, build public trust, and preserve life.

Important Reminder

Deviation from these basic concepts sometimes occurs due to the fluid and rapidly evolving nature of law enforcement encounters and the environment in which they occur. Deviations may range from minor, typically procedural or technical, to substantial deviations from Department tactical training. Any deviations are to be explained by the involved officer(s), and justification for substantial deviation from Department tactical training shall be articulated and must meet the objectively reasonable standard of the Department's Use of Force policy.

This Tactical Concepts – Tactics Training Overview cancels and supersedes Use of Force – Tactics Directive No. 16, Tactical De-escalation Techniques, October 2016.

Field Training Services Unit
Police Training and Education

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