Changes in Student Definitions of De-escalation in Professional Peace Officer Education

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Why focus on De-Escalation

• “Law enforcement agency policies for training on use of force should emphasize de-escalation and alternatives to arrest or summons in situations where appropriate”
  
  • 2.2.1 Action Item
  • The President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing
Why focus on De-Escalation

“Relying on hospital security more familiar with the health care clientele and staff, with an emphasis on de-escalation, will make the environment safer”

- Dr. Jon Pryor, CEO of Hennepin Healthcare
- *Star Tribune, December 14, 2018*
No wonder it is not clear

- Basic de-escalation skills training is designed to equip police officers with knowledge and skills that enable them to initiate specific actions to de-escalate a crisis situation
The sample

- Juniors
- 60-90 credits
- PPOE Program
- Law Enforcement Mindset Class
- 47 unique samples
On the right track: Pre-Test

- 8 out of 47 submissions
- Most common terms
  - Calm
  - Communication
  - Reasonable
  - Bring Down
  - Multiple Tools
On the right track: Post Test

• “Turning a situation or conversation from very high energy or tense, to a calmer and less tense”
• “It is the ability to resolve conflict through words rather than the use of force”
• “Stopping the situation from escalating further”
• “The process of bringing the level of agitation down through the use of many tools but primary ones voice and mind”
On the right track: Changes

- Expanding definitions
  - Crisis
  - Time
  - Distance
  - Cover
  - Disengagement
  - Isolate
  - Contain
In the Middle: Pre-Test

• 31 out of 47 submissions

• Most Common Themes
  • Mindset (Obnoxious, Out of Control)
  • Peaceful
  • Stress Level (hyped up, upset)
  • Talking
In the Middle: Post Test

• “Someone’s mindset is out of control and they can’t get back to normal by themselves. Someone else has to step in and control the situation”
• “To bring the level of threat of force down”
• “When a situation goes from hot to cold usually de-escalation happens when good communication is used and less force.”
• “Trying to transition something that is obnoxious and making it better”
In the Middle: Changes

- Changes
  - More Communication
  - Active Listening Skills
  - Positioning
  - Pacing
  - Slowing Down

- Lacking
  - Physical Space
  - Disengagement
Still in TV Land: Pre-Test

• 8 out of 47 submissions
• Most Common Themes
  • Normal
  • Out of Control
  • Violence/Danger
  • Tension
  • Fast Decisions/Quickly

This is my crazy face, so don't screw with me!
Still in TV Land: Post Test

• “Bring down the stakes of what is going on and to decrease the amount of perceived crazyness [sic]”
• “Stopping the person before it gets bigger or he or she gets out of hand.”
• “To make an issue less of an issue. If there is a problem deescalating it would make it less of a problem, almost like calming down.”
• “The process of a situation returning back to normal operations.”
Still in TV Land: Changes

- Changes
  - Use of Communication
  - Listening
  - Removing Force as First Option

- Lacking
  - Physical space
  - Disengagement
  - Slowing down
  - Patience
Implications

- Need to expand definition in coursework
  - Communication
  - Time
  - Distance
  - Cover
Future Research

• Current LEO understanding of definition.
• Reinforcement of de-escalation techniques in agencies
References

