



Seattle Police Department Policy Manual



8.100 – De-Escalation

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8.100-POL

This policy applies to sworn employees using de-escalation tactics and techniques. When safe and feasible and without compromising law enforcement priorities, de-escalation seeks to minimize the likelihood of the need to use force during an incident, and to increase the likelihood of voluntary compliance.

De-escalation may take the form of scene management, team tactics, and/or individual engagement. When individual engagement is not feasible, de-escalation techniques, including scene management and team tactics that utilize time, distance, and shielding, will still be used unless doing so would create undue risk of harm to any person due to the exigency/threat of a situation.

Force, even when reasonable, necessary, proportional, is not a de-escalation tactic.

De-escalation is reviewed and evaluated under the totality of the circumstances present at the time of the incident.

1. When Safe, Feasible, and Without Compromising Law Enforcement Priorities, Sworn Employees Will Use De-Escalation Tactics to Reduce the Need for Force

Team approaches to de-escalation are encouraged and will consider sworn employee training and skill level, the number of sworn employees, and whether any sworn employee has successfully established rapport with the subject. Where sworn employees use a team approach to de-escalation, every sworn employee's obligation to de-escalate will be satisfied if the sworn employee's actions complement the overall approach.

De-escalation options will be guided by the totality of the circumstances with the goal of attaining voluntary compliance through communication, time, distance, and shielding; considerations may include:

Communication – Sworn employees will use communication intended to gain voluntary compliance, such as:

- Verbal persuasion with clear instructions:

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- When multiple sworn employees are on scene, one sworn employee will be designated to take the lead on communications to avoid competing or confusing commands.
- Sworn employees should consider switching the communication lead if communication is proving ineffective or the initial lead is unable to engage.
- Give advisements and warnings in a calm and explanatory manner.

Exception: Repeated warnings, when they appear ineffective, given as a threat of force are not considered part of de-escalation.

- Using verbal techniques, such as Listen and Explain with Equity and Dignity (LEED) to calm an agitated subject and promote rational decision-making.
- Avoiding language that could escalate the incident (taunts and insults are prohibited).
- Other considerations for communication may include:
 - Attempting to communicate in non-verbal ways when verbal instructions would be inadequate, or
 - Communicating in a way that demonstrates respect for people's dignity (see manual section [5.001 – Standards and Duties](#)).
- Use of pattern interrupts, when appropriate (see manual section [8.050 – Definitions](#)).
- Consideration of whether any lack of compliance is a deliberate attempt to resist rather than a perceived physical or psychological inability to comply based on factors including, but not limited to:
 - Medical conditions,
 - Mental impairment,
 - Developmental disability,
 - Physical limitation,
 - Language barrier,
 - Drug interaction,
 - Behavioral crisis, or
 - Fear or anxiety.

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Time – Sworn employees will attempt to slow down or stabilize the situation so that more time, options, and resources are available for incident resolution. These tactics may include:

- Scene stabilization, which assists in transitioning incidents from dynamic to static by limiting access to unsecured areas, limiting mobility, and preventing the introduction of non-involved community members.
- Avoiding or minimizing physical confrontation, unless necessary (for example, to protect someone, or stop dangerous behavior).
- Calling extra resources or sworn employees to assist, such as CIT or less-lethal trained sworn employees.

Distance – Sworn employees will maximize their tactical advantage by increasing distance to allow for greater reaction time.

- Employing tactical positioning and repositioning to maintain the benefit of distance and cover.

Shielding – Sworn employees will utilize cover and concealment for tactical advantage, such as:

- Placing barriers between an uncooperative subject and sworn employees by using existing structures to provide a shield or other protection, or
- Using natural barriers in the immediate environment.