

SFY Recommendations for MA P.O.S.T. De-Escalation Guidance

June 2021



Strategies for Youth

A national, nonprofit policy and training organization dedicated to improving police/youth interactions and reducing disproportionate minority contact.

- Training Law Enforcement

*Policing the Teen Brain
In the Presence of Children*

- Policies

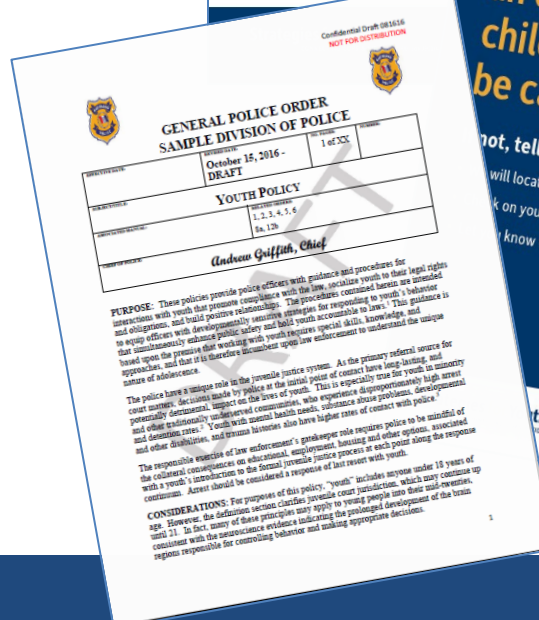
*Developmentally Appropriate,
Trauma-Informed, Racially Equitable*

- Outreach to Youth:

Juvenile Justice Jeopardy

- Policy & Research

*If Not Now, When?
Where's the State?*



Teens Can Be Difficult

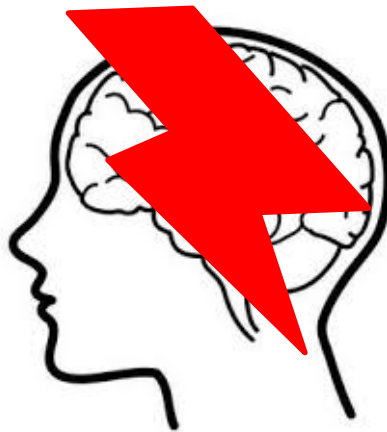


Their brains are changing and work differently.

Teen Brains Are Still Developing



immature



reactive



uninformed

How are police trained?

- Take control quickly
- Punish defiance
- Anticipate misconduct
- Assume intentionality
- Be “Transactional”



Causes of escalated responses:

- Taking control quickly
- Punishing defiance
- Anticipating misconduct
- Assuming intentionality
- Being “Transactional”



Specific LE Tactics That Escalate

- Provocation
- Disrespect
 - Accusations
 - Stop/Frisks for No Reason
 - Challenge masculinity
 - Cursing
- Threats



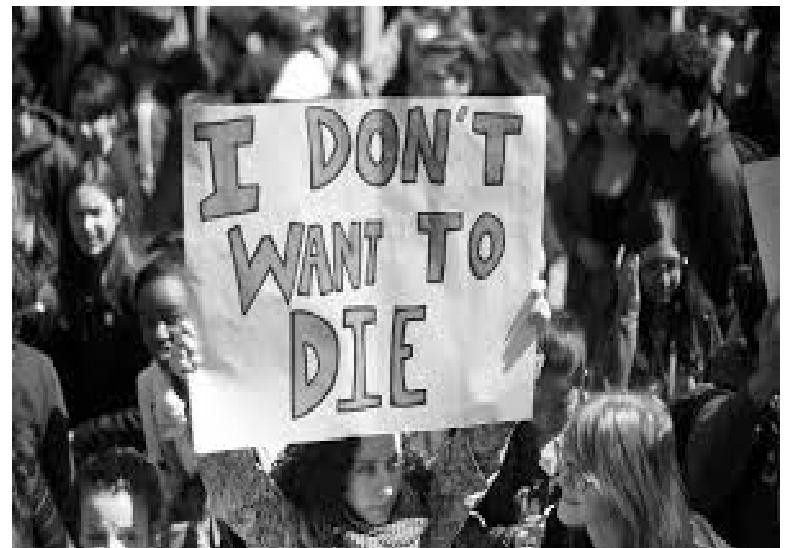
Just Being There

- Officers' uniform triggers response
- Fears of not being
 - heard
 - treated fairly
- More uniforms trigger more fear



Youth Responses to Officers:

- Expectations of officers' treatment inform youths' response
- Increased sense of powerless leads to:
 - Defensiveness
 - Flight
 - Fight



Best Tactics for Interactions with Youth



Before you can de-escalate...

What is
escalated?

- The youth?
- You?
- The situation?

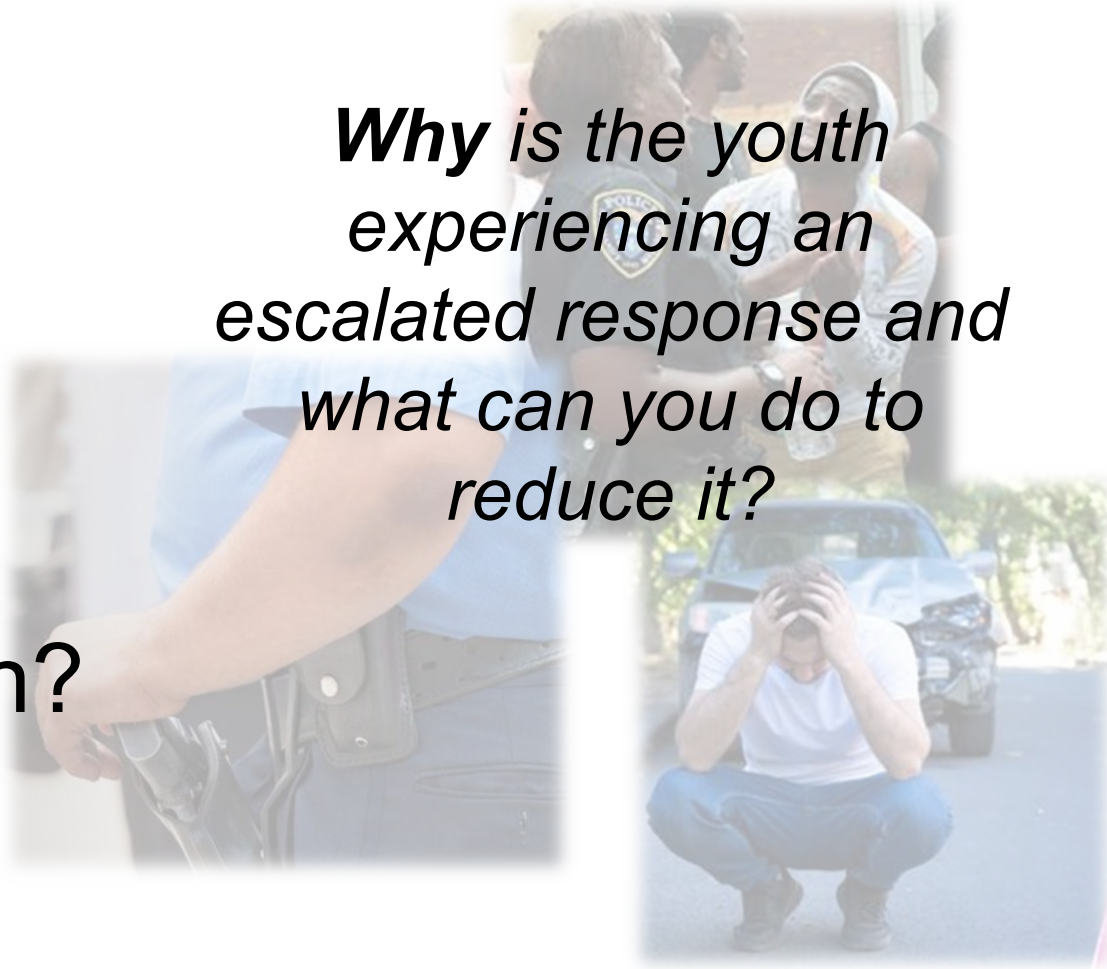


Before you can de-escalate...

What is
escalated?

- **The youth?**
- You?
- The situation?

*Why is the youth
experiencing an
escalated response and
what can you do to
reduce it?*



Priority: Show Care & Concern

- Assess youth's condition (high, in crisis, abused, lacking options, etc.)
- Look for cognitive and/or mental health issues
- Consider potential trauma exposure and youths' responses
- Identify external sources of agitation

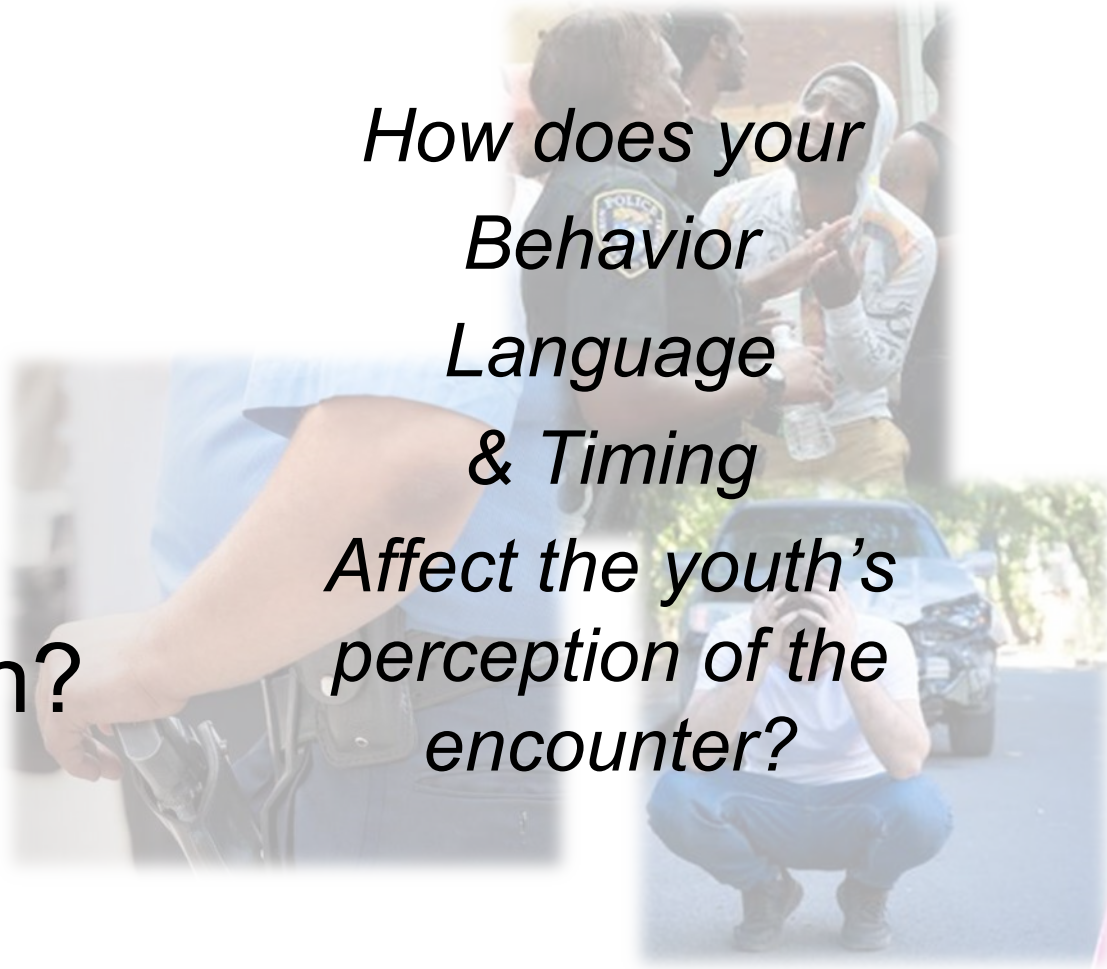
Before you can de-escalate...

What is
escalated?

- The youth?
- **You?**
- The situation?

*How does your
Behavior
Language
& Timing*

*Affect the youth's
perception of the
encounter?*



Priority:

Role as Neutral Problem-Solver

- Emphasis on non-custodial response, trouble-shooting, conflict resolution
- Neutral Approach
- Consider the Source of Reason for Encounter
 - Call for service
 - Patrol Observation

Priority: Problem Solver

Behaviors:

- Reduce Sense of Threat**
- Confirm non-aggressive posture
- Be aware of non-verbal communication
- Consider perception of threat
 - How will inviting back-up affect the situation?
 - Other adults available to support effort?

Priority: Problem Solver Cont'd.

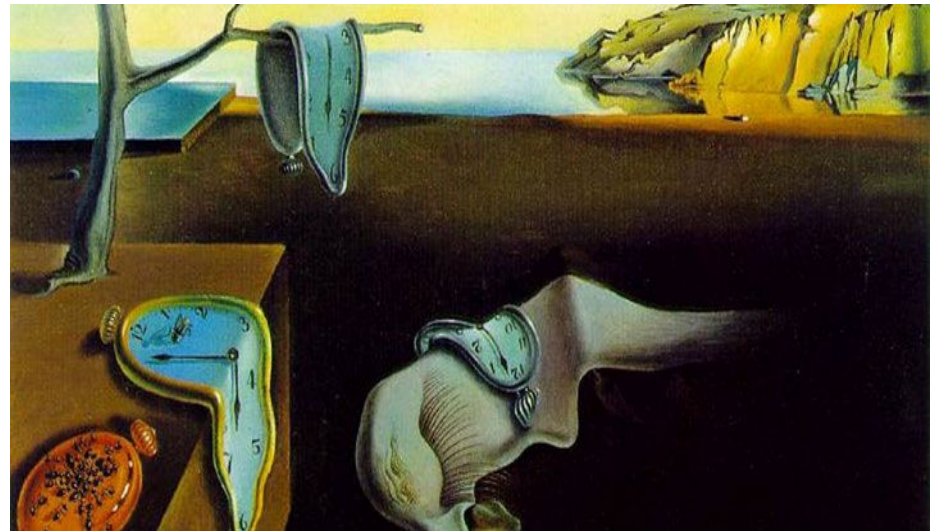
Language:

- Answer "why"
- Be an active listener
- Language – express concern,
- Clarify options:
situation/alternatives/consequences
- Expect Up
- Avoid threats

Priority: Problem-Solver

Timing:

- Slow is fast
- Kids process information/situations at different speeds
- Speed leads to transactional response and increased sense of powerlessness among youth

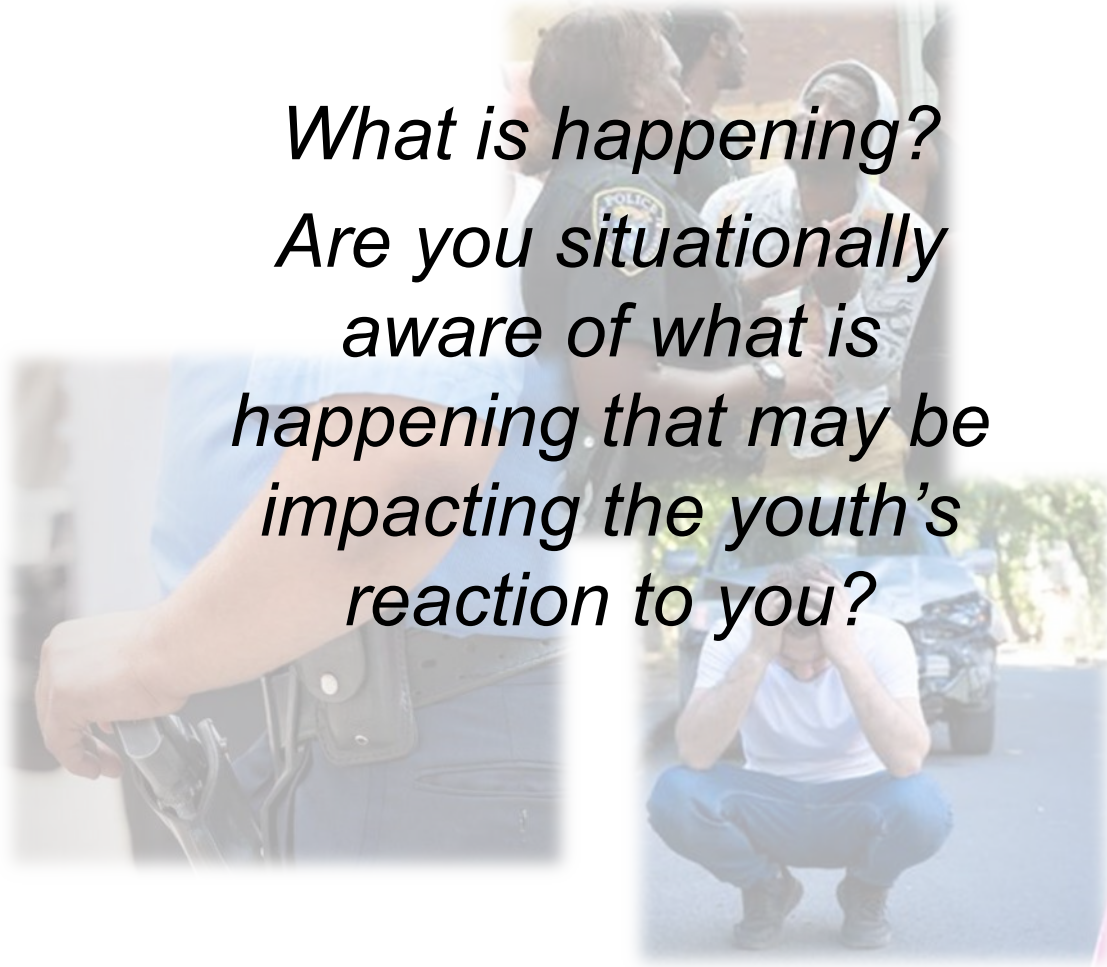


Before you can de-escalate...

What is
escalated?

- The youth?
- You?
- **The situation?**

*What is happening?
Are you situationally
aware of what is
happening that may be
impacting the youth's
reaction to you?*



Priority: Reduce Escalators

- Recognize the difference between calls for service and course of duty interactions:
 - Be aware of the power dynamics in Calls for Service
 - Recognize youth's perception of the interaction
- Identify and remove external agitators
- Separate youth from audience
- Separate your response to the youth from your response to the situation

Guidance Checklist: Key Elements

- Recognition of Developmental Differences
- Emphasize Role of Trauma
- Role of Officer: Goal of Interaction
- Articulate Chosen Tactics
 - Behavior
 - Language
 - Timing
- Alternatives
- Resolution of Interaction



1 De-escalation

- Distract youth with out-of-left field question
- Direct youth to concentrate on breathing/counting
- Give time
- Separate youth from each other
 - Use an explanation for the separation to reduce anxiety of friends
 - Riff on comments

2 Listen

- Look for signs of diminished capacity: PTSD, mental illness, etc.
- Allow venting, when repetitive use distraction
- Seek GIGA: Good Intentions Gone Awry
- Re-State youth's view out loud
- Explain/translate ramifications

3 Explain

- Clarify rules
- Anticipate challenges to the rule
- Explain the reason for the rules
- Explain options (situation/alternatives/choice)

4 Responses at the Incident

- Look for Face-Saving Outcome
- Collaborative Problem Solving
- Set plan of Action going forward – Graduated sanctions
- Check-ins
- Involve Parents

5 Expect Up

- Focus on the positive
- Remind youth of what could be
- Make it clear what to do and how

GENERAL RULES:

Watch Your Pronouns

- Don't start sentences with "you"
- It's sad (takes blame off person/ situation for what's sad)
- We need (not "you have to...")
- We have to figure this (not "you better get y together")

Don't ask "why"?

- Ask how
- Ask of what time did you...

Don't take it personally:

REMEMBER: You may not be a social worker but to keep safe you need to be a psychologist!

Explain why...connect

© 2021 Strategies for Youth. All rights reserved.



B.L.T. BEHAVIOR – LANGUAGE – TIMING



	What's the Kid's BLT?	What's Your BLT?
BEHAVIOR 	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
LANGUAGE 	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
TIMING 	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.

Developmental Competence

Strategies for Youth acknowledges that adults who are developmentally competent interact more effectively in interactions with youth. Adult's frame our actions that connect to developmental competence. Developmental competence refers to the skills, knowledge, and abilities that are needed to understand and influence behavior in a social, psychological, and psychological manner related to their developmental stage.



1. UNDERSTAND HOW DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE AFFECTS BEHAVIOR, COGNITION, AND EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

- Understand how the cognitive, affective, and social skills related to the developmental stage, and the individual's power of skills, making it more complex with maturity.
- Use your knowledge of behavioral challenges and interactions with children and youth to:
- Explain/translate ramifications.

DEVELOPMENTAL COMPETENCE based on the person's biological, emotional, social, and psychological development and individual differences. It is the ability to understand and influence behavior in a social, psychological, and psychological manner related to their developmental stage or interaction.

2. FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

Recognize the developmental stage of the person, person and social interaction is a function of their developmental stage, and maturity. Their behavior will be different than yours. Consider their developmental stage and individual differences. — as well as their individual and social differences — to the developmental stage of the child and youth.

Communicating EFFECTIVELY with Youth



1. KNOW WHEN CHILD DEVELOPMENT
Your expectations should not be too high for a 9-year-old and too low for a 14-year-old. Remember that even if you talk face to face and by age, the age of the child is not the same as the age of the adult.

2. KNOWLEDGE IS POWER
The more you know about a place, youth, their culture, their needs, the more you can connect with them. Consider their names, habits, needs, feelings, and your own background.

3. FIND SOMETHING TO PRAISE
Many youth have been through a lot of trauma. Praise and encouragement are essential. Focus on what they did well on, not what they did wrong. Praise is a great way to build a positive relationship.

4. BE SPECIFIC, CONCRETE AND SIMPLE
Youth often have a hard time understanding abstract concepts. Use simple, concrete language. Avoid jargon and complex words. Use examples and stories to help them understand.

5. SAVE YOUR THREATS
Don't use threats to get your way. Youth often have a hard time understanding abstract concepts. Use simple, concrete language. Avoid jargon and complex words. Use examples and stories to help them understand.

6. OCCASIONALLY TAKE A BREAK-UP
When you are talking to youth, giving them a break is a good idea. Youth often have a hard time understanding abstract concepts. Use simple, concrete language. Avoid jargon and complex words. Use examples and stories to help them understand.

7. REPAIR
If you make a mistake, apologize. Youth often have a hard time understanding abstract concepts. Use simple, concrete language. Avoid jargon and complex words. Use examples and stories to help them understand.

8. ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL
Youth are individuals. What works for one youth may not work for another. Be flexible and adjust your approach based on the youth's response.

9. HELP EACH OTHER OUT
Youth often have a hard time understanding abstract concepts. Use simple, concrete language. Avoid jargon and complex words. Use examples and stories to help them understand.

© 2021 Strategies for Youth, Inc.
All rights reserved. For more information, visit www.strategiesforyouth.org

Procedural Justice for Youth

VOICE Did I have a chance to give my voice a hearing?



IMPARTIAL Have I been treated fairly and impartially?



TRANSPARENT Did I see the rules and the reasons for the rules?



FAIR Is my response in line with the rules?



SPECIAL FOR YOUTH...

CONCERN Did I act like I cared about the youth's well-being and that care?



NOT PREDATORY Am I taking advantage of the youth's lack of power?



Youth and Trauma

What is Trauma?

Physical: An often serious, and body-altering physical injury, such as the loss of a limb.
Psychological: An emotional or psychological injury usually resulting from an extremely stressful or life-threatening experience.



When the trauma response is triggered, the amygdala "signals" the brain which makes it difficult to regulate thoughts, emotions and actions.

The Workings of the Traumatized Brain

- Cortisol, the stress hormone, floods the brain during a traumatic event, and is easily triggered—even when there is no real threat.
- When the trauma response is triggered, youth respond from the brain's emotion center and find it difficult to regulate thoughts, emotions and actions.

DID YOU KNOW?

Over 90% of juvenile justice-involved youth have experienced at least one ACE, with many reporting experiencing an average of 5 different ACEs.

A history of trauma increases the risk of arrest by 59% and of committing a violent crime by 30%.

The prevalence of youth experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the juvenile justice system is 8 times higher than in the community.

Youth in low-income communities face significantly more adverse experiences than children from a higher socioeconomic status.

Sources of Trauma: ACEs

Sources of childhood trauma are also known as adverse childhood experiences or ACEs.
Examples include: Death of a parent, emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect, exposure to domestic violence, community violence, household substance misuse and mental illness, parental separation or divorce, incarceration of a household member, homelessness.

The Bad News

Law enforcement officers come in contact with youth who are disproportionately affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). These youth are exposed to risk factors including mental illness, family dysfunction and community violence.

The Good News

Resilience, the ability to bounce back, is ordinary, NOT extraordinary. A person's ability to be resilient is based on the presence of protective factors in their lives. These include healthy relationships with adults, peer friendships, attachment to school, and "pockets of competence" in some areas.



Police can play an important role in promoting resilience in youth. Just like a child bouncing on a trampoline, people have the innate ability to bounce back. This is called being resilient. Resilience is also known as the ability to develop in a healthy manner despite facing adversity.

De-Escalation Guidance Should:

- Clarify developmental differences of youth and how that is expressed in behavior
- Articulate Role of Officer
 - Peacekeeper/Commitment to Avoiding Arrest
 - Social Agent
 - “Here to help.”
- Emphasize need to take into consideration all biases, including officer’s, involved.

Guidance Cont'd.

- Taking time to assess situations
- Adopt Procedural Justice approaches
- State with specificity officer conduct wanted:
 - Behaviorally
 - Language
 - Timing
- Warn against behaviors known to escalate

Guidance Cont'd.

- *Special emphasis: trauma*
 - Racial/Ethnic minorities' experiences, concerns, and fears
 - Traumatized responses should not be confused with guilt
 - Officers' racial/gender biases lead to interpretations that ignore youth's trauma