


PUBLIC RELATIONS & OFFICER SAFETY

Training Guide page 15



ACO CORE COMPETENCIES


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PUBLIC RELATIONS

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In the News



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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

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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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OFFICER COMMUNICATION, SAFETY & DE-ESCALATION

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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



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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

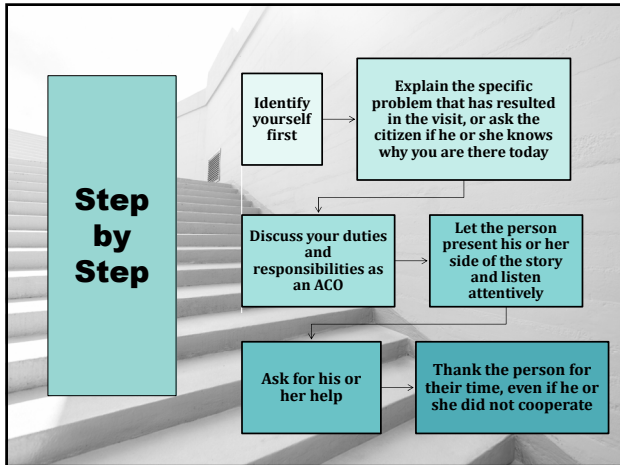


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Citizen Contact

<div style="background-color: black; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 30px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-bottom: 5px;">1</div> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">Look and stay calm no matter what the other person says or does</p>	<div style="background-color: black; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 30px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-bottom: 5px;">2</div> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">Keep your voice low and speak at a normal pace when talking to the other person</p>	<div style="background-color: black; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 30px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-bottom: 5px;">3</div> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">Speak clearly and intelligently</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
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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

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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

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De-escalating Effectively

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



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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!”

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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

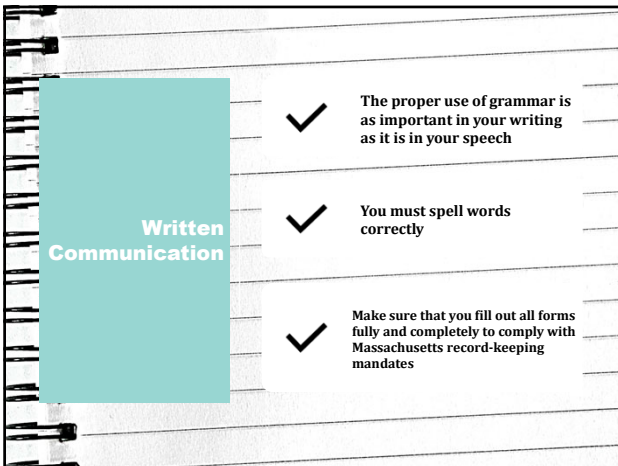
Always document every threatening event

- Documentation will help all parties when evaluating recurring events

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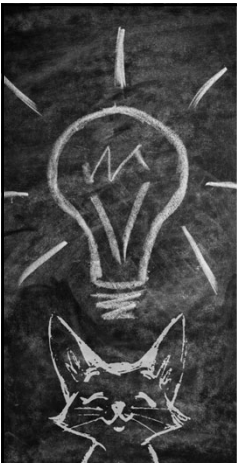


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MEDIA CONTACT

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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

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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



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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


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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.

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“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

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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

approved



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EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

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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



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Educate Groups

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



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Programming Opportunities

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



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

FILE TAXES.
HELP ANIMALS!
line 33F



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

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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 an issue.

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

Verbal De-escalation Tactics

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."

Give the individual choices to help resolve the issue.

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WRAP UP

Questions?

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