

Foreword by Assistant Chief Constable Dave Hardcastle

Assistant Chief Constable Dave Hardcastle, Chair of Guideline Committee and National Lead for Response Policing, on the importance of these guidelines.

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Written by Assistant Chief Constable Dave Hardcastle

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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. When 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. Every day, police officers and staff use their de-escalation, communication and negotiation skills in difficult and fast-moving situations to protect themselves and the public. This work is focused on ensuring adequate and structured support is in place, so officers and staff can develop and maintain the skills necessary to resolve conflict situations safely.

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 to protect the public, themselves or to effect an arrest. Officers and staff are trained to use the minimum force necessary 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 assaults are abhorrent and come at a high human, social and economic cost. These guidelines are the first stage in a programme of work by the College of Policing to develop the national curriculum on personal safety. The work will support officers and staff who have to use force, by identifying the tactics and techniques that are most safe and effective. This should lead to greater consistency in training.

All officers and staff would prefer to deal with conflict situations without needing to use force. This guidance looks to provide support by setting out how to assess and respond to situations in ways that minimise the chance that force will be needed. Developing evidence-based guidance on the most effective techniques to de-escalate, defuse 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 [Mazerolle et al. (2013)].

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 were sifted for relevance and quality to ensure only the best available evidence was included. This evidence has been supplemented with a call for practice 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. While 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 more specialist negotiation skills that are necessary for the safe resolution of these encounters. It has also become clear that such training in a policing context has not been the subject of any rigorous research studies. In fact, there is very little research in the UK on the use of force and, in particular, the effect of police 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 policing, these 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 [Salas et al. (2012)]. As such, this guidance 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 just a starting point. We hope that by reviewing the evidence and developing guidelines on what is known so far, 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 for officers and staff and equip them with the skills to help keep them safe.

Tags

Conflict management