2-55 Use of Force De-escalation

Related SOP(s):

2-19 Response to Behavioral Health Issues
2-52 Use of Force: General
2-53 Use of Force: Definitions
2-54 Intermediate Weapons
2-56 Use of Force: Reporting by Department Personnel
2-57 Use of Force: Review and Investigation by Department Personnel

2-55-1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for officers of the Albuquerque Police Department regarding the use of de-escalation techniques during interactions with individuals in an effort to avoid unnecessarily escalating a situation, to gain voluntary compliance from an uncooperative individual, and to reduce or eliminate the need to use force.

2-55-2 Policy

When feasible, an officer shall use de-escalation techniques. Policing, at times, requires an officer to exercise control of a violent or resistant individual, or an individual experiencing a mental or behavioral health crisis. At other times, policing may require an officer to serve as a mediator between parties, or to defuse a tense situation.

2-55-3 Definition

De-escalate

An action to attempt to calm a situation or to prevent a situation from escalating into a physical confrontation or injury by using verbal and non-verbal techniques, including active listening skills, tone of voice, announcement of actions, body posture, personal space, eye contact, and empathy and compassion to promote officer and individual safety. (See SOP – Response to Behavioral Health Issues.)

2-55-4 De-escalation Techniques and Guidelines

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A. De-escalation techniques are proactive actions and approaches that an officer uses to gain voluntary compliance of the individual(s) to reduce or eliminate the need to use force. When force is necessary, an officer shall reduce the amount of force used as an individual's resistance decreases.

1. The following list of de-escalation techniques is not intended to establish an order of priority in their use by officers.

2. De-escalation techniques include, but may not be limited to:

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a. Using distance, cover, concealment, and/or time. These techniques allow an officer to: assess the situation and their options; bring additional resources to the scene; and develop a plan for resolving the incident without using force;
b. Utilizing intermediate barriers;
c. When feasible, requesting additional personnel and waiting for their arrival;
d. Using active listening skills by an officer to indicate engagement in conversation with an individual;
e. Employing verbal de-escalation, which may include:
   i. Communicating with the individual(s) in a conversational tone of voice while considering additional resources (e.g., CIT officers, Mobile Crisis Teams, City Social Services, and Behavior Health Services) to best resolve the individual's crisis;
   ii. Beginning by asking questions rather than immediately issuing orders;
   iii. Advising the individual(s) of the actions that officers may take to end their crisis without the need to use force; and
   iv. Warning the individual that disobeying orders and posing an immediate threat to officers or others may result in the need to use force.

B. When reasonable, given the facts and circumstances known to the officer at the time, the officer shall attempt to de-escalate and slow down situations without increasing the risk of harm to the officer or others.

1. When feasible, the officer should:

a. Gather information about the incident;
b. Assess the potential risks to the individual(s), the officer(s), and others;
c. Coordinate resources; and
d. Communicate and coordinate a response.

C. Should an individual fail to comply with lawful directions or commands, an officer shall consider whether an individual's lack of compliance may be based upon an inability to comprehend in order to comply.

1. Where an officer identifies the presence of one of the following factors, they shall use de-escalation techniques to reduce or eliminate the need to use force:

a. The influence of drugs and/or alcohol;
b. A known or reasonably apparent mental illness or developmental disability;
c. The individual is experiencing a crisis incident;
d. A known or reasonably apparent physical disability or other medical or physical condition, including visual or hearing impairment; and
e. A language barrier.

D. An officer's approach to an individual can influence whether a situation escalates, resulting in the use of force.

6 1. An officer shall avoid taking unnecessary actions that may lead to the need to use force.

2. An officer shall recognize that their elevated stress levels can have an adverse impact on individual interactions.

7 E. In their interaction with individuals, an officer shall use advisements, warnings, verbal persuasion, and other tactics before using force.

6 F. Supervisors will become involved as soon as practicable in managing an overall response to potentially violent encounters by coordinating resources and officers' tactical actions.

7 G. If the individual is or appears to be, in a mental or behavioral health crisis, an officer should attempt to de-escalate and shall otherwise follow SOP – Response to Behavioral Health Issues.