



Module 3

Tactical Communications





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Aims:

Describe the theories, principles and concepts of tactical communications in relation to operational safety.

Learning Outcomes:

Officers/staff will be able to:

- Explain the principles of tactical communications
- Describe the 5 step positive style of tactical communications
- Describe compliance and signals of submission
- Identify when tactical communications may fail
- Describe the principles the assault cycle, attitude cycle and the chemical cocktail
- Identify the factors effecting communications
- Describe de-escalation strategies

Section 1 - Introduction

Tactical communication is defined as the use of communication skills with the purpose of achieving control and/or gaining a tactical advantage. In policing terms, the goal is always to control situations. Communication skills are the most important skills that an officer/staff can possess. This module addresses the key principles of effective communication and how these can be utilised to prevent a conflict situation arising, diffuse conflict and control situations.

Section 2 – Components of Communication

Tactical Communication



Communication is a two-way process in which people interact with others. When communicating face to face, this information exchange process has 3 components:

1. **Words:-** actual words spoken, phrases and content; making up 7% of the total message.
2. **Vocal:-** tone, volume, intonation, pitch, pace; making up 38% of the total message.
3. **Body language:-** body language, gestures, facial expressions; making up 55% of the total message. These figures show that clearly the majority of the message is non-verbal. It is therefore vitally important that officers/staff learn to use appropriate body language which concurs with what they are saying. If there is a conflict between the spoken word and body language, people naturally believe body language.

Giving out

Information is given out by a combination of voice and body language. To be effective, both need to compliment each other.

Taking in

Just like the subject, information is taken in through your eyes and your ears. Whilst tactical communication is improved by training and knowledge, the subject's abilities to give out and take in information are more likely to be affected by drink, drugs, mental state, behavioural patterns (some learned and some instinctive) and disabilities that impact on these skills.

These elements are classified as:

- Impact factors
- Warning signs
- Danger signs

This is the information taken in, which combines to form profiled offender behaviour and dictates what the tactical option will be.



Active Listening

Active listening is a system for taking in the subject’s spoken words, and is a basic conflict resolution skill. Officers/staff should:

- Be open and receptive
- Hear all of what is said
- Interpret what is said
- Act on what is said

Empathy is a powerful tool that can defuse a verbal confrontation, which can result in achieving compliance and control. Summarising what the subject has said displays understanding. Options and intended actions should then be explained to the subject. Words alone will not control or resolve every encounter with a subject intent on resisting an officer/staff.

The following five step system is a professional method of communication when resistance levels persist or increase.

Prior to considering this system it is important for officers/staff to identify the subject’s best method of communication. This may include identifying need for an interpreter or appropriate adult.

Section 3 - Five Step 'Positive Style' of Tactical Communication

Step 1: Ethical Appeal

Ask - most people will respond to a direct request from the police.

Step 2: Reasonable Appeal and Explain

Explain the reason for the request, explain what law has been broken and what they did to cause police to speak to them.

Step 3: Personal Appeal and Options

Explain to the person what they can expect to gain or lose. Options can be created for them. Such options may affect them in terms of time, money, reputation or family.

Step 4: Practical Appeal – Confirmation

This is where the officer/staff confirms the resistance. The subject should be informed of what is required. Following refusal, a good recognised phrase is "is there anything I can reasonably do or say to make you co-operate with me/us?" This easily recognisable phrase also acts as a signal to other officers/staff that this may be the last line of dialogue before taking physical action.

Step 5: Action

A physical force option. This is a necessity because of the subject's continued or escalating resistance. The officer/staff should choose a force option based on their perception of the resistance offered and other impact factors as per the use of the Tactical Options Model.

Section 4 - Recognise 'Compliance' and Signals of Submission

It is necessary to recognise and record compliant behavioural patterns. Compliant behaviour on its own is invariably dealt with through officer/staff presence and tactical communication.

Compliance has both verbal and body language components which are easy enough to identify. Open hand gestures with the palms facing the officer/staff are the most common physical signs. Again, the verbal components are obvious. The body language signs which will confirm the subject's submission include:

- Relaxation of muscles, loss of resistance
- Signs of exhaustion, sweating, out of breath
- Falling onto knees
- Officers/staff should note this may not be the case in all situations. Fear can also cause physical response and should not be presumed to be resistance.

Section 5 - Five Occasions When Tactical Communications May Fail

Whilst it is always preferred to deal with an encounter with the lowest level of force, this is not always possible. There are five times when communications skills will often fail and other options should be considered. The mnemonic **SAFER** can be used to explain these five areas:

Security:

When there is imminent danger to any subject.

When property under police control/protection are threatened.

Attack:

Where the officer/staff or other subjects are being attacked, or personal safety is jeopardised.

Flight:

When a subject runs away from an officer/staff.

Excessive - Repetition:

When it becomes obvious that no voluntary compliance will be forthcoming.

Revised Priorities:

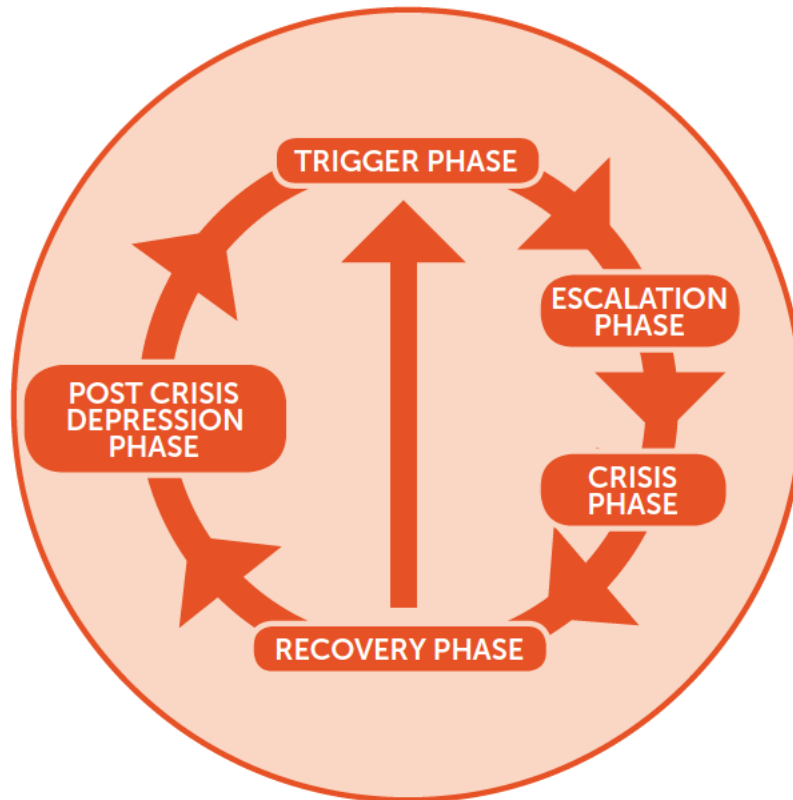
When the encounter changes and requires immediate action on a different response option.

The characteristics of the subject with the edged weapon (size, sex, age, etc) may affect an officer's/staff perception of the threat and their decision as to the type and amount of force to use.

The presence of the edged weapon is the factor of primary importance. A subject producing a knife or edged weapon in a threatening manner is exhibiting serious or aggravated resistance.

Section 6 - The Assault Cycle

An act of violence takes the form of a cycle of behaviour.



The Trigger Phase

There can be numerous triggers, both internal and external. It is during the trigger phase that tactical communications should be employed to try to prevent the subject's behaviour escalating. Tactics to **avoid** include:

- Direct confrontational questions regarding the cause of aggressiveness
- Direct threats
- Invasion of personal space
- Judgemental or critical statements

The Escalation Phase

Behaviour begins to deviate from normal. If a subject's behaviour enters the escalating phase, it may still be possible to gain control by using tactical communications, however, the officer/staff should be considering other response options.

The Crisis Phase

Control over aggression diminishes – violence becomes likely.

The Recovery Phase

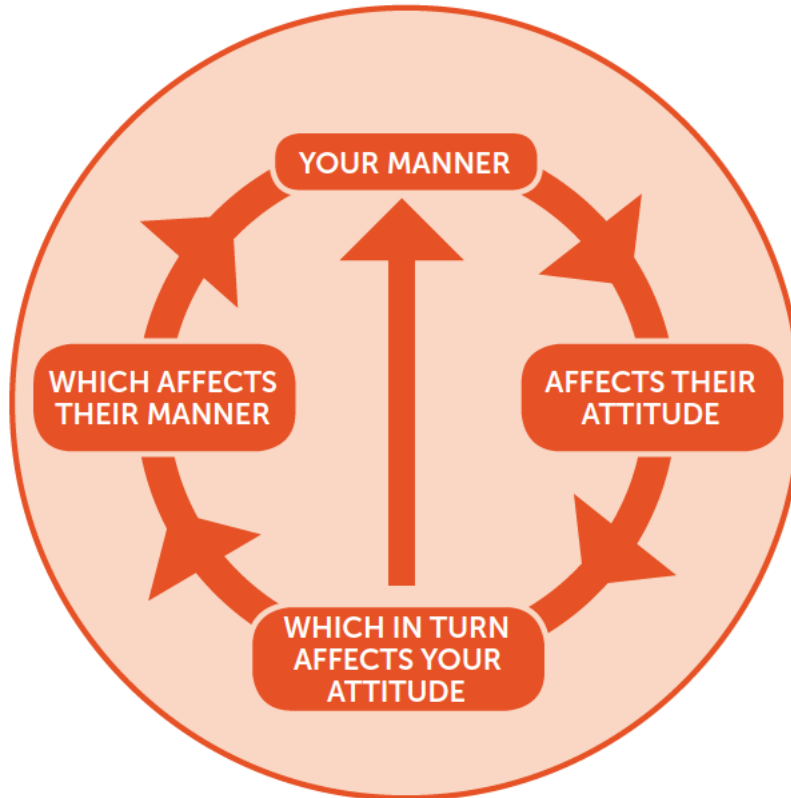
The subject's behaviour begins to return to normal. It is important to be aware that a subject's high state of physical and psychological arousal can remain for an extended period after an incident. During this phase the subject is particularly sensitive to the trigger factors.

Post Crisis Depression Phase

Mental and physical exhaustion are common. Subjects may become tearful, remorseful, guilty, ashamed, distraught or despairing. Evidence has shown that the person having to deal with the aggressive subject (i.e. officer/staff) experiences a similar set of phases. This means that whilst the officer/staff requires to be behaving in a rational and effective manner, the heightening of psychological and physical states may hinder the process.

Section 7 - The Attitude Cycle

Conflicts can be escalated purely by an officers/staff response to a subject's behaviour. A throw away remark may greatly increase the risk of physical violence.



How an officer/staff says something to a subject may dictate their response (positive or negative).

The above cycle is directed towards the officer/staff making the initial contact. This can be reversed with a subject making the initial negative statement and the officer/staff responding negatively. An unfortunate transition will move towards the assault cycle.

Section 8 - The Chemical Cocktail

During a conflict the body releases a range of internal chemicals to enhance an officer's/staff survival ability; the following is a breakdown of these chemicals.

Adrenaline - Adrenaline increases heart rate, oxygen supply to the lungs and blood supply to the muscles. This also promotes supply of glucose into the blood for energy. These things assist in coping with fear and stress.

Endorphins - The body's natural painkillers.

Dopamine - Dopamine is a neurotransmitter. It is a chemical messenger that helps in the transmission of signals in the brain and other vital areas.

Noradrenaline - This is a hormone which causes vasoconstriction (blood moves from extremities to major muscle groups).

Cortisol - A naturally occurring hormone which reduces the effects of shock.

Physiological effects of the Chemical Cocktail:

- Additional strength
- Increased pain threshold
- Increased awareness and detailed focus on immediate threat
- General muscle tightening
- Visual slow down (Tachypsychia)
- Tunnel vision
- Post incident fatigue

Section 9 - Factors effecting communications

Alcohol and drugs are mind altering and therefore can change the perception of the subject. If the officer/staff recognises the presence of alcohol or drugs then the situation is not irretrievable. There is a higher risk that the subject may not be compliant due the influence of drugs or alcohol, or may exhibit certain behaviours like irritability or slurred speech. The officer/staff should maintain tactical awareness at all times and communicate accordingly without antagonising the situation.

Disability

Certain disabilities may make communication between officers/staff and members of the public more difficult. Depending on what the disability is the officer/staff should assess and adapt their communications accordingly. The barrier relates to our ability to deliver a service, so we must assess the situation and try to minimise or remove the barrier(s) where possible. This may mean moving to another environment for example. If this is not possible, the officer/staff should assess the value in continuing to attempt to communicate at that point and re-evaluate their options.

Examples of this would be engaging with a deaf person whose first language is British Sign Language. Overcoming barriers may be as simple as moving into an area with good light if the person can lip read or it may need the deployment of a BSL interpreter.

The use of family and friends to assist communication should be carefully considered. Unless the circumstances dictate a quick response is required, this is generally not the best course of action. This is due to issues including confidentiality but also the subject may not want their family member involved and this may cause increased distress and reaction.

Environment

There may be environmental barriers to communication (e.g. noise pollution) and physical barriers (e.g. doors, other people, vehicles or distance).

Selective perception

Selective perception or confirmation bias, is a tendency to favour information that confirms preconceptions or a point of view and discard that information which defies it, regardless of whether the information is true. Information is selectively screened and information that confirms our own biases is allowed through and positively accepted. This can be both an unconscious and a conscious process.

Cross-Cultural Communication

When people from different cultures communicate there can be a number of obstacles preventing the message being correctly received. It would be sensible however, for officers to become familiar with those traits which they are more likely to come into contact with.

Culture goes a long way in forming a person's frame of reference, but officers/staff need to be aware that their own culture can sometimes force them to misinterpret behaviour of someone outside their own ethnic group. What may be perceived as aggression by one party may be simply exuberance on the part of the other. There are obvious dangers when getting this wrong, from personal safety to accusations of over-reacting or even assault.

When trying to get a message across it must be accepted that this is more likely to take longer, so allow more time. Use active listening skills when receiving the information and check understanding throughout. People who are not fluent in a language are more likely to bring with them not only their own accent, but also their own language's intonation. This can cause problems as the emphasis on some words in a sentence can alter it's meaning, or give a contradictory message. In this case, place more emphasis on the words themselves, rather than the way they are said. By paying attention to the danger cues, this will assist in making a more accurate threat assessment. Likewise, signalling non-aggression may well be effective in demonstrating the officers/staff wish not to inflame a situation.

Section 10

The elements of a de-escalation strategy when dealing with a subject will depend on the context and environment. However, the following principles may be applied:

1. Appear calm, centred and self-assured. Relax facial muscles and look confident. Your anxiety can make the subject feel anxious and unsafe and that can escalate aggression.
2. Use a modulated, low tone of voice (our normal tendency is to have a high pitched, tight voice when scared).
3. Do not be defensive; even if the comments or insults are directed at you, they are not about you. Do not defend yourself or anyone else from insults, curses or misconceptions about their roles.
4. Be aware of any resources available for back up. Know that you have the choice to leave.
5. Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for help. The agitated subject is very sensitive to feeling shamed and disrespected. We want him/her to know that it is not necessary to show us that they must be respected. We automatically treat them with dignity and respect.
6. Do not argue or try to convince, give choices; empower.
7. Don't be defensive or judgmental.
8. Do not get loud or try to yell over a screaming person. Wait until he/she takes a breath; then talk. Speak calmly at an average volume.
9. Respond selectively, answer all informational questions no matter how rudely asked.
10. Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, but always respectful tone. Give choices where possible in which both alternatives are safe ones.
11. Empathise with feelings but not with the behaviour (e.g. "I understand that you have every right to feel angry, but it is not okay for you to threaten me).
12. Do not argue or try to convince.
13. Wherever possible, tap into the subject's cognitive mode: DO NOT ask "Tell me how you feel". But, "Help me to understand what you are saying to me". People are not attacking you while they are teaching you what they want you to know.
14. Suggest alternative behaviours where appropriate.
15. Give the consequences of inappropriate behaviour without threats or anger.
16. Trust your instincts. If you assess or feel that de-escalation is not working, STOP! You will know within 2 or 3 minutes if it's beginning to work.

The Physical Stance

1. Never turn your back for any reason.
2. Always be at the same eye level. Encourage the subject to be seated, but if he/she needs to stand, you stand up also.
3. Allow extra physical space between you and the subject – about four times your usual distance.
4. Do not stand full front to the subject. Stand at an angle so you can sidestep away if needed.
5. Do not maintain constant eye contact. Allow the subject to break his/her gaze and look away.
6. Do not point or shake your finger.
7. DO NOT smile. This could look like mockery or anxiety.
8. Do not touch – even if some touching is generally culturally appropriate and usual in your setting. Cognitive dysfunction in agitated people allow for easy misinterpretation of physical contact as hostile or threatening.

Keep hands out of your pockets/body armour, up and available to protect yourself.

