

# What works: policing with procedural and distributive justice

Exploring the impact of policing with procedural and distributive justice on public perceptions.

First published 22 April 2025

There are several police activities that have been shown to have a direct impact on public perceptions. The police have a higher degree of influence over these activities, which could form the basis of a public service model of policing.

## Policing with procedural and distributive justice

Research from across the world shows that procedural justice is strongly associated with higher levels of police legitimacy. When members of the public trust officers and staff to make fair decisions and treat people respectfully, they are more likely to see the police as legitimate.

Distributive justice – the perceived fairness with which the costs and benefits of policing are distributed in society – tends to be less strongly associated with legitimacy. However, it will be harder for the police to secure the consent of people if those people feel over-policed or under-protected.

Overall, perceptions of police fairness have a greater effect than perceptions of police effectiveness on legitimacy.

## What works

Procedural justice involves officers and staff:

- making impartial decisions based on the facts
- listening to people and taking their views into account
- explaining the outcomes of decisions, as well as how they were made
- showing people that they are trustworthy
- treating people with respect and dignity

Research shows that [training that puts procedural justice into practice](#) in an operational context can change officer and staff behaviours. Checklists and scripts can also be effective, but only in the right circumstances.

A systematic review of the international evidence also shows that [interventions consistent with principles of procedural justice](#) – such as restorative justice, informal police contact and neighbourhood watch – generally have a positive impact on police legitimacy.

## Resources

- [Code of Ethics: Ethical policing principles](#)
- [College evidence commentary on procedural justice](#)

You can also search for examples of police practice on the College's [practice bank](#).

## Tags

Evidence-based policing   Community engagement