



PUBLIC RELATIONS & OFFICER SAFETY

Training Guide page 15

ACO CORE COMPETENCIES



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Overview

PUBLIC RELATIONS

In the News





Public Relations Overview

- Public relations is the business of creating goodwill and understanding between animal control and the public
- The skills most important to an ACO relate to his or her ability to appropriately handle interactions with people
- Animal-handling skills are secondary

Public Relations Overview

- As always, speak with your supervisor and department before engaging in any public relations activities
 - Understand your department's policies and procedures for handling the media
 - If your department does not have policies and procedures in place, MDAR can direct you to resources to help your municipality create these documents



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MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE
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NATURAL RESOURCES



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**OFFICER COMMUNICATION,
SAFETY & DE-ESCALATION**

First Impression

- Citizens form a first impression of you based on what they see
- Keep your appearance clean and neat
 - Have a uniform if at all possible
- Maintain your vehicle
 - Some ACOs have use of a municipal vehicle; others have personal vehicles
- Be aware of your body language



Citizen Contact

- Keep 4 – 6 feet between you and the other person at all times
- Face the citizen during a conversation, but angle your body slightly to the side
- Make eye contact during the conversation, but do not stare



Citizen Contact

1

Look and stay calm no matter what the other person says or does

2

Keep your voice low and speak at a normal pace when talking to the other person

3

Speak clearly and intelligently

- **Know your job and the laws, but don't be afraid to say "I don't know"**
- **You may always call your supervisor, law enforcement, or MDAR if you have questions about your job or the law**

Step by Step

**Identify
yourself
first**

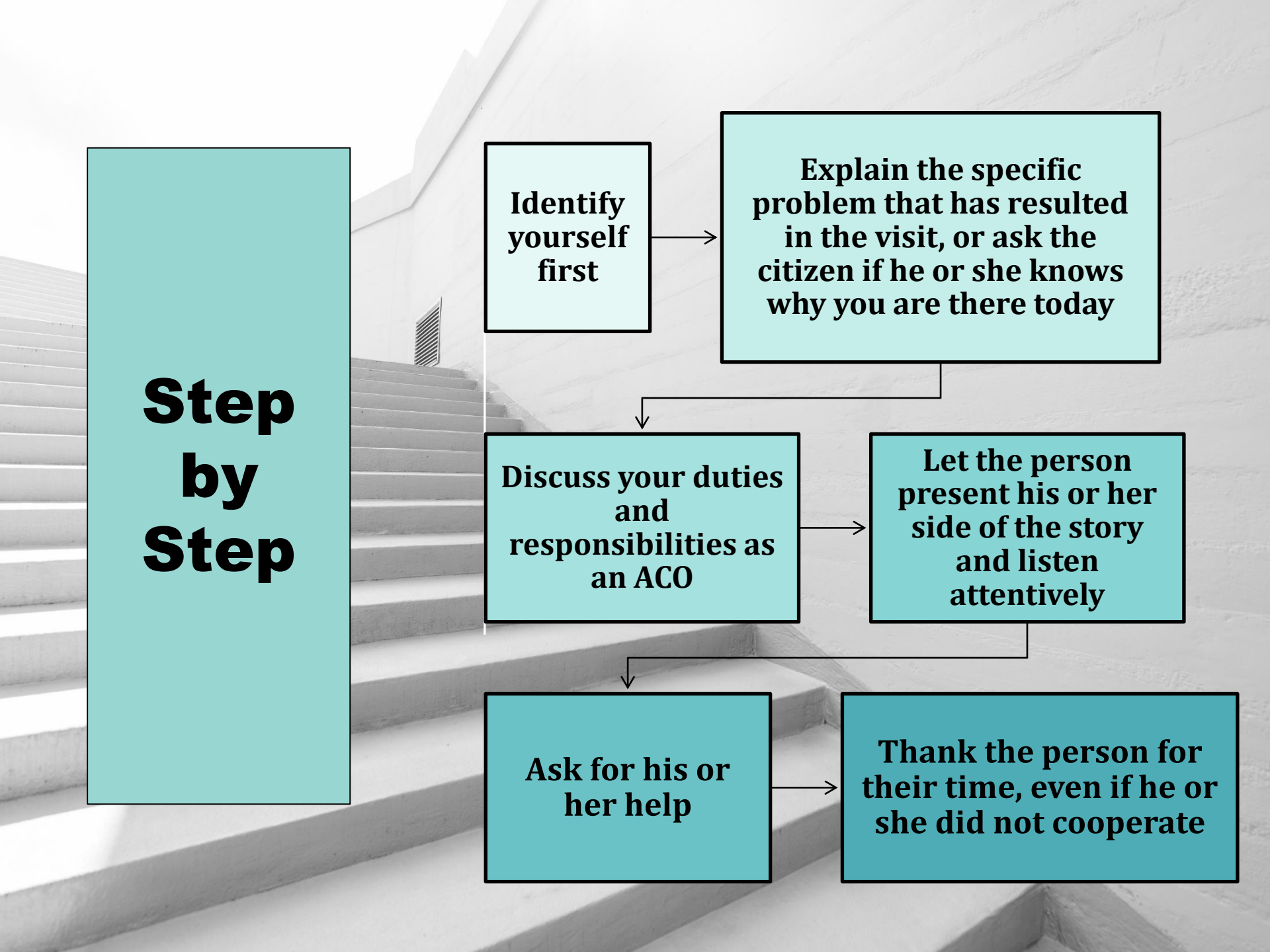
**Explain the specific
problem that has resulted
in the visit, or ask the
citizen if he or she knows
why you are there today**

**Discuss your duties
and
responsibilities as
an ACO**

**Let the person
present his or her
side of the story
and listen
attentively**

**Ask for his or
her help**

**Thank the person for
their time, even if he or
she did not cooperate**



Verbal De-escalation



Verbal de-escalation is what we use during a potentially dangerous or threatening situation in an attempt to prevent a person from causing harm to us, themselves, or others

Without specialized training, you should never consider the use of physical force

Verbal de-escalation consists of tactics to help limit the number of staff who might be injured on the job

Verbal De-escalation Tactics



- Some tactics include:
 - Simply listening
 - Distracting the other person
 - Refocusing the other person on something positive
 - Changing the subject
 - Motivating the other person
 - Empathizing with the other person
 - Giving choices
 - Setting limits

De-escalating Effectively

- Understand communication barriers:
 - Pre-judging
 - Not listening
 - Criticizing
 - Name-calling
 - Engaging in power struggles
 - Ordering
 - Threatening
 - Minimizing
 - Arguing



De-escalating Positively



- Use positive and helpful statements such as:
 - “I want to help you!”
 - “Please tell me more so I better understand how to help you.”
 - “Let’s call Mr. Smith; I know he’d be able to help you with this.”
 - “Ms. Jones handles this for our district, so let’s ask her what she thinks about this situation. She’s always willing to help!”

Notification and Follow-up

Intervention must occur to end the situation, if it has not yet occurred. This may be accomplished by supervisors, security, or police, depending on the circumstances.

Always report minor situations

- Minor situations can be a cry for help and/or a warning sign of bigger things to come

Always document every threatening event

- Documentation will help all parties when evaluating recurring events

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WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Written Communication



The proper use of grammar is as important in your writing as it is in your speech



You must spell words correctly



Make sure that you fill out all forms fully and completely to comply with Massachusetts record-keeping mandates



**Social
Media**

Do Not Post or Talk About Violations

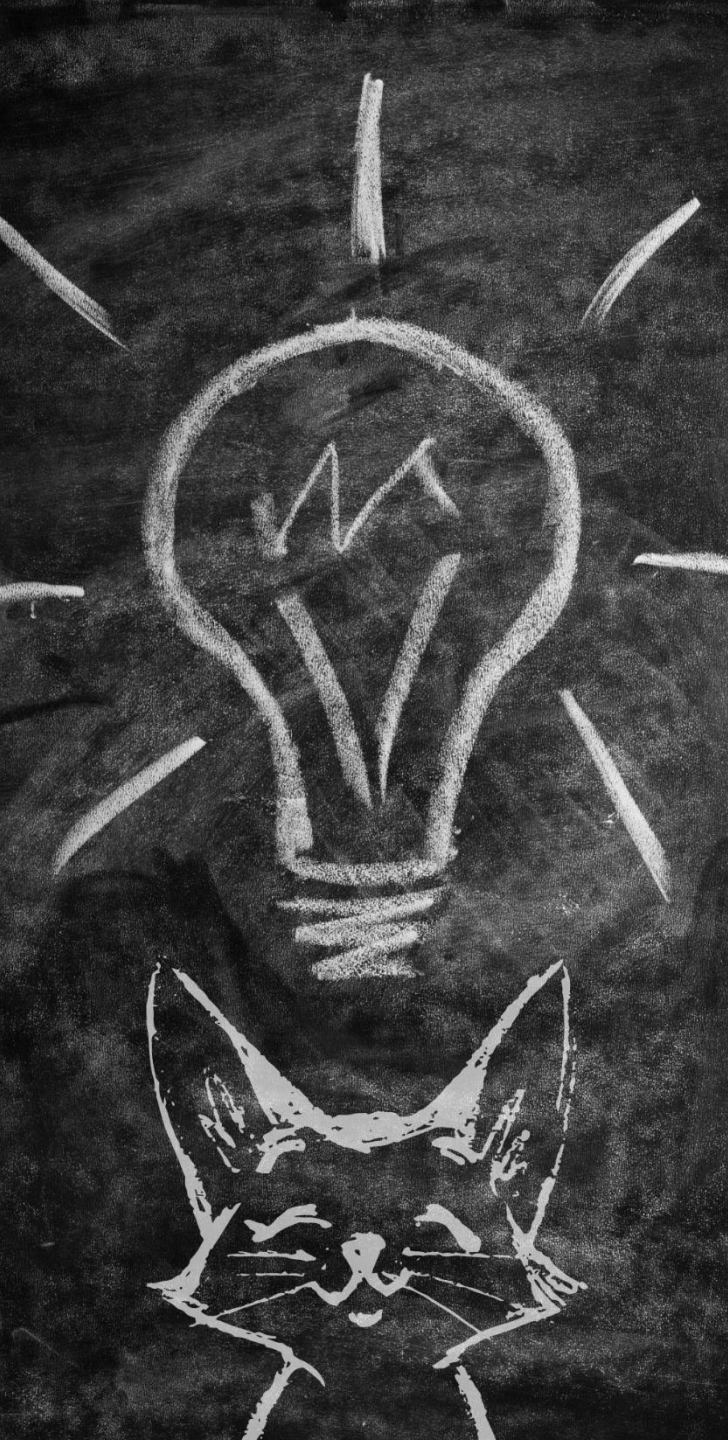
- Do not talk about or post information on violations or ongoing investigations in person, on social media sites, or elsewhere on the internet
- Never divulge information about a complainant



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MEDIA CONTACT



Look at it as an Opportunity

- It is your chance to educate the public on the issue, whether it is animal cruelty, responsible pet ownership, or bite prevention
- It is also free and can be good publicity for your agency

Be Available To the Press

- Do not return phone calls or release information unless you are authorized to do so or it goes through the proper channels (public relations officer, etc.)
- If you are authorized to do so, always return press phone calls, even if you cannot immediately answer their questions
- Do not be afraid to say “I don’t know”, but be sure to let them know you will get an answer to them as soon as possible



Be Prepared



A reporter will usually have done some research before saying anything

Take time to prepare yourself; know the facts, expect questions, and consider what you want the interview to accomplish

Determine the reporter's purpose in writing the article

Think Before You Speak

- Take a minute to think about your answer before saying anything.
- Do not feel obligated to comment if you are intercepted in the field, even if you are authorized to do so.



“Off the Record” & Personal Views

- If there is something you do not want the general public to know, do not say it
- Do not use your municipality’s social media platforms or your own social media platforms to share any details pertaining to your job
- Remain objective in all cases



Get Your Supervisor's Approval

- If you decide to submit an article or news release from your agency, get your supervisor's approval first
- Consider your purpose, what needs to be said, and how to say it
- Do not submit something with your personal opinions in it
- If you mention another city, county, or state agency, be sure to call them first as a professional courtesy





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EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Educational Programming

- Most animal control problems are “people problems” which can be corrected and even prevented by educating your community on issues pertaining to pets
- Every officer-citizen contact is an educational opportunity
 - You have the chance to explain the law, answer questions, and teach responsible pet ownership



Educate Groups

- In addition to individual citizens, you can educate groups:
 - Classrooms
 - Civic clubs
 - Church organizations
 - Kennel clubs
 - Other youth or adult groups



Programming Opportunities

- Bite prevention
- Responsible pet ownership
- Laws and ordinances regarding animals
- Animal safety
- Rabies prevention
- Animal control services
- The importance of spay/neuter

How To Meet A Dog

Do

- ✓ Kneel and turn to side
- ✓ Keep your face up and away from dog's face



- ✓ Walk up slowly and speak softly
- ✓ Allow dog to approach you
- ✓ Pet gently for a few seconds then stop
- ✓ Always ask before petting

Don't

- × Reach towards or over head
- × Make direct eye contact
- × Make quick movements or loud noises
- × Hug a dog you just met
- × Pet a dog while holding a baby



A dog is afraid if you see:

- Wide, worried eyes
- Leaning or looking away
- Ears back, tail low or tucked

Courtesy of Pets and People in Harmony, Columbus Dog Connection, and CattleDog Publishing

Proud to be part of the network that has helped
over **14,000** local animals and counting!

FILE TAXES.
HELP ANIMALS!
line **33F**



WWW.MASS.GOV/ANIMALFUND

The Mass Animal Fund

You routinely have the ability to educate the public on the importance of sterilization by your participation in the Mass Animal Fund Spay/Neuter Voucher Program

- Low-income Massachusetts residents who receive state or federal services are eligible to receive vouchers for free spay/neuter of their dogs and/or cats

Training Guide Pause

Let's take a minute and
review guide page 15

PUBLIC RELATIONS & OFFICER SAFETY

Verbal de-escalation is an important tool to use during a potentially dangerous or threatening situation in an attempt to prevent a person from causing harm to us, themselves, or others.

Cross out anything that isn't a verbal de-escalation tactic below:

Empathize with the Individual and try to understand things from their point of view.

Provide positive motivation to encourage a solution.

Minimize the Individual's concerns, by telling them it's not issue.

Try changing the conversation by refocusing the individual on something positive.

Verbal De-escalation Tactics

Give the Individual choices to help resolve the issue.

Simply listen to what the individual is saying.

Try to make sure your body language is not threatening.

Let the individual know right away that they are facing citations and penalties.

Use physical force.

Pre-judge the individual and the situation and make sure you go into the conversation with your mind made up.

Make the individual aware that you are there for their safety and the safety of the animals and ask for their help.

Use a distraction to resolve tension.

Use positive and helpful statements like: "Please, tell me more so I can better understand how I can help you."

A Day in the Life



WRAP UP

Questions?