



The following recommendations are offered to the Cleveland Community Police Commission in the development of new use of force policies by the Cleveland Division of Police, and in particular how children and youth may be impacted by such policies and practices.

Discretion for best possible outcome. Police officers necessarily exercise discretion in handling everyday problems they may encounter on patrol. Building a rapport with a child or youth (defined as under 18 years of age) is one of the most effective ways to ensure safety as well as to promote crime prevention. Understanding the tremendous amount of discretion available in determining how to respond to a situation involving a child/youth is critical to productive police-youth encounters overall and specifically, to minimizing the unnecessary, ineffective and/or harmful use of restraints and use of physical force practices.

Context counts. According to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) guidance on police use of force, “situational awareness is essential” and “time becomes a key variable in determining when an officer chooses to use force.” (

circumstances, as well as items in the environment, that may indicate the presence of a child/youth and thus warrant more caution and limited use of force tactics. For instance, places where child/youth congregate, such as playgrounds, schools, daycare centers, recreation centers, etc., should alert officers to the possibility of children/youth being present. In addition, noting the presence of items, such as toys, diapers, children’s bikes, etc., when approaching a home or vehicle, should alert officers to the possibility of a child/youth being present.

Minimum Force Necessary. NIJ notes “law enforcement officers should use only the amount of force necessary to mitigate an incident, make an arrest, or protect themselves or others from harm.” In instances involving children/youth, officers should anticipate behavioral responses that reflect fear and traumatized responses to police and may include: physical resistance; fleeing; verbal challenges; and disregard for police directives. Officers should provide distance, and spend the time necessary to establish rapport with youth as an alternative to using physical force whenever it is safe to do so. Female officers, where possible, should be used to conduct searches of female youth suspects. Consideration of the nature and seriousness of the offense or complaint should inform the officer’s decision as to whether and how to pursue a fleeing youth suspect and employ physical force tactics.

Developmentally-informed Practices. When confronted with these responses, officers should employ tactics designed to de-escalate the encounter and reduce traumatic responses; for youth these include developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed strategies and tactics, including crisis intervention. Officers should receive training on child and adolescent development and effective communication and other de-escalation strategies.

- b. Physical attributes of the officer relative to the child/youth, should also inform the degree of force necessary to stabilize a situation.
 - c. Grabs, holds and other forms of bodily restraint should be tempered by the size and age of the children/youth as children are still growing physically and may be more susceptible to injury.
 - d. Punches, kicks and other physically aggressive forms of bodily force should not be used on a child/youth unless absolutely necessary to stabilize the situation and gain compliance, and should never be used if children/youth are in restraints.
 - e. If injury occurs, immediate steps should be taken to provide medical assistance.
4. Less-Lethal
- a. Blunt impact instruments of control should be avoided with child/youth unless absolutely necessary to stabilize the situation and gain compliance.
 - b. Chemical sprays should not be used on children/youth unless absolutely necessary to stabilize the situation and gain compliance or to reduce risk of injury to the themselves or others, and other less intrusive means have been employed.
 - c. Chemical spray should never be used on children/youth in restraints.
 - d. Electronic control weapons and tasers present an increased risk for injury and should not be used on children/youth.
 - e. If injury occurs, immediate steps should be taken to provide medical assistance.
5. Lethal
- a. Context and circumstances are critical for considering whether lethal force is necessary. See notes on the environment and surroundings discussed above.
 - b. If injury occurs, immediate steps should be taken to provide medical assistance.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions.

Sincerely,



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