Conflict management using de-escalation, communication and negotiation

Consultation
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Foreword

Policing is a physically demanding and potentially dangerous profession. The police routinely have to respond to and deal with conflict situations involving violent and aggressive people. In responding to such situations, officers and staff put themselves in potential danger, and their actions can also have an impact on public safety, trust and confidence in the police. This work is focused on ensuring officers and staff are adequately supported to develop the de-escalation, communication and negotiation skills necessary to resolve conflict situations safely without using force, where this is possible.

There will always be occasions where officers and staff are required to ‘go hands on’ and the use of force on an individual is necessary in order to protect the public, themselves or to effect an arrest. Officers and staff are trained to use the minimum force necessary to achieve that and they often find themselves operating in highly charged environments where immediate decisions are needed. More can and should be done to stop police officers and staff becoming victims of assault. These guidelines are the first stage in a programme of work by the College of Policing which will support officers and staff who have to use force by identifying the tactics and techniques that are most safe and effective.

All officers and staff would prefer to deal with conflict situations in a way where the use of force is not necessary and this guidance looks
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to support this by setting out the available evidence on how to assess and respond to situations in a way which minimises the likelihood that the use of force will be required. Developing evidence-based guidance on the most effective techniques to de-escalate, diffuse conflict and ‘cool down’ situations is one way we can help officers to stay safe.

Using effective de-escalation and communication techniques during confrontational encounters may also have other benefits. Research shows that police encounters where decision making is explained and individuals are treated with fairness, dignity and respect are likely to increase public compliance, cooperation and satisfaction and help to reduce crime.¹

The practitioners and subject experts who developed this guidance drew on their professional knowledge as well as extensive reviews of the evidence on techniques and tactics for managing conflict safely without force. Over 20,000 studies have been sifted for relevance and quality to ensure only the best available evidence is included and this evidence has been supplemented with a call for practice evidence as well as focus groups with frontline staff and observations of current personal safety training.

It has become clear during the course of this work that much of the current focus of personal safety training is on the physical techniques for containing and managing aggressive individuals. Whilst we have encountered some really innovative approaches to developing de-escalation skills across the country, there is generally much less investment in the development of communication and de-escalation skills that are necessary for the safe resolution of these encounters.

It has also become clear that de-escalation training in a police context has not been the subject of any rigorous research studies. Indeed, there is very little research in the UK on the police use of force generally and specifically on the impact of training. Much of the research evidence comes from the health sector with several evaluations of staff de-escalation training to support the management of psychiatric patients. Though not directly relevant to the policing context, the findings have important implications for training officers and staff to resolve encounters safely.

But training is not the only thing that matters. Evidence shows that for successful transfer of learning into the workplace, learners must be motivated to learn the material, feel supported by the organisation, and have the opportunity to use the new skills once back on the job.² This guidance therefore also includes organisational and supervisory guidelines to help ensure officers and staff are adequately supported to use skills that could keep them safer.

Guidance is of course just a starting point. It is hoped that by reviewing the evidence and developing guidelines on what is known so far, that this will act as a catalyst for further action. Working together as practitioners and subject experts, we have already identified opportunities to improve our safety training offer for officers and staff and equip them with the skills to help keep them safe.

ACC Dave Hardcastle
Chair of Guideline Committee
National Lead for Response Policing

Summary of recommendations

This College of Policing guidance report contains four guidelines related to resolving conflict in everyday police-citizen encounters without using force. The guidelines are designed to encourage safer resolution and reduce the risks of assaults to officers and staff, and improve public safety. There will, however, always be conflict situations where using force is necessary and the safest response.

The guidelines cover the following areas:

- personal safety training
- supervisor knowledge and awareness
- learning the lessons
- developing the evidence base.

For each guideline the type and strength of the evidence underpinning the guideline is shown together with a summary of the evidence and what this might mean in practice. More information about the process used to develop this guidance can be found later in the report. A summary of the guidelines is shown below.
## Summary table
### Keeping our people safe

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### 1 Personal safety training

Chief Constables should ensure that any personal safety training includes the following non-physical aspects of conflict management in order to reduce assaults against the police and increase public safety:

- Situational awareness.
- The impact factors that may affect the likelihood of officers and the public using force.
- Emotional awareness and self-regulation.
- Verbal and non-verbal communication and negotiation skills.
- Realistic scenario based learning drawing on evidence from real-world situations (eg, body worn video footage).

### 2 Supervisor knowledge and awareness

Chief constables should ensure supervisors have knowledge and awareness of the potential contributory factors to escalation (eg, resilience, stress, being a victim of assault) to be able to support their officers in order to prevent assaults against them and ensure appropriate use of force. Awareness can be maintained by:

- Routine debriefing.
- Regular 1-2-1s.
- Patterns in data on the use of force, assaults against the police and injuries.

### 3 Learning the lessons

Forces should take an evidence-based approach to developing officer skills to assist de-escalation and support appropriate use of force, and officer and staff safety. Existing data should be used where available.

This may include:

- Data on use of force, assaults against the police and injuries.
- Root cause analysis.
- Post-incident debriefs.

### 4 Developing the evidence base

The College of Policing should work with forces and academia to develop the evidence base on the use of force, assaults against the police and injuries by:

- Analysing police data.
- Exploring current training practice.
- Developing different approaches to personal safety training and testing its impact.

### Evidence-base:

- **empirical evidence**: good | moderate | limited
- **practitioner evidence**
Introduction

What is this guidance for?
This College guidance is designed to provide clear evidence-based guidelines for practice focused on resolving conflict situations without using force. The aim of the guidance is to ensure that officers are properly supported to develop their skills in the non-physical aspects of conflict management.

There are some situations, for example where there is an imminent risk to life, where force is necessary and likely to be the safest response. Officers and staff should also be skilled in tools and techniques to de-escalate situations without using force when it is appropriate to do so and be confident in their ability to use these skills to help resolve situations safely. Officers use these skills routinely in their day to day work but the degree to which they are formally taught as part of an officer’s professional development varies.

Who developed this guidance?
The guidance was developed collaboratively by a guideline committee and an internal College development team. The guideline committee was made up of frontline and specialist police practitioners and academic subject matter experts. The role of the guideline committee was to consider the evidence and develop guidelines taking into account the views of stakeholders.
How evidence-based is this guidance?
The guidance draws on an extensive review of the best available research evidence which has been supplemented by the experience of frontline practitioners. Although the evidence base in this area is fairly limited in policing, in healthcare there is an emerging picture of how training in specific communication skills can help reduce assaults against staff. Due to the state of the evidence it is not possible to be completely prescriptive about what good de-escalation training looks like however, there is sufficient consistency across the studies to give us a steer on what the key skills might be and to be confident that encouraging a focus on developing these skills is helpful.

Where relevant, additional supporting information drawn from the Personal Safety Manual, National Police Firearms Curriculum and Armed Policing APP has also been included in the practice advice boxes.

Who is the guidance for?
This guidance is primarily aimed at chief constables and learning and development leads in forces. This work has identified that training in tactical communications is integral to managing conflict situations without force. This guidance will also be of interest to supervisors, frontline officers and staff to help in developing their own approach to handling difficult encounters.

What's next?
The College would like to encourage further work in this area by identifying the tactics and techniques that are most safe and effective to support officers and staff who have to use force, building the evidence base related to effective de-escalation and better understanding the impact of different approaches to training and developing these skills.
Guideline 1: Personal safety training

Chief Constables should ensure that any personal safety training includes the following non-physical aspects of conflict management in order to reduce assaults against the police and increase public safety:

- Situational awareness.
- The impact factors that may affect the likelihood of officers and the public using force
- Emotional awareness and self-regulation.
- Verbal and non-verbal communication and negotiation skills.
- Realistic scenario based learning drawing on evidence from real-world situations (e.g., body worn video footage).

Evidence summary

There is promising evidence to show training associated with reductions in incidents of aggression and physical violence, shared some common features:

- A focus on understanding the motivations of others and showing empathy
- Teaching specific interpersonal communication skills
- A focus on how to control one’s own emotions and remain calm
- Some element of scenario-based role-play or live simulation.

This evidence is based on 18 studies that tested de-escalation or conflict management training. The majority of evidence comes from healthcare, with five studies being from a policing context.

Evidence-base:

- Empirical evidence: good | moderate | limited
- Practitioner evidence: available
Situational awareness

Situational awareness has been defined as the ability to perceive and process all potential threats in the environment (Andersen, J. & Gusstafsberg, H. 2016). The importance of maintaining high levels of situational awareness in conflict situations was stressed both by practitioners and members of the guideline committee. There is some evidence that situational awareness is a skill that can be taught. A randomised controlled trial testing the impact of training police officers in techniques to enhance psychological and physiological control during stressful incidents found that trained officers were more situationally aware and made a greater number of correct use of force decisions in scenarios (Andersen, J. & Gusstafsberg, H. 2016).

The National Decision Model involves assessing the situation, including any specific threat, the risk of harm and the potential for benefits. Wherever circumstances allow officers should:

- obtain as much information as possible from the control room before arrival
- gather as much information from the scene on arrival from what is seen, heard, witnesses, CCTV etc
- make a threat/risk assessment based on this information.

The following questions should be considered:

- What is happening? (what is seen, heard and felt?)
- What do I know so far? (consider previous experience, information from other people, intelligence sources, briefings etc)
- What do I not know?
- Do I need to seek more information (or intelligence)?
- What could go wrong? (and what could go well?)
- How probable is the risk of harm?
- How serious would it be?
- Is that level of risk acceptable?
- Do I need to take action immediately?
- Is this a situation for the police alone to deal with?
- Am I the appropriate person to deal with this?
- What are my possible options?

Creating time and space

Using the BUGEE mnemonic may help create opportunities for the subject and officers to gain additional time and space to defuse the situation:

- Be prepared to back off
- Use of effective cover
- Give space and time if possible
- Early negotiation
- Evacuate immediate area.
Try not to wade in too quickly, thus putting yourself into a situation that you may need to fight your way out of.

Where possible take a moment to stop and assess, both the situation and the individual’s reaction to it.

Assess the threat level faced from the subject and location - creating a clear safe distance in case of escalation or going hands on.

Maintain awareness of your surroundings eg, the presence of bystanders, busy roads, the arrival of back-up.

Consider removing officers where necessary - recognise the option to remove an officer (where feasible) from a situation where the situation is escalating rapidly.

Consider the National Decision Model to help assess your options.

Pay attention to the individual’s danger cues (eg, fists clenching, hands rising above waist etc) to assist in making a more accurate threat assessment. There may be conflict between what an individual says and their body language. Consider the body language until proved otherwise as this can help predict an individual’s actions and possibly increase reaction time.

Anxiety, loss of verbal control and loss of physical control are pre-indicators of a potential physical act being carried out.

High levels of adrenalin can result in loss of peripheral vision – try and sweep your head and glance sideways as often as possible to be aware of the environment and to prevent the fixation of attention upon the subjects to the exclusion of others.

Impact factors

‘Impact factors’ are those factors that have been shown to make encounters between the police and public riskier. The dynamic risk assessments that officers and staff make during conflict situations can be supported by officers having awareness of impact factors and taking them into account alongside other information about the threats they face.

In line with officer experience, the evidence review suggests officers might be more likely to be assaulted during a conflict situation when the citizen is:

- hostile towards the police
- intoxicated
- in a high-crime neighbourhood.

In addition, the officers might be more likely to use force in situations when the suspect:

- is disrespectful or abusive towards them
- possesses a weapon
- appears intoxicated
- resists arrest.

The risk of force being used might also be greater in encounters with people who are male, younger, non-white or perceived to have mental ill health.
Mentally vulnerable individuals
Officers should be aware that an inappropriate or disproportionate response to someone experiencing emotional or mental distress could escalate the situation. When engaging with a potentially mentally-distressed individual, officers should consider:

- approaching the individual calmly and with a low consistent voice
- acknowledging the person’s experience and distress
- asking the person what’s been happening to them
- being clear about what is happening
- reassuring the individual (repeatedly where necessary) that you are no physical threat to them
- asking the individual whether they need help in a gentle and thoughtful manner
- being alert to changes in behaviour and using instinct where concerned, seeking advice and support from a medical professional
- informing the individual that you understand the situation is frightening.

There is a growing recognition that the use of force and restraint against people in a mental health crisis or suffering from drug or substance induced psychosis can pose a life threatening risk.

Emotional awareness and self-regulation
Emotional awareness and self-regulation are key aspects of emotional intelligence – the ability to identify and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others. Practitioners felt that an officer’s emotional intelligence was closely linked to their ability to communicate effectively in difficult situations. They talked about the importance of:

- demonstrating empathy
- understanding possible reasons for a person’s behaviour
- being aware of the impact of their own behaviour on others
- being aware of the affect of impact factors on your decision making.

Evidence from the training studies supported this as interventions that delivered reductions in incidents of violence or assaults and/or demonstrable behaviour change, typically included a focus on:

- aspects of emotional intelligence
- understanding the motivations of others
- showing empathy
- controlling one’s own emotions and remaining calm.

Emotional awareness and self-regulation – practice advice
- When dealing with an incident, be assertive, signal non-aggression and use active listening skills.
- Be aware of your body language and how this can come across to others.
- Know that people are shouting at the uniform, not necessarily at you.
- Recognise your own stress and don’t let it build up.
- Recognise it takes a lot of effort for someone to be angry and aggressive and know that at some point the situation will calm down.
Active listening

Active listening has been described as ‘a system of opening and maintaining communications through the use of empathy, listening and body language’.

Active listening should be used throughout – remaining open to what the individual is saying starts the rapport building process:

- Be open, receptive, don’t pre-judge, be unbiased and fair.
- Listen to the whole message, take notice of use of words, tone and body language.
- Look at the person to show you are listening.
- Empathise – demonstrate understanding.
- Nod your head to indicate understanding or to encourage the individual to keep talking.
- Paraphrase what they have told you and check understanding.
- Avoid criticism and praise appropriately, if necessary criticise their behaviour rather than them personally.
- Avoid fake understanding and taking sides.
- Use open questions to open up conversation use pauses appropriately to allow the individual to respond.
- Stand at a comfortable distance from the individual and slightly side on to promote cooperation.
- Where possible, act on what is said.
- Make it clear that you have plenty of time for the conversation.

Crisis and hostage negotiators use ‘verbal containment’ to lower the risk of violence. If a person is using their energy in communicating, they might be less likely to use force.

Verbal communication

Verbal communication describes the words and phrases, tone of voice, intonation and other expressions used when an officer or staff member interacts with a member of the public. Verbal communication was described by practitioners as their first tactic in trying to de-escalate or diffuse conflict situations. Evidence from the review suggests that specific communication techniques were a common element of effective training. Officers repeatedly stressed the value of effective verbal communication to create time and distance, slow things down and help build a rapport with an individual. Research on procedural justice⁶ has highlighted that officers can encourage people to be more cooperative by:

- giving people a ‘voice’, letting them tell their side of the story, and listening
- making impartial decisions and explaining how they were reached
- showing trustworthiness by being open and honest
- treating people with dignity and respect.

The College of Policing (2015) Personal Safety Manual provides detailed information on the key principles of effective communication to achieve these aims. Authorised Professional Practice on Mental Health provides further information on communication with people with mental ill health.

Verbal communication – practice advice

- Avoid commands beginning with ‘don’t’ and use outcome focused language instead eg, ‘what is going to happen next is…’
- Use open questions to engage the person.
- Explain why you are taking the action you are.
- Be honest about what is going to happen next.
- Keep talking – even during/after going hands on.
- Speak clearly, use simple language, avoid using jargon and slang where appropriate and check understanding.
- Do not shout, use a raised voice or use threatening language – remain calm.
- Minimise the number of people needed to deal with the situation.
- Introduce yourself, ask the individual their name and use it.
- Use the pronoun ‘I’ rather than ‘you’ to take responsibility and promote cooperation and understanding.
- Be assertive rather than aggressive eg, ‘I want to help you (aim) but you make that very difficult for me (consequence) when you shout and swear (situation)’
- Use deflection and redirection to deal with swearing, vulgarity and insults eg, ‘I appreciate what you are saying but…’ ‘I hear what you are saying but/and…’, ‘I understand you but…’

Options
Consideration should be given to the different ways to resolve the situation with the least risk of harm.

Options may include:
- LEAPS - Listen, Empathise, Ask, Paraphrase, Summarise
- 5 Step Appeal – Simple, Reasoned, Personal, Final, Action (Final: ‘Is there anything I can reasonably do to make you co-operate with me/us?’)

The five-step appeal model

This model offers a valuable means of final approach in cases of resistance whereby individuals are given every chance to comply with the officer’s requests.

- **Step 1: Simple appeal** – Ask the individual to comply with the officer’s request.
- **Step 2: Reasoned appeal** – Explain why the request has been made, what law if any has been broken, and what conduct has caused the request.
- **Step 3: Personal appeal** – This may remind the individual that they may be jeopardising values that are high priorities to them eg, loss of free time if arrested, loss of money, loss of income, possibility of a criminal record, loss of respect of their partner and family.
- **Step 4: Final appeal** – The officer should now finally tell them what is required and use a phrase that means the same as the following example: ‘Is there anything I can reasonably do to make you co-operate with me/us?’
- **Step 5: Action** – Reasonable force may be the only option left in the case of continued resistance.

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication or body language includes physical gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, as well as posture and body positioning, unspoken understandings and presuppositions, and cultural and environmental conditions that may affect any encounter between people. Non-verbal communication can be a powerful form of communication and, like verbal language, can be interpreted differently by different people and groups, causing considerable potential for misunderstanding. Officers spoke about the importance of being aware of the impact of their own body language, expressions and mannerisms and should also be aware that they will be communicating with a diverse range of people, all of whom may have a different perception of what is acceptable.
Advice on posture, positioning and body movement can be found in the College of Policing (2015) Personal Safety Manual.

**Non-verbal communication – practice advice**

- Allow the individual time to speak, continue to signal non-aggression, adopt a relaxed posture and use friendly, open gestures.
- Be aware of their own non-verbal signals – signaling a non-aggressive response can help defuse a situation.
- Move slowly, allowing the individual space, whilst adopting a basic or interview stance.
- Be aware of the ‘Betari’s Box’ communication model – this model identifies the way in which individuals can get locked into a cycle of behaviour.

**Scenario-based learning**

Scenario-based learning normally involves students working their way through a storyline, in which they are required to practice newly-acquired skills to solve an ambiguous situation or complex problem. Evidence from the review suggested that training that achieved behaviour change included some form of scenario based learning. Practitioners echoed this finding with calls for more realistic role playing in the safety training.

Use of realistic scenario based learning may provide an opportunity to integrate personal safety training into routine practice and help officers to acquire or develop skills. Doing so may help the transition of behaviour from the ‘classroom’ to the ‘street’. Officers may also feel better prepared for real-life situations, such as managing a person in a difficult situation.

There are a range of options that could be considered. One of the studies included in the evidence review for these guidelines (Andersen et al 2016) involved officers practicing their use-of-force decision-making skills in realistic field settings (eg, apartments, abandoned warehouse) with trained actors and stress-inducing environmental factors (eg, low light, loud noises). Other possibilities include role-play scenarios within a more traditional personal safety training setting, which give officers the opportunity to handle the scenario in a range of different ways (including de-escalating conflict), or the use of body worn video footage. Other police training studies have highlighted the importance of students being given the opportunity to practice their skills, reflect on their practice and received personalised feedback (Wheller et al 2013).

**De-escalation training case study links**

Case studies have been produced by the following forces:

- Hampshire constabulary
- Sussex Police
- Bedfordshire Police
Guideline 2: Supervisor knowledge and awareness

Chief constables should ensure supervisors have knowledge and awareness of the potential contributory factors to escalation (e.g., resilience, stress, being a victim of assault) to be able to support their officers in order to prevent assaults against them and ensure appropriate use of force, and officer and staff safety. Awareness can be maintained by:

- routine debriefing
- regular 121s
- checking any patterns in data on the use of force, assaults against the police and injuries.

Evidence summary

An individual’s ability to consistently remain calm and communicate effectively in difficult situations was identified by practitioners as being associated with their level of resilience and wellbeing. Supervisors were seen as having a key role to play in recognising wellbeing issues and supporting their staff.

Two studies looked at the impact of emotional exhaustion on use of force with mixed results. Three studies found previous injury on the job was related to greater use of force.

Evidence-base:

- Empirical evidence: good
- Practitioner evidence: available

Supervisors have an important role to play both in supporting officers who have been assaulted and by encouraging reflective practice for example through de-briefing difficult encounters and getting officers to consider whether there might be any alternative options for tackling similar encounters in the future. Supervisors also need to be alive to any potential contributory factors and use regular 121s, debriefs and outputs from analysis of use of force, assaults or injuries data to understand the support their staff may need.

Contributory factors

Contributory factors are those influencing factors that can work together to increase the likelihood that a situation may escalate and result in use of force. There are some potential contributory factors that could affect an officer’s response or could escalate a situation rapidly.

Wellbeing and resilience

While the review did not look specifically for evidence relating to wellbeing and resilience, they were identified as potential contributory factors by practitioners. An officer’s ability to stay calm and communicate effectively while dealing with a confrontational person was thought to be strongly associated with the officers’ personal level of resilience and wellbeing. Officers discussed some of the emotional work associated with their public facing role and the levels of abuse they can sometimes face (and in some cases become hardened to) and the impact this can have on their wellbeing and resilience.
Wellbeing and resilience – practice advice

- Debriefing with colleagues or as a shift was cited by some officers as a useful way of reflecting and not taking it home.
- Officers can be good at hiding stress or wellbeing issues and so the importance of team and supervisory relationships was highlighted to ‘notice behaviour that is out of the norm’.
- The importance of good supervision, regular 121s were highlighted as essential opportunities for staff to open up about any problems.
- The bravado and banter of the shift briefings was discussed as a potential barrier to flagging wellbeing issues.
- Supervisors should explore opportunities to support officers in their role where possible. Being placed on restricted duties with the knowledge that this may result in more work for the shift was considered a potential barrier to reporting wellbeing issues.

Potential impact of stress

Officers had consistent views on the impact of stress and described how:

- there seems to be a link between stress and decision making – the higher the level of stress, the more likelihood for officers to make rash decisions, lose motor skills, forget training and communicate badly.
- Being stressed may weaken an officer’s tolerance and mean they will react/use force sooner than they would normally.
- Being stressed may inhibit ability to listen and come up with creative solutions (they are more likely to be task focused and use force).
- Resourcing pressures may contribute to escalation, ‘the accumulation of jobs through a shift can lead to pressured decision making…[there is] pressure to resolve things quickly so we haven’t time to talk to a person for 20 minutes…’
- Stress related illness may still not be taken seriously by managers in some cases, ‘although supportive on the face of it, behind closed doors it is very different’.

7 Evidence exists to support this link but it was not specifically included as part of this review.
Guideline 3: Learning the lessons

Forces should take an evidence-based approach to developing officer skills to assist de-escalation and support appropriate use of force, and officer and staff safety. Existing data should be used where available. This may include:

- data on use of force, assaults against the police and injuries
- root cause analysis
- post-incident debriefs.

Evidence summary

Practitioners felt that insufficient time was given to non-physical techniques in personal safety training.

The guideline committee identified a number of existing data sources that could be used to identify areas for skill development and continue to ensure that current training is fit for purpose.

Evidence-based approach

The College’s definition of evidence-based policing sets out, in broad terms, what is meant by forces taking an evidence-based approach to developing officer skills. At its core, the definition involves officers and staff using the ‘best available’ evidence to inform policing policy and practices. In the context of officers managing conflict, this approach might involve the analysis of assaults against the police, injuries and use of force data to understand when officers, staff and members of the public are at most at risk, the use of debriefs and root cause analysis to systematically identify lessons learnt and evaluating the impact of innovations to personal safety training.

Use of force, assaults and injuries data

Police forces have been collecting data on officers’ use of force for several years but not in a consistent way. Following a call for greater transparency by the Home Secretary in 2014, the National Police Chiefs’ Council carried out a review of forces’ recording.
practices and proposed a nationally consistent approach. This resulted, from April 2017, in the majority of forces agreeing to collect and publish the same data on officers’ use of force. The recommended dataset includes details on injuries to officers and citizens sustained during use of force incidents, and some forces may expect officers to gather additional data locally. In addition, forces may also gather other data on assaults against officers and staff. These data on use of force, assaults and injuries should enable forces to assess the use and impact of different use of force techniques, and develop a stronger evidence base on the effectiveness of training, tactics and equipment.

**Root cause analysis**
When incidents happen, it is important that lessons are learned in order to prevent the same thing happening again. Root cause analysis is a method used in the NHS to identify and correct the root causes of events, rather than simply addressing the ‘presenting symptoms’. Focusing remedial action on root causes aims to prevent the problem recurring. Analysis is carried out after an event to identify root causes with a view to highlighting possible future issues and enabling appropriate action to be taken to prevent them.

**Debriefs**
Debriefing identifies good practice and areas for improvement, which could include organisational learning. Debriefs can be used to:
- identify issues regarding operational performance of a team or an officer
- prevent mistakes recurring
- help to identify an officer’s stress level and emotional wellbeing
- support officers in unloading intelligence or information that may be relevant
- be a useful way of reflecting occurrences
- allows for officers to discuss their concerns.
Guideline 4: Developing the evidence base

The College should work with forces and academia to develop the evidence base on the use of force, assaults against the police and injuries by:

- analysing police data
- exploring current training practice
- developing different approaches to personal safety training and testing its impact.

Evidence summary

The evidence review identified a limited number of well-designed and implemented studies but very few that focused specifically on policing demonstrating a clear gap in the evidence.

Evidence-base:

Practitioner evidence: available

The review of the evidence carried out for the development of these guidelines revealed a general lack of research from the UK on issues relating to the police use of force. There is an opportunity for the College to encourage a collaborative approach with forces and universities to ensure that these gaps in the evidence are addressed. The availability for the first time of nationally consistent data means that there will be scope to examine patterns in the use of force across the police service, such as:

- the factors associated with officers being assaulted and using particular types of force, injuries, and incidents escalating
- differences between officers and police forces
- the effect of personal safety training.

The College should review and update this guidance to reflect the developing evidence base.

Critical gaps remain in the evidence on personal safety training about what specific techniques should be taught, how they should be taught, for how long and how often, and what effect training has on officer and public safety. Guideline 1 in particular provides the scope for the College, forces, and academics to develop and test the impact of innovations in personal safety training (ie, coverage of the non-physical aspects of conflict management and use of realistic scenario based learning) through carefully designed and executed studies. In addition, exploratory research using a range of methods would help to develop a better understanding of the issues that officers face during conflict situations and how personal training is currently delivered across the service, both of which could inform the design of training innovations.
The development process

How this guidance was developed
This guidance was developed by the safer resolution guideline committee according to the College of Policing pilot process. The process involves bringing together an independent committee of academics, practitioner topic experts and frontline practitioners who collectively review the best available evidence and agree whether any guidelines for policing practice can and should be made. The evidence presented to the committee includes evidence from the best available research in the topic area together with expertise elicited directly from practitioners.

What is a systematic review?
A systematic review summarises the research evidence on a particular topic, using strict criteria to identify relevant studies and exclude studies that do not meet pre-set quality and methodological requirements. Systematic review principles are used to make sure that the entire process is as transparent as possible and potential bias is minimised. By using systematic reviewing principles we are able to identify relevant evidence that can be used to support decision-making and practice, as well as highlighting any gaps in the evidence base.

Identifying research evidence
The research evidence underpinning this guidance was identified through a review of the evidence according to systematic review principles.
The evidence review focused on the following questions.

1. What is effective in minimising the need to use force in conflict situations?

2. What increases or decreases the likelihood that a potential conflict situation will result in the use of force?

A review protocol was developed for each question. The figure below outlines the process followed:

**Key stages of the evidence review process**

1. **Draft inclusion criteria covering study focus, and methodology to help decide which studies should be included**
2. **Draft keywords to be used to search for relevant studies**
3. **Search academic databases using keywords**
4. **Screen titles and abstracts of all the studies found to reject any that don’t meet the inclusion criteria**
5. **Screen studies that passed the first screen again, this time using the full papers and a more stringent inclusion criteria**
6. **Extract key information such as research methods, population and findings from the remaining, eligible studies**
7. **Assess studies for quality and relevance. Synthesise information into evidence tables and written summaries**

**Flow of the evidence**

The diagrams below show the flow of studies through the different phases of the review. There are two diagrams, one for each separate review question. The diagrams illustrate just how extensive an evidence review can be, with initial searching returning thousands of studies before sifting, rating and reviewing returns a smaller number of studies that constitute the best available evidence to answer the question.

**1. What is effective in minimising the need to use force in conflict situations?**

- **Records identified through database searching** (n = 13,228)
- **Additional records identified through other sources** (n = 24)
- **Records excluded** (n = 13,074)
- **Titles and abstracts screened** (n = 13,252)
- **Full text articles assessed for eligibility** (n = 178)
- **Studies included** (n = 23)

2. What increases or decreases the likelihood that a potential conflict situation will result in the use of force?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Records identified through database searching (n = 7,684)</th>
<th>Additional records identified through other sources (n = 12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Titles and abstracts screened (n = 7,696)</td>
<td>Records excluded (n = 7,421)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 275)</td>
<td>Records excluded (n = 210)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies included (n = 65)</td>
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Assessing the evidence

An evidence rating which represents the author’s judgement about the strength of the research evidence is provided for each recommendation. The strength of the research evidence has been rated as either good, moderate or limited. Ratings are based upon three features:

1. **Relevance:** An assessment of the extent to which the context of the study translates to the situations in which the guidelines will be applied, often referred to as ‘ecological validity.’ If a study is focused on a different sector, in artificial settings, or a different population, relevance is considered to be lower.

2. **Consistency:** An assessment of the consistency of the findings across the body of evidence as a whole.

3. **Risk of bias:** A risk of bias tool was created to assess factors that may have influenced the results of the study. This includes:
   - the methods used in the study
   - whether the participants in the study were likely to be representative of the wider population
   - whether there seemed to be important differences between the control and treatment groups.

High quality studies would be considered to have a low risk of bias and received higher ratings.

**Practice evidence review**

Practitioner experience was collected using a number of methods. A general call for practice was issued to all forces asking for examples of police practice, training or ongoing research relating to initial account interviewing. The College Development Team also
conducted semi-structured telephone interviews and focus groups with frontline officers. These focus groups were carried out using a virtual tool developed for critical incident de-briefing known as 10,000 volts (10KV). 10KV is a web based tool that has been used in over 300 operational debriefing incidents. Each participant has their own tablet allowing them to contribute anonymously to an online discussion, usually in response to a series of pre-set questions. All responses are recorded and analysed to understand any common themes or key issues raised.

The 10KV questions were developed with input from the Guideline Committee. The aim of the questions was to gather specific practical information about how officers handle difficult encounters and how well trained and equipped they feel to do that. In total over 30 participants from over ten forces took part. Participants included frontline responders, supervisors and training and development leads.
De-escalation training case studies

Hampshire Constabulary

What happened?
Hampshire extended its annual PST refresher to two days in response to a high number of officer assaults. It was also felt that a one-day training session was insufficient in ensuring officers were as skilled and confident as possible to deal with conflict.

What training is now delivered?
Day one includes a 90-minute interactive session on the National Decision Model. Officers discuss impact factors related to the subject, environment and officer (e.g., warning and danger signs, behaviour, verbal and non-verbal communication and self-regulation) and different communication models (e.g., Betari’s box, LEAPS, the 5 Step Appeal, building rapport and transactional analysis). De-escalation is a consistent theme throughout the day.

Day two is delivered around six weeks later and contains a separate 60-minute session on de-escalation. In this session, officers receive input on how the communication models can be applied in an operational context. Their learning is reinforced through roleplays performed by trainers, using scenarios designed to demonstrate how to de-escalate and gain control of situations effectively through communication and without resorting to physical force. Officers learn by observing the scenarios and and providing feedback to the trainers.
taking part. The roleplays include some of the communication models to see whether officers are able to identify them.

What was learned?

- Stressing that, while some officers may have used de-escalation skills effectively for years, training can help them understand why some strategies may have worked. Other officers will be unaware of the communication models.
- Explaining that the purpose of personal safety training is to make officers more aware of the threats and risks they face, that the risks of harm increase once they go ‘hands on’, and that the risks are reduced if they are can resolve situations without force.
- Emphasising that communication skills may not work in all situations, and that the training does not mean using force is not an option.
- Recognising the need to extend the length of personal safety training to include the de-escalation inputs and scenario-based learning.

What has been the response to the new training?

Practitioner feedback

- ‘PST2 is much more beneficial than standard PST. Very well delivered.’
- ‘I thought our PST was more relevant in content than it has been previously. It felt more useful.’
- ‘I found this to be a really useful course, which I feel we should have been training for several years, with the increased likelihood of assaults it was really useful to have proper training.’

Sussex Police

What happened?

Sussex identified ways to incorporate de-escalation training within its two-day annual PST, as a result of being involved in the closed consultation of these guidelines. There was also local anecdotal evidence that situations were sometimes escalating too quickly and that there were opportunities for officers to de-escalate.

What training is now delivered?

Before attending the course, officers review an online pre-read document covering officer safety and first aid. Different communication models are covered in this pre-read (eg, active listening, LEAPS, the 5 Step Appeal, Cooper’s Colour Codes, profiled subject behaviour, impact factors and reasonable officer responses).

Day one of the course includes a 30-minute activity on de-escalation consisting of group work and discussion. The officers are divided into one of three groups. The first group is asked to identify barriers to communication, the second different communication models, and the third what makes people behave aggressively and unpredictably. The trainers use the group work to discuss and bring out effective de-escalation strategies. The CARES mnemonic is also discussed as a potentially safer way of dealing with people who officers perceive to be suffering from mental ill-health.

Day two contains a 75-minute role-play session, using scenarios that allow officers to demonstrate practical application of their learning. All officers participate in two realistic scenarios, one of which has been designed to be resolved without physical force. The officers take part in the scenarios in a pair, and receive feedback from trainers. They remain in the training arena afterwards to observe the remaining scenarios.
What was learned about introducing the new training?

- Needing to develop other activities for officers to complete while they wait to participate in their scenarios, particularly when training large groups.
- Understanding that some officers find it distracting to take part in the scenarios in front of their colleagues and would prefer not to be observed.
- Recognising that giving individual feedback to every officer can be challenging due to time constraints but remains important.
- Needing to take steps to make the role-play scenarios as realistic as possible by, for example, dimming the lights to simulate night time, using crash mates to simulate walls, and introducing street sounds.

What has been the response to the new training?
The de-escalation training has been well-received by frontline officers and senior leaders in the force alike. Some can reportedly now see that the same scenario can be resolved with less risk as a result of using de-escalation techniques.

Bedfordshire Police

What happened?
Bedfordshire plans to pilot a separate one-day de-escalation training course in response to a recent increase in officer assaults.

What training will be delivered?
Bedfordshire expect to introduce a six-hour training course on de-escalation to frontline officers in 2018/19 with a view to making officers safer. The course will be delivered on scheduled training days and will be in addition to officers’ annual PST refresher. The training is currently being developed by the College in partnership with PST and crisis negotiation specialists from a range of forces. The course will cover the recommended content outlined under Guideline 1, and will focus on developing the practical skills needed for effective tactical communication. The training is expected to draw on the models and techniques that are currently included in the officer safety manual and in specialist crisis negotiation training.

The training will make use of a range of adult learning methods. The plans currently involve the afternoon session being devoted to role-play scenarios, so that officers have the opportunity to practice their skills in a realistic but safe environment, and to receive personal feedback to help them improve.

The plan is for the new course to be piloted with response officers from some shifts but not others, which means it will be possible to test its impact. The College-led evaluation will look at whether use of force incidents, assaults against the police, and injuries decline for officers who are trained – compared to those who are not – before and after the training is introduced. There may also be scope to examine body worn video footage to see whether officers used the skills they were taught on the course, and whether they were helpful in reducing conflict safely and without force. This approach will help to strengthen the evidence base, as recommended by Guideline 4.
What is effective in minimising the need to use force in conflict situations?


What increases or decreases the likelihood that a potential conflict situation will result in the use of force?


Conflict management using de-escalation, communication and negotiation


About the College

We’re the professional body for everyone who works for the police service in England and Wales. Our purpose is to provide those working in policing with the skills and knowledge necessary to prevent crime, protect the public and secure public trust.

college.police.uk