College of Policing

Conflict management using de-escalation, communication and negotiation

Guidelines

Contents

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. 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.[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 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.[2] 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.

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

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1 Mazerolle et al. (2013).
2 Salas et al. (2012)

The guidelines

These College of Policing guidelines focus on how to resolve conflict in everyday encounters between the police and the public without using force, where possible. The guidelines are designed to encourage safer resolution, reduce the risks of assault 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:

- conflict management skills
- supervisory support
- learning the lessons
- developing the evidence base.

The type and strength of the evidence underpinning each guideline is shown together. The supporting information that follows includes a brief summary of the evidence and explains what the guideline might mean in practice. Details about the process used to develop the guidelines and supporting information are available **here**.

Evidence-base ratings:

Overall strength of the empirical evidence

Availability of practitioner evidence

Keeping people safe

1 Conflict management skills

Chief Constables should ensure officers and staff are sufficiently skilled in the following non-physical aspects of conflict management to reduce the risk of them being assaulted and increase public safety:

- Situational awareness, including awareness of the impact factors that may affect the likelihood of officers/staff and the public using force.
- Emotional awareness and self-regulation.
- Active listening.
- Verbal and non-verbal communication and specialist negotiation skills.

The most effective way for officers and staff to develop and maintain these skills is likely to be realistic scenario-based training that draws on evidence from real-world situations (eg, body-worn video footage). Such training should be linked to, and build on, the initial and annual personal safety training on the physical aspects of conflict management that forces deliver to their officers and staff.

Evidence-base:
empirical evidence
good|**moderate**|limited

practitioner evidence available

2 Supervisory support

Chief constables should ensure supervisors have:

- the knowledge, skills and capacity to support officers and staff who have been assaulted
- awareness of the factors that may escalate conflict in order to prevent assaults against officers and staff, and ensure appropriate use of force.

These factors could relate to officers and staff (eg, wellbeing and resilience, stress, being a victim of assault), the public or situations.

Awareness can be maintained by:

- routine informal debriefing
- regular one-to-ones
- checking any patterns in data on use of force, assaults against the police, and police/public injuries.

Evidence-base:
empirical evidence
good|moderate|**limited**

practitioner evidence available

3 Learning the lessons

Chief constables should ensure forces take an evidence-based approach to developing and maintaining officer and staff skills in the non-physical aspects of conflict management, use of force and personal safety.

Existing data should be used where available. This may include:

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

Evidence-base:
empirical evidence
good|moderate|**limited**

practitioner evidence available

4 Developing the evidence base

Chief constables should work with the College, the wider police service and relevant partner agencies, as well as academia and other experts to develop the evidence base on the use of force, assaults against the police and police/public injuries, by:

- analysing police data
- exploring and sharing current training practices
- testing the impact of training innovations (eg, content, method of delivery and frequency of training).

Evidence-base:
empirical evidence
good|moderate|**limited**

practitioner evidence available

Introduction

What are these guidelines for?

The College guidelines and supporting information are designed to provide clear evidence-based guidance to forces on how to keep officers and staff safe, by helping them to resolve conflict without needing to use force, where possible. The aim of the guidance is to ensure that officers and staff are properly supported to develop their skills in the non-physical aspects of conflict management.

In some situations, for example where there is an imminent risk to life, force will be 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 and staff use these skills routinely in their day-to-day work, but the degree to which these skills are formally taught as part of their professional development varies.

Who developed these guidelines?

The guidelines were developed collaboratively by a guideline committee and an internal College development team. The guideline committee was made up of frontline and specialist police practitioners, academics, and subject matter experts. The role of the guideline committee was to consider the evidence and draft the guidelines, taking into account the views of stakeholders.

How evidence-based are these guidelines?

The guidelines and supporting information draw on the **best available evidence**, in this case an extensive review of the relevant research along with insights from frontline officers and staff, gathered through focus groups. Although the research evidence in this area is fairly limited in policing, the emerging picture from healthcare is that training in specific communication skills can help reduce assaults against staff. Because of the state of the evidence, it is not possible to be prescriptive about what should be included in conflict management training, how it should be taught or how often. There was, however, sufficient consistency across the studies that showed training was effective for the guideline committee to give a clearer idea of the key skills that officers and staff are likely to need.

Text boxes in the supporting information outline potential training content for officers and staff. The text boxes contain practical advice from the front line – which may be particularly helpful to new recruits – and example communication models. The practical advice from the front line came from a number of sources, including the officers and staff who took part in the focus groups. They were also informed by the **communications module** of the Personal Safety Manual, crisis negotiator training, National Police Firearms Curriculum and the **Armed Policing Authorised Professional Practice**, all of which have been developed by subject matter experts, and frontline officers and staff. The communication models came from existing police training and guidance. Some of the models are similar to one another, which is to be expected, but have been included to show the volume and diversity of material available. Officers and staff do not need to know all the models or learn them 'off by heart'. It would be better if they understood the principles underpinning them and were able to apply them in operational settings.

Who are the guidelines for?

The guidelines are primarily aimed at chief constables. The more detailed supporting information is intended for learning and development leads and other strategic leads in forces. This information may also be of interest to supervisors in supporting their teams, and frontline officers and staff in developing their own approaches to managin. The practical advice and communication models in the text boxes may be of particular value to less experienced officers and staff.

What's next?

The College would like to encourage further work in this area by:

- identifying the physical tactics and techniques that are most likely to be safe and effective to support officers and staff who have to use force

- building the evidence base related to effective conflict management in policing

- developing a better understanding of the impact of different approaches to training and the development of these skills.

Guideline 1:
Conflict management skills

Chief constables should ensure officers and staff are sufficiently skilled in the following non-physical aspects of conflict management to reduce the risk of them being assaulted and increase public safety:

- **Situational awareness, including awareness of the impact factors that may affect the likelihood of officers/staff and the public using force.**

- **Emotional awareness and self-regulation.**

- **Active listening.**

- **Verbal and non-verbal communication and negotiation skills.**

The most effective way for officers and staff to develop and maintain these skills is likely to be realistic scenario-based training that draws on evidence from real-world situations (eg, body-worn video footage). Such training should be linked to, and build on, the initial and annual personal safety training on the physical aspects of conflict management that forces deliver to their officers and staff.

📍 Evidence summary

There was promising evidence to show that training associated with reductions in incidents of aggression and physical violence shared common features, such as:

- a focus on understanding the motivations of others and showing empathy

- teaching specific interpersonal communication skills (eg, non-verbal communication and active listening)

- 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 was based on 18 studies that tested de-escalation or conflict management training. The majority of studies were carried out in a healthcare setting, and five in a policing context.

Evidence-base:

📖 Empirical evidence: good|**moderate**|limited

👮 Practitioner evidence: **available**

Officers and staff routinely find ways to manage conflict situations without physical force. While many are already highly skilled in the non-physical aspects of conflict management, forces have responsibility for ensuring that all officers and staff have these skills to a consistently high standard.

Dialogue and communication are central to specialist training in public order, crisis negotiation and firearms. How much other frontline officers and staff are taught the non-physical aspects of conflict management currently varies between forces. This is due to competing training priorities and time/resource pressures. These skills are sometimes included in forces' personal safety training, the content and delivery of which is determined locally.

Personal safety training standards are currently set by the College of Policing and supported by the **Personal Safety Manual**. The manual comprises a comprehensive set of learning resources and guidance on all aspects of officer and staff safety, including a **module** focused specifically on tactical communication techniques to prevent, defuse and manage conflict situations without using physical force.

Situational awareness

Situational awareness is the ability to perceive and process potential threats in the environment. The importance of maintaining high levels of situational awareness in conflict situations was stressed both by officers and staff in the forces groups, as well as by members of the guideline committee. The evidence review found that situational awareness was a skill that could be taught.

Situational awareness can help officers and staff make a dynamic risk assessment and to decide whether, when and how to be assertive and seek to take control of a situation. The National

Decision Model – which officers and staff should understand and be able to use – involves assessing the situation, including any specific threat, the risk of harm and the potential for benefits. Wherever circumstances allow, officers and staff should:

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

Example model – the BUGEE (TASER Curriculum)

Following the BUGEE mnemonic may create time and space for officers and staff to assess risk, decide on the most appropriate course of action, and potentially defuse the situation:
- **B**e prepared to back off
- **U**se of effective cover
- **G**ive space and time if possible
- **E**arly negotiation
- **E**vacuate immediate area.

Practical advice from the front line – situational awareness

- Where possible, take a moment to assess the threats that you, the person and other members of the public face in the situation.
- Try to create 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 backup).
- High levels of adrenaline can result in a loss of peripheral vision. Try to sweep your head and glance sideways at regular intervals to stop yourself focusing your attention exclusively on the person, and maintain an awareness of the wider environment.
- Pay attention to potential danger cues the person may be displaying (eg, clenching fists, raising hands above waist) to help you make a more accurate risk assessment, predict the person's actions, and increase your reaction time.
- Recognise that what someone says may be different to their body language.
- Remember that anxiety and/or loss of verbal or physical control can be early indicators of a potential physical act being carried out.
- Think about what else could be going on (eg, the person being in mental health crisis or having difficulties communicating).
- Consider that a person's behaviour and reactions to a situation may be due to a mental or physical illnesses, physical disability, reduced mental capacity or neurological difference (eg, autism).

Impact factors

The **Personal Safety Manual** sets out a series of 'impact factors' that are thought to make potential conflict situations higher risk, such as weapons, crowds, alcohol, prior knowledge about or the relative size and build of the people involved. Dynamic risk assessments of situations can be supported by officers and staff being aware of such impact factors and taking them into account along with other information about the threats they face.

The evidence review showed that the chances of officers being assaulted increased in high-crime neighbourhoods or when citizens were hostile towards the police and/or intoxicated.

The evidence review also highlighted factors – mainly from US research – that have increased the likelihood of the police use of force. Some of these are not recognised impact factors and do not justify using force (eg, someone who happens to be young, male, or Black). Others, however, could be relevant to dynamic risk assessments and might be regarded as potential impact factors (eg, weapons, intoxication, or resistance or abusiveness). Understanding which factors can affect safety and give sufficient reason to use force might support better decision making.

People with communication difficulties

Officers and staff may inadvertently escalate conflict by the way they interact with people who find it difficult to communicate. These may include people with mental or physical illnesses, physical disabilities, learning difficulties or reduced mental capacity, or developmental or neurological differences (eg, autism). They may also include people who are not fluent in English or are intoxicated. Officers and staff will need to keep an open mind about what could be causing someone's communication

difficulties, as appearances can be deceiving (eg, someone in diabetic crisis may appear drunk). It is not the job of the police to make clinical decisions.

Regardless of why someone might have communication difficulties, the potential for confrontation is likely to be increased if that person:

- is agitated, confused and/or scared
- cannot understand what is happening or what they are being asked or told
- is unable to follow instructions, or cannot behave in ways that officers and staff expect them to.

There is also **growing recognition** that using force and restraining people who are in mental health crisis, experiencing acute behaviour disturbance, or suffering from drug- or substance-induced psychosis can pose a life-threatening risk.

Officers and staff may need to adjust how they interact with people with communication difficulties, and consider how people may perceive and respond to the presence, attitudes and demeanour of the police. Effective communication could enable officers and staff to make more accurate risk assessments, by giving them extra time in dynamic situations and encouraging people to provide more information.

Further information is available in the **Authorised Professional Practice on Mental Health**, MIND's police guides on **autism** and **mental health**, and from the **National Police Autism Association**.

Practical advice from the front line – mental health and capacity, and neurodiversity

- Approach the person calmly with an open, non-threatening stance.
- Don't get too close to the person. Give them plenty of space.
- Use a low, consistent voice. Do not shout or use threatening language.
- Introduce yourself, ask for the person's name and use it.
- Be sensitive and compassionate.
- Break up complex information into short sentences with simple language.
- Consider using pictures or symbols if the person responds better to non-verbal communication.
- Remember the person may take what you say literally (eg, 'it will take a couple of minutes').
- Be patient, pause regularly and check the person's understanding.
- Try to explain, as much as possible, that you are no physical threat to them.
- Try to move the person to a calmer and more familiar place, with fewer people and less noise.
- Avoid any physical contact (eg, a reassuring hand on the shoulder) unless it is necessary (eg, to restrain them).
- Ask whether the person has any problems you may not know about.
- Be alert to changes in behaviour.
- Understand that the person may become defensive or aggressive because of previous experiences with people in authority.
- Ask them what has been happening.
- Patiently try to draw out an explanation for their behaviour (eg, to understand and respond to the impact of any trauma).

Practical advice from the front line – mental health and capacity, and neurodiversity (continued)

- Summarise what the person has told you back to them.
- Acknowledge the person's situation and experience, and explain that you can see how it could be affecting them (eg, causing them distress).
- Ask the person if anything has helped before, and how you can help now (eg, phoning someone).
- Calm the person before taking further action, if possible.
- Repeatedly reassure the person and explain what is going to happen.
- Seek advice and support from a medical professional at the earliest opportunity.

Children and young people

The way the police manage confrontation involving children and young people is a sensitive issue. The National Police Chiefs' Council's **strategy on child-centred policing** states that officers and staff should:

- treat people who are under the age of 18 as children
- regard their safety, welfare and wellbeing, which is required under sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Children and young people will have vulnerabilities because of their physical, emotional and cognitive development. This could mean they behave differently to adults in response to distress or trauma. Some children and young people who come into contact with the police will also have physical and mental illness, reduced mental capacity or neurological differences (eg, autism spectrum disorder). For these reasons, the practice advice in the previous section can also be applied to conflict situations involving children and young people.

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. Officers and staff felt that their 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 how impact factors can affect decision making.

Officer and staff experience was supported by the evidence review. The review showed the training that reduced assaults or violence, or changed behaviour, typically focused on:

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

Practical advice from the front line – emotional awareness and self-regulation

- Be assertive, signal non-aggression and use active listening skills during an incident.
- Be aware of your body language and how this might come across to others.
- Try to understand that people are shouting at the uniform, not necessarily at you.
- Recognise your own stress and do not let it build up.
- Remember it takes a lot of effort for someone to remain angry and aggressive, and that they are likely to calm down at some point.

Active listening

Active listening is a system of opening and maintaining communications through the use of empathy, listening and body language. It is a skill that can be acquired and developed with practice. However, active listening can be difficult to master so its development may take time and patience.

Active listening should be used throughout an encounter. Being open to what a person is saying helps to build rapport, which could help reduce tension. 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.

Practical advice from the front line – active listening

- Be open, receptive, unbiased and fair, and avoid making assumptions.
- Stand at a comfortable distance from the person and slightly side-on to promote cooperation.
- Look at the person, to show you are listening.
- Make it clear that you have plenty of time for the conversation.
- Use open questions to encourage conversation.
- Use pauses appropriately to allow the person to respond.
- Nod your head to indicate understanding or to encourage the person to keep talking.
- Listen to the whole message, take notice of the use of words, tone and body language.
- Paraphrase what they have told you and check understanding.
- Show empathy and demonstrate understanding.
- Avoid criticism, and praise appropriately.
- If necessary, criticise their behaviour rather than them personally.
- Avoid fake understanding.
- Do not take sides.
- Where possible, act on what is said, however trivial it may seem to you.

Example model - MOREPIES (crisis negotiator training)

This mnemonic was developed by the FBI to help crisis negotiators remember the key steps involved in active listening when they are under pressure. The model may be a useful in a wider range of situations:

- **M**inimal encouragers – Use verbal and non-verbal communication (eg, nodding) to show you are listening and interested in what a person is saying.
- **O**pen questions – Use open-ended rather than closed questions to draw out information from the person.
- **R**eflection – Repeat or echo recent words or phrases the person has used.
- **E**ffective pauses – Use silences before or after something meaningful to:
  - demonstrate you understand its important
  - allow the person to vent their frustration
  - give you time to think
  - encourage turn-taking in the conversation
  - help everyone to focus their thoughts and attention.
- **P**araphrase – Summarise what the person has been saying in your own words to demonstrate understanding and allow for clarification.
- **'I'** messages – Start sentences with 'I' to personalise what you are saying, show responsibility and establish rapport.
- **E**motional labelling – Tell the person you understand what effect the situation is having them on them (eg, 'I can see you are upset, this must be frustrating for you').
- **S**ummary – Sum up what has been said in your own words.

Verbal communication skills

Verbal communication describes the words and phrases, tone of voice, intonation and other expressions used when officers or staff interact with members of the public. Verbal communication was described by officers and staff as their first tactic in trying to de-escalate or defuse conflict situations. While many in the police already have excellent communications skills, training can help officers and staff to acquire, develop and maintain those skills. The evidence review suggested 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 justice[3] 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 **Personal Safety Manual** provides detailed information on the key principles of effective communication to achieve these aims.

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3 Mazerolle et al. (2013).

Practical advice from the front line – verbal communication

- 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 dealing with the situation, but keep others on standby in case they are needed.
- Introduce yourself, ask the person 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…'

Example model – Five-Step Appeal (Personal Safety Manual)

This model provides officers and staff with a way of dealing with resistance, and involves them giving the person every chance to comply with their requests.

- **Step 1: Simple appeal** – Ask the person to comply with your request.
- **Step 2: Reasoned appeal** – Explain why the request has been made, what law (if any) has been broken, and what has caused the request.
- **Step 3: Personal appeal** – Remind the person that they may be jeopardising things 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** – Tell the person what is required and use a phrase that means the same as the following: 'Is there anything I can reasonably do to make you cooperate with me/us?'
- **Step 5: Action** – Reasonable force may be the only option left in the case of continued resistance.

Example model – LEAPS (Personal Safety Manual)

This simple mnemonic offers a flexible and structured approach to communicating in all situations, not just those that are confrontational.

- **L**isten – Listen to the whole message and the feelings. Do not just take the content at face value, and try not to interrupt.
- **E**mpathy – Be open-minded about what is said, show understanding, and try not to judge.
- **A**sk – Use effective questioning to establish or clarify the facts, seek opinions and check understanding.
- **P**araphrase – Repeat back your understanding of what you have heard.
- **S**ummarise – Condense everything that has been said into a concise and simple statement, and check on any agreed actions.

Non-verbal communication skills

Non-verbal communication refers to body language, such as physical gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, posture and body positioning. It also includes unspoken understandings, presuppositions, and cultural and environmental conditions that may affect any encounter. Non-verbal communication can be powerful and, like verbal language, can be interpreted differently by different people, causing considerable potential for misunderstanding. Officers spoke of the need to be aware of the impact of their own body language, expressions and mannerisms, and that they communicate with a diverse range of people, who will hold different views as to what is acceptable. There is also a need for officers and staff to consider how neurological differences (eg, autism and dyspraxia) and physical illnesses and disabilities may affect a person's non-verbal communication.
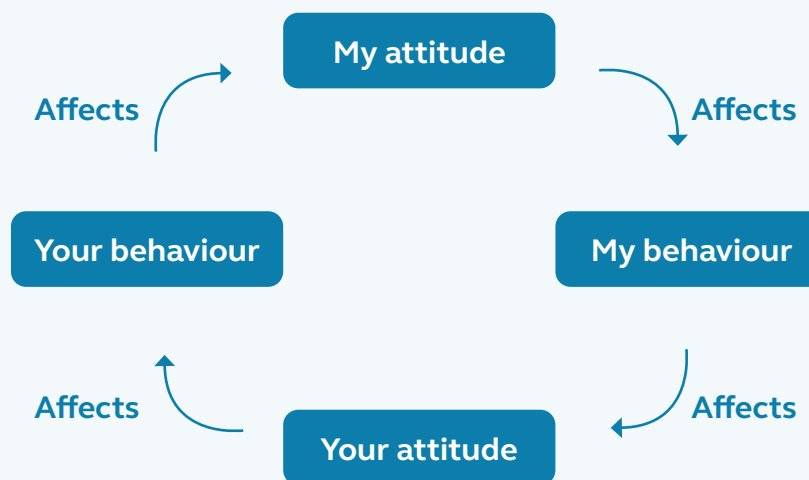
Advice on posture, positioning and body movement can be found in the **Personal Safety Manual**.

Practical advice from the front line – non-verbal communication

- Allow the person time to speak, continue to signal non-aggression, adopt a relaxed posture and use friendly, open gestures.
- Be aware of your own non-verbal signals – signalling a non-aggressive response can help defuse a situation.
- Move slowly, allowing the person space, while adopting a basic or interview stance.
- Be aware of Betari's Box (see below).

Example model - Betari's Box (Personal Safety Manual)

Betari's Box describes how people can get locked into a vicious or virtuous circle of communication, based on how their attitudes and behaviour respond to each other.

Scenario-based learning

Scenario-based learning normally involves students working their way through a storyline, where they are required to practise new skills to solve an ambiguous situation or complex problem. The evidence review suggested that training that achieved behaviour change included some form of scenario-based learning. Practitioners agreed, suggesting more realistic role-play scenarios in their training.

Use of realistic scenario-based learning may provide an opportunity to integrate personal safety training into routine practice and help

officers to acquire, develop or maintain skills.[4] Doing so may help the transition of behaviour from the 'classroom' to the 'street'. It may be difficult for officers and staff to remember and apply communication tactics in dynamic, high-risk situations without practising them until they are second nature. Scenarios may also make officers and staff more confident and better prepared to use their skills in a variety of real-life situations (eg, those involving people in mental health crisis or with neurological differences).

There are a range of options that could be considered. One of the studies included in the evidence review involved officers practising their use of force decision-making skills in realistic field settings (eg, apartments, abandoned warehouses) with trained actors and stress-inducing environmental factors (eg, low light, loud noises).[5] 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 practise their skills, reflect on their practice and receive personalised feedback.[6]

Professional development

Forces have flexibility to decide how they ensure officers and staff are sufficiently skilled in the non-physical aspects of conflict management. It may be necessary for forces to review their current training provision, carry out learning needs analysis, and examine their data on use of force, assaults against the police and police/public injuries before deciding on what action to take.

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4 Wheller and Morris (2010).
5 Andersen and Gustafsberg (2016)Wheller et al. (2013)
6 Wheller et al. (2013).

There are advantages in forces including non-physical skills in the personal safety training they deliver initially to new recruits and annually to serving officers and staff. Doing so may help officers and staff to:

- understand the full range of options available to them when trying to resolve conflict safely
- see how physical and non-physical skills complement one another
- not get the wrong idea about the most appropriate action when there is an imminent threat.

The downsides with this approach include:

- the time forces have available for personal safety training
- the capacity and capability of instructors to deliver training in communication and negotiation
- the need for officers and staff to develop and maintain their physical skills.

By reviewing what they currently deliver, forces may be able to make space within their existing personal safety training for the teaching of non-physical skills. Forces are advised not to include these skills at the expense of essential physical skills that officers and staff need to resolve conflict effectively and safely, because of their duty of care under the Police (Health and Safety) Act 1997.

Forces may have greater capacity to deliver training on the non-physical aspects of conflict management if they do not seek to include them in personal safety training. Communication and negotiation skills also have wider application, not just in conflict situations. However, the main risk of not taking an integrated

approach would be officers and staff not seeing the connection between their physical and non-physical skills.

However forces decide to deliver training, it will require careful handling. If the training content, method of delivery and language used to describe the training is not right, officers and staff could challenge its operational relevance and/or think it is patronising. Forces should also consider how training can be supported through continuing professional development. This approach could help ensure officers and staff retain and improve their skills through practice, self-reflection and personalised feedback. Options include reviewing body-worn video footage and including use of force in professional development reviews and work-based assessments.

Guideline 2:
Supervisory support

Chief constables should ensure supervisors have:

- **the knowledge and skills to support those officers and staff who have been assaulted**
- **awareness of the factors that may escalate conflict in order to prevent assaults against officers and staff, and ensure appropriate use of force.**

These factors could relate to officers and staff (eg, wellbeing and resilience, stress, being a victim of assault), the public or situations.

Awareness can be maintained by:

- **routine informal debriefing**
- **regular one-to-ones**
- **checking any patterns in data on use of force, assaults against the police, and police/public injuries.**

Evidence summary

Someone's ability to 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. The evidence review identified two studies that looked at the impact of emotional exhaustion on use of force with mixed results, and three studies that found previous injury on the job was related to greater use of force.

Evidence-base:

Empirical evidence: good|moderate|**limited**

Practitioner evidence: **available**

Supervisors can play an important role in supporting officers and staff who have been assaulted and encouraging reflective practice (eg, by debriefing difficult encounters and encouraging officers to consider alternative options when tackling future encounters). Supervisors also need to be aware of any background issues that could lead to confrontation escalating. They can use regular one-to-ones and informal debriefs, as well as the results of data analysis about the use of force, assaults and police/public injuries, to understand what support officers and staff in their teams need (eg, training, continuing professional development and access to wellbeing services). Forces will need to help supervisors who lack the knowledge, skills and/or capacity to support officers and staff who have been assaulted, so that this role is not seen as being an 'extra burden'.

Wellbeing and resilience
Background issues – on their own or in combination – can affect interactions between the police and public, and make it more likely that these encounters will deteriorate and/or result in force being used. Practitioners identified wellbeing and resilience as important factors that can contribute to conflict escalating. They felt their ability to stay calm and communicate effectively during confrontational encounters was strongly associated with their personal levels of resilience and wellbeing. They also talked about how the emotional labour involved in their public-facing roles, and the abuse they can face, can affect their wellbeing and resilience, and lead to them becoming 'hardened'.

Practical advice from the front line – wellbeing and resilience

- Debriefing incidents was cited by some officers as a useful way for officers and staff to voice and reflect on issues as a team, and prevent them taking those issues 'home' with them.
- The need for supervisors to develop positive team and supervisory relationships was highlighted:
    - because officers and staff can be good at hiding stress and other wellbeing issues
    - to enable people to spot any behaviour that is out of the norm.
- Regular one-to-ones were seen as essential opportunities for officers and staff to open up about problems. Supervisors need to be prepared to have these conversations and, where appropriate, encourage and help officers and staff to access support (eg, local welfare services).
- The bravado and 'banter' sometimes on display at shift briefings, and the belief that being placed on restricted duties would create more work for colleagues, were both thought to be potential barriers to officers and staff opening up about wellbeing issues.

Stress

Officers and staff had consistent views on the impact of stress on their decision-making during confrontational situations. They said being stressed:

- made it more likely that they would become task-focused, make rash decisions, lose motor skills, forget their training and communicate poorly
- lowered their tolerance levels, meaning they could react or use force sooner than they would do normally
- would inhibit their ability to listen and come up with creative solutions to the situation.

Complex police demand, coupled with resource pressures, were thought to contribute to escalation of conflict because they created an increasingly stressful environment for officers and staff. In particular, the accumulation of jobs during a shift and need for situations to be resolved quickly were specifically felt to make decision-making more pressurised.

Some also felt that stress and stress-related illness were not always taken as seriously as they should be by supervisors.

Being a victim of assault

Assaults against police officers and staff are offences under the **Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018**, and are punishable by up to 12 months in prison. Officers and staff should be encouraged to report any assaults they experience and should also expect to be treated in the same way as a member of the public who has been assaulted.

Forces have adopted the Police Federation's seven-point investigation plan for dealing with assaults against the police. It highlights some specific responsibilities for supervisors, including:

- completing a safety incident report with the victim
- seeing the victim as soon as possible after the incident and discussing a welfare plan (recognising that officers and staff may downplay the impact of the incident)
- informing the relevant senior leaders of the assault, so they can discuss it at the daily management meeting and identify any organisational learning.

The evidence review identified research suggesting officers and staff who were victims of assault might be more likely to use force to resolve conflict in the future. The experience of being assaulted could affect their perceptions of risk and encourage them to go

'hands-on' quicker next time, to prevent a repeat of the incident. While completely understandable, this could, paradoxically, increase the risks to their own safety, and prevent them from using more proportionate responses.

The **National Police Wellbeing Service** supports forces in their wellbeing provision to officers and staff, such as how best to deal with trauma. Three other levels of support are typically available to officers and staff who have been assaulted:

- many forces provide local welfare services for those who have been physically and/or psychologically affected by assaults

- occupational health may provide additional support if these issues affect officers' or staff members' work

- a range of national charities extend the services that are available locally. They include **Flint House**, **Disabled Police Association**, **Police Care UK**, **Police Dependants' Trust**, **Blue Lamp Foundation**, **Defence Medical Welfare Service** and **The Police Treatment Centres** .

Further advice is available in the College's **practical guide on how to respond to trauma in policing**.

Guideline 3:
Learning the lessons

Chief constables should ensure forces take an evidence-based approach to developing and maintaining officer and staff skills in the non-physical aspects of conflict management, use of force and personal safety.

Existing data should be used where available. These may include:

- **data on use of force, assaults against the police, and police/public injuries**

- **root cause analysis**

- **post-incident debriefs.**

📍 Evidence summary

The evidence review found limited empirical evidence. Officers and staff said, however, there was room to improve personal safety training. They felt insufficient time was spent training non-physical skills. They were also concerned about reductions in the amount of time spent on physical skills, how often personal safety was taught and its perceived inconsistency. The guideline committee also highlighted existing data sources that forces could use to identify areas for skill development and to help ensure training was fit for purpose.

Evidence-base:

📖 Empirical evidence: good|moderate|**limited**

👮 Practitioner evidence: **available**

By carrying out exploratory analysis of their data to identify patterns, forces should be better placed to understand the risks to safety, identify learning needs and assess training delivery. Routine analysis like this will help forces to make better use of limited training time, prioritise the most important training content and improve training delivery.

Data analysis may also help forces to identify the officers and staff who are at the greatest risk of being assaulted, using force or causing injury, so that support can be better targeted and help improve the police response to these issues.

Evidence-based approach
Evidence-based policing is an approach in which officers and staff use the best available evidence to inform and challenge policing policy and practice. In the context of managing conflict, this approach might involve forces:

- analysing their data on use of force incidents, assaults against the police and police/public injuries to understand better the risks to officers, staff and the public

- using formal post-incident debriefs and root-cause analysis systematically to identify and learn lessons from incidents and near-misses.

Data on use of force, assaults against the police, and police/public injuries

Forces have been collecting data on the police 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 forces agreeing to collect and publish the same data on the use of force. The agreed dataset includes, for example, details on injuries to officers/staff and citizens sustained during use of force incidents. In addition, forces may also gather other data on assaults against officers and staff. These data on use of force, assaults and police/public injuries should enable forces and their partners 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. Forces may develop a more rounded assessment of these issues by looking at other data (eg, from complaints and post-incident procedures following death and serious injury).

Root-cause analysis

It is important for forces to learn lessons from adverse events or near-misses if they are to prevent similar things happening again. **Root-cause analysis** is a formal process used in the NHS to identify the factors that contributed to an incident in which patient safety was compromised. The aim is to identify ways to improve rather than hold anyone to account for what they did or did not do. This type of approach is intended to be:

- open and transparent
- preventative of recurrences
- objective
- focused on weaknesses in the system

- proportionate to the incident
- timely and responsive
- collaborative.

Post-incident debriefs

Formal debriefs after incidents or near-misses can help to identify notable practice and areas for improvement by allowing officers and staff to reflect on what happened during those incidents and any learning from them. Debriefs can be used to:

- highlight issues regarding operational performance of a team or individual officers/staff members
- help understand what happened, why and what could have been done differently
- prevent mistakes recurring
- identify issues with stress and wellbeing among officers and staff
- help officers and staff share intelligence and other information, and to raise any concerns.

Guideline 4:
Developing the evidence base

Chief constables should work with the College, the wider police service and relevant partner agencies, as well as academia and other experts to develop the evidence base on the use of force, assaults against the police and police/public injuries, by:

- **analysing police data**

- **exploring and sharing current training practices**

- **testing the impact of training innovations (eg, content, method of delivery and frequency of training).**

📍 Evidence summary

The evidence review identified a limited number of well-designed and implemented studies and very few that were carried out in a policing context, which demonstrated a clear gap in the evidence.

Evidence-base:

📖 Empirical evidence: good|moderate|**limited**

🛡 Practitioner evidence: **available**

The evidence review carried out to support 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 police service and its partners to work collaboratively to address these gaps in the evidence. The availability of nationally consistent data on use of force incidents means there is now scope to carry out exploratory analysis, for example, on:

- the factors associated with officers and staff being assaulted or injured, different types of force being used, public injuries and incidents escalating

- individual, team and force-level differences

- the effect of personal safety training.

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/staff and public safety. **Guideline 1** in particular provides the scope for the police service and its partners to develop and test the impact of innovations in training (eg, 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 (eg, the analysis of body-worn video footage) would help to develop a better understanding of the issues that officers, staff and members of the public face during conflict situations and how personal safety training is currently delivered across the service, both of which could inform the design of innovations in professional development.

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About the College

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Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

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