

POST PERISHABLE SKILLS PROGRAM (PSP)

IV – STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office

CCN: 29540 | POST Certification II | Reimbursement Plan ____ | 2 hours

COURSE GOAL:

The course will provide the student with the minimum topics of Strategic Communications required in the POST Perishable Skills Training Program. The intent of the course is to improve the student's ability to generate voluntary compliance through the art of persuasion and utilizing the tools of interpersonal and tactical communication. The course consists of a hands-on/practical strategic communications training for in-service personnel.

DATE: 02/12/2026

TIME: 1400-1600

LOCATION: Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, 5200 Soquel Avenue, CA 95062

INSTRUCTORS:

**McBride, Caitlin
Fish, Stefan**

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Minimum Topics/Exercises:

- a. Officer safety
- b. Escalation versus de-escalation
- c. Communication Elements
- d. Listening Skills
- e. Questioning Techniques
- f. Persuasion
- g. People with disabilities
- h. Team Communication during a critical incident
- i. Class Exercises/Student Evaluation/Testing

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

1. Reinforce with patrol officers the core ideal of sanctity of human life. The need to protect themselves, members of the public and, whenever possible, criminal suspects and subjects in crisis from danger and harm.

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2. Promote public safety and officer safety by learning and integrating skills and strategies related to decision-making, crisis recognition, tactical communications, and officer safety tactics.
3. Provide patrol officers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to assess and manage threats, influence behavioral change, and gain voluntary compliance whenever possible in dynamic and dangerous situations.
4. Provide patrol officers with a decision-making model that is intuitive, practical and effective for safely resolving non-firearms critical incidents and for documenting and explaining actions after the fact.
5. Provide patrol officers with basic skills needed to recognize individuals in crisis and to approach and attempt to engage them in a safe and effective manner.
6. Provide patrol officers with key communication skills needed to safely engage with, de-escalate, and gain compliance from subjects who are in crisis/and or non-compliant. Demonstrate the importance of listening and persuasion skills as they relate to effective strategic communication.
7. Demonstrate a minimum standard of strategic communication skills with every technique and exercise, to include:
 - A. Officer Safety
 - B. Listening / Persuasion
 - C. Judgement and Decision Making
 - D. De-Escalation, Verbal Commands
 - E. Effectiveness under Stress Conditions
8. Reinforce with patrol officer's effective tactical approaches and teamwork needed to safely resolve incidents.

EXPANDED COURSE OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Introduction, Course Objectives, Goals and Key Areas
 1. Instructor Introductions
- B. Course Goals and Objectives
 1. Safety
 2. Enhanced professionalism
 3. Decrease in complaints
 4. Decrease in liability
 5. Lessen personal stress
 6. Distance + Cover = Time
 7. Time = Options
 8. Options = Increased Voluntary Compliance
 9. Increased Voluntary Compliance = Decreased UOF

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II. OFFICER SAFETY

IV (e, f, i)

- A. Control the Environment
 - 1. Tactical Pause
 - 2. Slow down
 - 3. Gather Information
 - 4. Develop a plan
 - 5. Time + Distance = Options
- B. Make Sound Decisions
 - 1. What's important right now?
 - 2. Set priorities
 - 3. Think through your choices
 - 4. Make sound decisions

III. UNDERSTANDING ESCALATION VERSUS DE-ESCALATION IS AFFECTED BY COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

IV (b)

- A. Professionalism
 - 1. Stay in control of your emotions and keep your ego in check
 - a. The more the ego is involved, the more difficult the situation
 - b. The less ego, the more influence
 - c.
 - 2. Appropriate Language
 - a. What you say
 - b. How you say it
 - c. How communications
- B. How you treat others
 - 1. Golden Rule – Treat others how you want to be treated
 - 2. Platinum Rule – Treat others the way they want to be treated
- C. Four Tenets of Procedural Justice
 - 1. Voice
 - 2. Neutrality
 - 3. Respectful treatment
 - 4. Trustworthiness

IV. COMMUNICATION ELEMENTS

IV (c, d, e)

- A. Phases of Communication
 - 1. Approach – Impact of physicality
 - 2. Greeting – Initiating the conversation
 - 3. Engagement – Strategies to promote communication
 - 4. Adaptation – Being flexible

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5. Repair – Re-establishing rapport
6. Incident closure - How we end a contact today could influence a future contact
- B. Message Delivery
 1. Content
 2. Tone/Voice
 3. Non-Verbal
- C. Active Listening
 1. Affirmations
 2. Open ended questions
 3. Mirroring
 4. Paraphrasing
5. Avoiding “You” messages
6. Effective pauses
7. Listen to understand not to respond
- D. Empathy
 1. Empathy vs. Sympathy
 - a. Empathy – The ability to understand and share the feelings of another
 - b. Sympathy – Feelings of sorrow and pity for someone else's misfortune
 2. Establish Rapport
- E. Questioning techniques
 1. Intentional closed questions
 2. Open ended questions
 3. Question Types
 - a. Fact Finding
 - b. Leading
 - c. Opinion Seeking
- F. Persuasion **IV (f)**
 1. Rational appeal
 2. Personal appeal
 3. Ethical appeal

VI. PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

IV (g)

- A. Individuals with physical, mental health, developmental, or intellectual disabilities may have difficulty communicating, understanding, or complying with commands from peace officers.
 1. State Law
 2. Agency Policy 333 Communications with Persons with Disabilities
 3. Policy 433 Crisis Intervention Incidents
- B. Recognize appropriate methods of communication with people experiencing:

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1. Mental Illness
2. Substance Use Disorders
3. Intellectual Disabilities
4. Physical Disabilities
5. Emotional Distress
- C. Potential Strategies
 1. Pace
 2. Tone/Voice
 3. Reduce distractions
 4. Content
 5. Non-Verbal
- D. Special Relationships
 1. State Law- Doe, et al. v. City of Modesto
 2. Agency Policy
- E. Community Caretaking
 1. State Law-People v. Ovieda
 2. OTB #135-Community Caretaking Doctrine

VII. TEAM COMMUNICATION DURING A CRITICAL INCIDENT

IV (h)

- A. Coordinated effort
 1. Planned Response (when feasible)
 2. One voice
 - a. Single point of contact with subject(s)
 - b. Single point of contact with dispatch
 3. Force options
 4. Continuous Assessment
- B. Potential Resources
 1. Mental Health Resources
 2. Community Resources
- C. Debrief
 1. Effective
 2. Ineffective

VIII. CLASS EXERCISES/STUDENT EVALUATION

IV (i)

- A. Students will be provided with various scenarios in which tactical communication and active listening skills will be utilized and demonstrated. The instructor will proctor the exercise and provide direct/immediate feedback.