

**SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT
PROCEDURE**

DATE: JUNE 25, 2020

NUMBER: 1.55 - ADMINISTRATION

SUBJECT: DE-ESCALATION

RELATED POLICY: [1.04](#), [1.56](#)

ORIGINATING DIVISION: INTERNAL AFFAIRS

NEW PROCEDURE:

PROCEDURAL CHANGE:

SUPERSEDES: **NEW DEPARTMENT PROCEDURE**

I. PURPOSE

This Department procedure establishes guidelines on the use of de-escalation techniques, crisis intervention tactics, and other alternatives to force.

This procedure should be read and applied in context with Department Procedures 1.04 and 1.56. Nothing in this procedure is meant to modify Procedure 1.04 Use of Force.

II. SCOPE

This procedure applies to all members of the Department.

III. BACKGROUND

A. The San Diego Police Department recognizes and respects the value of human life, having this as its highest priority. It is the policy and practice of the Department to train its officers to perform their duties to the highest standards, with integrity, and to make decisions that are fair, respectful, lawful, and based on good judgment.

B. The law takes into account that police must make split-second decisions in tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving circumstances. *Graham v. Connor*, 490 US 386 (1989). Some such circumstances can be stabilized through the use of de-escalation tactics. Safe de-escalation tactics should be the ultimate goal of every officer responding to potentially violent incidents.

- C. Officers may be called upon to detain or arrest a subject who is uncooperative, is actively resisting, may attempt to flee, poses a danger to others, or poses a danger to him or herself. When safe and reasonable to do so, based on the totality of circumstances, officers shall use de-escalation tactics consistent with Department training to attempt to persuade the subject to voluntarily comply or to reduce the need to use a higher level of force.
- D. The San Diego Police Department is committed to achieving a safe resolution to conflict whenever possible. To this end, the Department trains its officers in tactics, techniques, and strategies to control these types of incidents using time, distance, communications, and other available resources in an effort to de-escalate encounters and gain voluntary compliance.
- E. De-escalation can provide effective tools for officers during interactions with the public and result in improved decision making, reduction in situational intensity and increase the likelihood of outcomes with greater voluntary compliance. Gaining voluntary compliance enhances officer and public safety, helps officers to defuse a situation, mitigates unintended consequences, and establishes police legitimacy and community trust.
- F. Successful resolution of an encounter requires the cooperation of a subject to provide officers with the time and opportunity to employ these de-escalation techniques. While the ultimate objective of every law enforcement encounter is to avoid or minimize injury, nothing in this procedure requires an officer to retreat or be exposed to possible physical injury before applying reasonable force.
- G. The process of incident management and de-escalation includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - 1. Utilizing pre-engagement techniques
 - 2. Assessing the overall scene
 - 3. Establishing effective lines of communication
 - 4. Using appropriate levels of reasonable force, based on the totality of the circumstances
 - 5. Intervening whenever force being used appears unreasonable
 - 6. Rendering aid and evaluating the need for medical assistance
 - 7. Reporting of all force used during the incident
 - 8. Reviewing the incident to ensure adherence to department procedures

IV. DEFINITIONS

- A. De-Escalation – encompasses a variety of strategies and/or techniques designed to reduce the immediacy of a threat, minimize the need for force, and gain voluntary compliance from a subject.
- B. Voluntary Compliance – The act of submitting for investigation, detention, or arrest cooperatively, without verbal or physical resistance requiring force.
- C. Totality of Circumstances – means all facts known to an officer at the time. Considerations applying to both the officer and the subject include, but are not limited to:
 - 1. Age;
 - 2. Availability of other options;
 - 3. Ground fighting
 - 4. Confined spaces
 - 5. Distance between subject(s) and officer(s)
 - 6. Whether the subject is under the influence of alcohol or drugs;
 - 7. Whether the subject has a physical, mental, developmental, or intellectual disability;
 - 8. Prior contacts with the subject or awareness of any propensity for violence;
 - 9. Whether the subject appears to be resisting, attempting to evade arrest by flight, or is attacking the officer(s);
 - 10. Environmental factors such as location/terrain/lighting conditions;
 - 11. Number of subjects/officers;
 - 12. Nature of offense;
 - 13. Opportunity/Time, provided by subject, to allow for de-escalation;
 - 14. Proximity to weapons;
 - 15. Size;
 - 16. Skill;
 - 17. Strength/endurance;
 - 18. Language barriers;

19. Training and experience of the officer;
20. Whether the subject is armed or perceived to be armed;
21. Crowd control situations; and
22. Any other exigent circumstances.

V. PROCEDURES/REQUIRED ACTIONS

- A. When given the time and opportunity, before approaching a subject, officers shall use all available information known at the time of the incident to help assess the situation. This assessment may include, but is not limited to the following:
 1. Obtaining relevant information regarding the incident.
 2. Conducting a threat/risk assessment of the incident.
 3. Considering other available resources and techniques including specialized units, PERT clinicians, and negotiators to resolve the incident.
- B. When given the time and opportunity during an encounter, officers shall create distance by seeking cover and selecting positions that place physical barriers between the officer and the subject, creating a buffer zone. The creation of the buffer zone helps to reduce situational intensity by decreasing perceived pressure while continuing to control the operational space. Officers can move to a position that is tactically advantageous or allows greater distance in order to de-escalate a situation or deploy a greater variety of force options, including lesser force or no force at all.
- C. Officer(s) shall try to establish an effective line of communication with the subject. Some factors affecting communication may include:
 1. The subject's age.
 2. Possible medical or physical conditions.
 3. Level of intoxication due to drugs or alcohol.
 4. Any known or perceived disabilities, including mental illness.
 5. Potential language barriers.
- D. When time and circumstances reasonably permit, officers shall take into consideration that a subject with a diminished capacity may not have the ability to understand or communicate effectively.
- E. Officers shall present lawful orders, request cooperation, and provide clear, concise direction to achieve voluntary compliance.

- F. Officers shall attempt to establish trust, in order to gain compliance with subjects and cooperatively de-escalate situational conflict.
- G. When officers encounter subjects that do not voluntarily comply, reasonable levels of force may be used to achieve a successful resolution. Consistent with Department Procedure 1.04 Use of Force, officers may use force to effect an investigative detention or arrest; control a subject who is in lawful custody; prevent an escape; or, protect the officer, the subject, or another person from injury or death. Any time force is used, the officer shall:
 - 1. Maintain control of enforcement situations.
 - 2. Use a force option which is reasonable under the totality of circumstances
- H. Anytime unreasonable force is used, officers shall intervene, as required and defined in Department Procedure 1.56.
- I. Once a subject is safely in custody, officers shall assess the subject for any potential injuries or medical issues. If the subject has difficulty breathing, is not at a functional level of consciousness, exhibits symptoms of medical distress, is injured, or if the officer has any concern regarding the subject's medical condition, the officer shall request the Fire-Rescue Department personnel or paramedics and render first aid to the extent of their abilities until the Fire-Rescue Department personnel or paramedics arrive.
- J. Whenever physical force used by an officer results in an injury that necessitates medical treatment of any person, the officer shall immediately contact a field supervisor (Refer to Department Procedure 6.01, Handcuffing, Restraining, Searching, and Transporting Procedures).
- K. Officers who use force shall personally prepare the appropriate report (arrest, detention, officer's report, Blue Team entry) documenting their use of force, except when an SDPD investigator interviews the officer and his/her statements (regarding the force used) are documented in the investigator's report.