PRIMA'S 2018 RISK MANAGEMENT
WEBINAR SERIES

De-escalation in Police-Citizen Encounters

Greg Veitch
Chief of Police
Saratoga Springs, NY Police Dept.

De-Escalation

- Webinar objectives:
  - Define the term de-escalation
  - Examine how de-escalation works in police-citizen encounters
  - Understand how de-escalation should be considered by investigators of police-citizen interactions

De-Escalation

- A dictionary definition:
  - “to reduce the level or intensity of (a crisis, etc…)”

De-escalation

- A police definition:
  - “Tactics and techniques used by officers, when safe and without compromising law enforcement priorities, that seek to minimize the likelihood of the need to use force during an incident and increase the likelihood of voluntary compliance.”

The Gold Standard

- Police respond and calm things down
- Ask for compliance and cooperation
- Get cooperation and compliance
- If arrest is necessary, it is peaceful.
- Suspect is reassured, respectfully that all will be worked out in the court system.

- No force needed and no one gets hurt.

Police Response to Crisis

- Respond safely
- Secure the scene
- Assess the situation
- Apply the tactical response best suited to the situation

- Resistance= active resistance

Police Policy

- When safe and feasible under the totality of circumstances, officers shall attempt to slow down or stabilize the situation so that more time, options and resources are available for incident resolution.
- When time and circumstances reasonably permit, officers shall consider whether a subject's lack of compliance is a deliberate attempt to resist or an inability to comply based on factors including, but not limited to:

Police Policy

- Medical conditions
- Mental impairment
- Developmental disability
- Physical limitation
- Language barrier
- Drug interaction
- Behavioral crisis

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Realistic De-escalation

- An officer's primary concern in all interactions is safety: their own, innocents, and suspects.
  - "How am I supposed to tell the difference between someone who is hallucinating because they are in mental health crisis or because they just drank a bottle of Vicks 44D and smoked pot?"

Public Perception?

Mental Health

- Helpless
- Non Violent
- Law Abiding
- Compliant
- Victim
- Should not have a force response by police

Drug Addict

- Not helpless
- Usually violent
- Law Breaker
- Willing to fight police
- Did this to themselves
- Little sympathy for the consequences of their actions

De-escalation

- Is society telling police that they should be able to tell the difference between “crazy” and “criminal?” In a split-second?

- The police should be teaching officers how to address the needs of a person in crisis, regardless.

De-escalation Issues

- Forces within the officer
- Tactics to deal with the person in crisis
  - Respond and secure
  - Identify what you have
  - Communication
  - Post incident
- Mental Health Crisis response

The Officer

- Department Culture
  - Accountability, leadership, training
- Individual Officer
  - Competence, ego
- De-escalation is an agency culture issue, not a tool for officers to employ

Tactics

- Respond and Secure
  - Get there safely
  - Start formulating a plan
  - Supervisor Notifications
  - Secure the scene if you can do so safely
    - Establish perimeter
    - Start trying to open communication

Identify the Situation

- What exactly do we have here?
  - Suicidal
  - Criminal/violent
  - Mental Health Crisis
  - Intoxicated

  - Do we need to escalate?
  - Do wee need SWAT or CIT?

Communication

- Our goal should be to influence the person to change their behavior, rather than forcing them to do so. If safe to do so.

- Communication + tactical skill= de-escalation

Communication

- Establish Contact
- Build Rapport
  - Questioning
  - Active Listening
- Influence behavior

Establish Contact

- Many barriers may exist to establishing contact with a person in crisis
  - Environment
    - Chaotic scene, the source of the problem
  - Individual
    - Unable to understand
      - "Show me your hands" might mean something totally different to someone in crisis.

Build Rapport

- Once contact is made, we can start asking questions that we hope will point us to influencing behavior towards a resolution.

- By using active listening we can gain trust and demonstrate empathy.

Influencing Behavior

- Logical Persuasion
- Emotional Persuasion

Post-Incident

- Medical Attention
- Follow up referrals/interviews
- After action reports

Mental Health Crisis Response

- Police will agree that they are not the answer to a person in a mental health crisis and that they may not have the appropriate tools to effectively resolve the issue.

- Police also understand that more study of psychology will not help them at the scene.

Mental Health Crisis Response

- Responding without diagnosing
  - Safety first
  - Communication
  - Resolution

Investigations/Training/Admin

- Investigations
  - The reality of street encounters
  - Questions
  - Graham v. Connor

Administration

- Supervisor Training
- Culture/Leadership
- Reporting System
- Documentation

Training

- Behavior cues not diagnosis
- Scenario based training
  - Provocations
  - Tough/marginal/confusing scenarios
- Values/ethics training

The Main Point

- De-escalating police-citizen encounters is a complex and multi-dimensional problem that requires both tactics and communication.

- Questions?