



# Module 3

## Tactical Communications



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Section 1:	Introduction
Section 2:	Components of Communication
Section 3:	5 Step Positive Style of Tactical Communications
Section 4:	Recognise compliance and Signals of Submission
Section 5:	5 Occasions when Tactical Communications may fail
Section 6:	The Assault Cycle
Section 7:	The Attitude Cycle
Section 8:	Chemical Cocktail
Section 9:	Factors Affecting Communications
Section 10:	De-escalation Strategies

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### Aims:

Describe the theories, principles and concepts of tactical communications in relation to operational safety.

### Learning Outcomes:

Officers/staff will be able to:

- Explain the principles of Tactical Communications
- Describe the 5 Step Positive Style of Tactical Communications
- Describe compliance and Signals of Submission
- Identify when Tactical Communications may fail
- Describe the principles of the Assault Cycle, Attitude Cycle and the Chemical Cocktail
- Identify the factors affecting communications
- Describe de-escalation strategies

### Section 1 - Introduction

Tactical Communication is defined as the use of communication skills with the purpose of achieving control and/or gaining a tactical advantage. In policing terms, the goal is always to control a situation. Communication skills are amongst the most important skills officers/staff can possess. This module addresses the key principles of effective communication and how these can be utilised to prevent conflict, diffuse and control a situation.

## Section 2 – Components of Communication

### Tactical Communication



#### Giving Out

Communication is an interaction between two or more people, with all participants having an active role in the process. This process has 3 main components:

1. **Words** :-spoken words and phrases, making up 7% of the total message.
2. **Vocal** :- tone, volume, intonation, pitch, pace. making up 38% of the total message.
3. **Body language** :- body language, gestures, facial expressions; making up 55% of the total message.

For communication to be successful, a combination of all 3 components is needed, where each component compliments the others. Figures clearly show that the majority of communication is non-verbal. Therefore, it is vital that officers/staff use the appropriate body language to the message they wish to convey. If conflict exists between the components then people will instinctively believe body language before the spoken words or tone of voice.

#### Taking In

Taking in information is also a vital part of communication, with information being taken in through the eyes and ears. Just like giving out information this can be broken down:

- **Eyes** :- peoples body language, gestures and facial expressions, which include Impact Factors, Warning and Danger Signs. This accounts for 80% of the information taken in.
- **Ears** :- spoken words, phrases, tone, volume, intonation, pitch and pace. This accounts for 20% of the information taken in.

This information taken in, is combined to formulate Profiled Offender Behaviour and allows an officer/staff to consider the next tactical option.

It should be noted that this information breakdown is the same for both officer/staff and the subject. There are many factors that may affect the ability to take in or give out information, such as; alcohol, drugs, mental state, disability or injury.



**Active Listening**

Active listening is a method to take in the subject’s information, and can be a basic conflict resolution skill. Officers/staff should:

- Be open and receptive
- Hear all of what is said
- Interpret what is said
- Act on what is said

Empathy is a powerful tool and can defuse a verbal confrontation, resulting in compliance and control. Summarising what the subject has said displays understanding. Explain to the subject what options are available and the actions that may be taken. Words alone may not establish control, or resolve every encounter, especially if a subject is intent on conflict with an officer/staff.

**Communication Tools**

The following system may aid communication.

- |                    |                                |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Listen,</b>     | Active Listening               |
| <b>Empathise,</b>  | Shows understanding            |
| <b>Ask,</b>        | If more information is needed  |
| <b>Paraphrase,</b> | In the officer/staff own words |
| <b>Summarise,</b>  | Condense the facts             |

Before considering this system, it is important for officers/staff to identify the subject’s best method of communication. This may identify the need for an interpreter or appropriate adult.

## Section 3 - Five Step 'Positive Style' of Tactical Communication

### Step 1: Ethical Appeal

This is a method of persuasion that connects to the subjects Morals, Principles and Character. Most people know right from wrong, and will comply with a request made by the Police.

### Step 2: Reasonable Appeal and Explanation

This is when an officer/staff gives an explanation of any crimes that may have been committed, and the reasons why the officer/staff are engaging with the subject. The subject should be given a full explanation of what is required of them.

### Step 3: Personal Appeal and Options

This is when an officer/staff informs the Subject of what options are available, and what may result from each option. The results from each option should be made personal to the subject e.g. family, money or reputation..

### Step 4: Practical Appeal – Confirmation

The Practical Appeal is when the Officer/staff confirms the previous appeals. Officers/staff should inform the subject of what is required of them, and the subsequent result of refusal. If the subject continues to refuse to co-operate, it is a good idea for the officer/staff to ask, "Is there anything I can reasonably say or do, that will make you comply with my request?" This phrase also acts as a signal to other officers/staff present, that this is the last line of dialogue before taking action.

### Step 5: Action

A physical Use Of Force, Tactical Option, must be an absolute necessity because of the subject's continued and escalating resistance. Officer/staff should choose a tactical option based on their perception of the subjects level of resistance, and other impact factors as per the Tactical Options Model.

## Section 4 - Recognise 'Compliance' and Signs of Submission

It is necessary to recognise and record compliant behaviour. Compliant behaviour on its own is invariably dealt with by Officer Presence and Tactical Communication. Compliance incorporates both verbal and body language which are easy enough to identify. The subject putting their hands up, and moving backwards are the most common signs. Again verbal signs of compliance are numerous and varied, but tend to be easily understood, and tend to match up with the subjects body language.

### Signs of submission include:

- Relaxing of the muscles, loss of resistance
- Signs of exhaustion, sweating, out of breath
- Falling onto knees
- Officers/staff should note this may not be the case in all situations. Fear can also cause a physical response that should not be presumed to be resistance.

## Section 5 - Five Occasions When Tactical Communications May Fail

Whilst it is always preferred to deal with an encounter with the minimum level of force, this is not always possible. There are five times when communications skills may often fail and other options should always be considered. The mnemonic SAFER can be used to remember these five areas:

### Security:

When the subject perceives themselves to be in imminent danger.

### Attack:

Where the officer/staff or subjects are being attacked, or their safety is in immediate jeopardy.

### Flight:

When a subject is running away from an officer/staff.

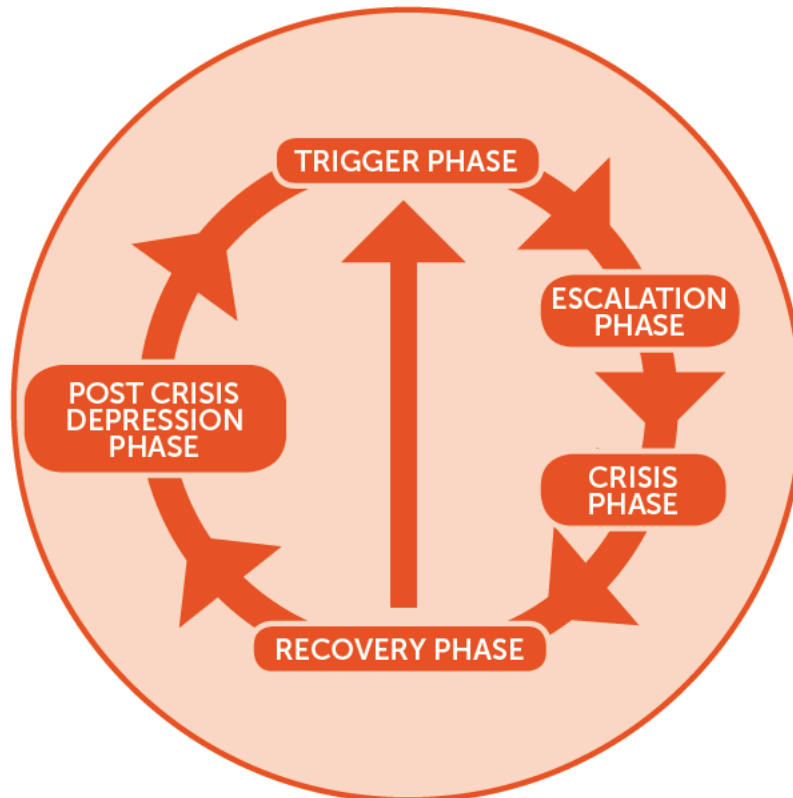
### Excessive - Repetition:

When an officer/staff has tried all avenues of communication and these have failed or the officer/staff perceives these communications will fail then it may become apparent that no voluntary compliance will be forthcoming.

### Revised Priorities:

When the threat dynamic changes and requires immediate action and a different tactical response option, e.g. if the subject suddenly produces a weapon or is joined by other subjects.

## Section 6 - The Assault Cycle



### The Trigger Phase

A Trigger can be anything. It can happen in a split second like a noise, spoken words or an action. Alternatively it can develop over time, such as repetition of instructions or questions, being ignored, or it can be a physical issue like an injury or lack of sleep. Intervention as early as possible through removal or resolving the trigger, can often prevent reaching the later phases of the cycle.

**This phase includes anything the subject perceives to be a serious threat, regardless of whether any other person would agree an actual threat exists or not.**

#### Tactics to avoid include:

- Direct confrontational questions regarding the cause of aggressiveness
- Direct threats
- Invasion of personal space
- Judgemental or critical statements

### The Escalation Phase

If the trigger is not removed or resolved, then the subjects aggression levels may start to increase as the subject prepares their body and mind to attack the cause of the trigger. Their ritual behaviours of combat replace normal behaviour. Warning Signs and latterly Danger Signs may be observed as the subjects aggression escalates.

### The Crisis Phase

Control over aggression diminishes, exploding into one or more physical assaults on the perceived source of the threat. An individual cannot sustain this level of energy indefinitely.

### The Recovery Phase

The subject's behaviour begins to return to normal. With the battle over, the muscles begin to relax, and ritualized combat behaviour decreases as the body and mind seek abnormal behaviour pattern. It should be noted, this is a gradual process taking an extended period of time. During this period the subject is highly sensitive to further triggers and vulnerable to re-escalation.

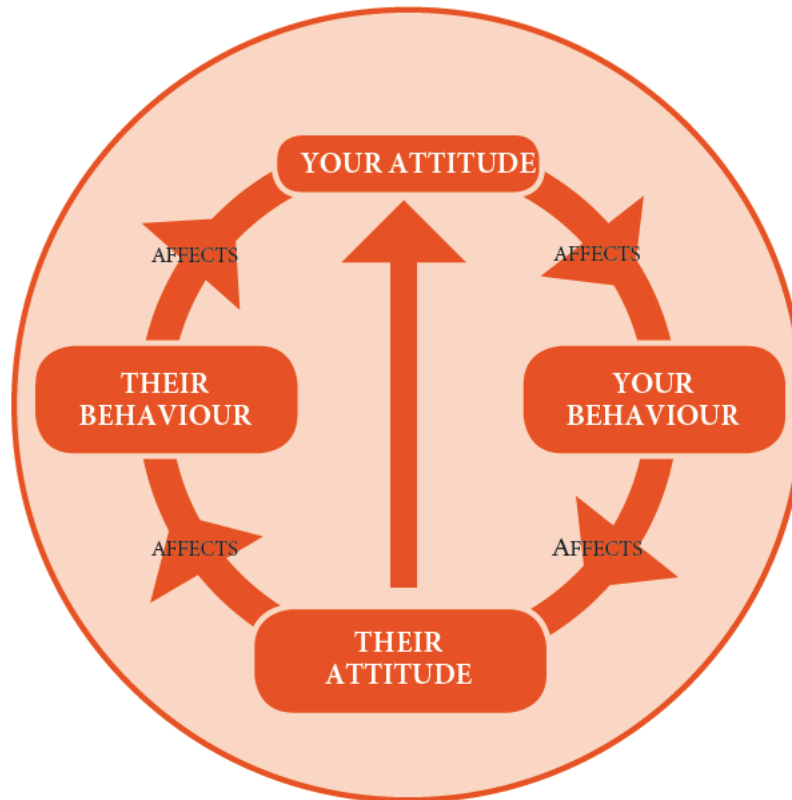
### Post Crisis Depression Phase

The levels of exertion during the Crisis Phase now takes it's toll. The physical and emotional symptoms of fatigue and/or depression can dominate the behaviour. Subjects may be ashamed of their actions, cry, hide or curl up in the fetal position and sleep.

Officers/staff may experience a similar set of phases, meaning they require to behave in a rational and effective manner, whilst in a heightened physical and emotional state. This heightened state may hinder the officer/staff in the performance of their role.

## Section 7 - The Attitude Cycle

The Attitude Cycle, also known as Betari's Box, is a simple model that can help officers/staff to understand the impact their attitudes and behaviours can have on the attitudes and behaviours of the people around them.



An officers/staff frame of mind plays a large role in the behaviour they exhibit. If the officer/staff is feeling positive and motivated, then their behaviour will also be positive, and this will be reflected in their body language and voice. This can affect those around them in a positive manner. However, this can also work in reverse. If an officer/staff has negative feelings, then this can cause negative body language and actions, which may affect those around them in a negative way.

It is important to remember that this cycle works both ways. Officers/staff must keep in mind the possible negative impact a subjects attitude and behaviour may have on them. Therefore, officers/staff must strive to stay positive and motivated, breaking any negative cycle, before things start to escalate.

## Section 8 - The Chemical Cocktail

During conflict, the human body produces a range of chemicals to increase survivability. These chemicals include:

**Adrenaline** - Adrenaline increases heart rate, oxygen supply to the lungs and blood supply to the muscles. This also promotes supply of glucose into the blood for energy. These things assist in coping with fear and stress.

**Endorphins** - The body's natural painkillers.

**Dopamine** - Dopamine is a neurotransmitter. It is a chemical messenger that helps in the transmission of signals in the brain and other vital areas.

**Noradrenaline** - This is a hormone which causes vasoconstriction (blood moves from extremities to major muscle groups).

**Cortisol** - This hormone helps to reduce the effects of shock.

### Effects of the Chemical Cocktail:

- Additional strength
- Increased pain threshold
- Increased awareness and detailed focus on immediate threat
- General muscle tightening
- Visual slow down (Tachypsychia)
- Tunnel vision
- Post incident fatigue

## Section 9 - Factors Affecting Communications

### Alcohol and drugs

These substances affect the brains communication pathways and can change the subjects perception. There are higher risks that the subject may not be compliant due the influence of drugs or alcohol, or may exhibit behaviours like irritability or slurred speech. The officer/staff should maintain tactical awareness at all times and communicate accordingly without antagonising the situation.

### Disability

Some disabilities can cause communications to fail, and this can then hinder an officer/staffs ability to deliver the best possible service. Officers/staff must therefore be able to recognise these barriers early and adapt their communication strategy accordingly, to maximise effective communication. This can be done in numerous ways. Officers/staff may choose to change the environment, by removing persons or objects from the area. They may choose to move to another location. Officers/staff can choose to alter their tone of voice or even to alter their own appearance. however officers/staff should note it is not always possible to make the changes needed . In these circumstances the officer/staff should assess the value of continuing, and should re-evaluate the tactical options available to them.

Examples of this would be engaging with a deaf person whose first language is British Sign Language. Overcoming barriers may be as simple as moving into an area with good light if the person can lip read or it may need the assistance of a BSL interpreter.

The use of family and friends to assist communication should be considered carefully . Unless the circumstances require a quick response, this is generally not the best course of action due to confidentiality, also the subject may not want their family member involved and this may cause increased distress and reaction.



## Environment

There may be environmental barriers to communication (e.g. noise pollution) and physical barriers (e.g. doors, other people, vehicles or distance).

## Selective Perception

Selective perception or confirmation bias, is a tendency to favour information that confirms preconceptions, or a point of view, and discard any information which defies it, regardless of whether the information is true. Information is selectively screened, and information that confirms personal biases are accepted. This can be both an unconscious or conscious process.

## Cross-Cultural Communication

Police Scotland covers a multi-cultural society, and thus officers/ and staff should expect to deal with people from different cultures to their own. It is a good idea for officers/staff to make themselves familiar with the cultural traits of those people they are most likely to have contact with. Failure to recognise the obstacles created when communicating with a person from a different cultural background can prevent a message being understood or cause a message being misinterpreted

An individual's culture has a large impact on how they communicate, both verbally and in their body language. Officers/staff need to take this into account when dealing with someone from a different cultural background to their own. A comment or action may be perceived one way by one person, but perceived very differently by another. This can mean the difference between getting things right, or things going very wrong. Officers/staff being aware of this can help reduce the chances of assaults and complaints.

It should be noted that communication between people of different cultural backgrounds can take considerably longer than usual. Therefore, officers/staff should be prepared to spend more time dealing with the incident. Officers/staff should use Tactical Communication skills to ensure information is received and understood. People who are not fluent in a language are more likely to bring with them not only their own accent, but also their own language's intonation. This can cause problems as the emphasis on some words in a sentence can alter its meaning, or give a contradictory message. Officers/staff should place more emphasis on the spoken words themselves, rather than the tone in which they are said. By paying attention to body language can assist in a more accurate threat assessment. Likewise, presenting non-aggressive body language can be effective in de-escalating a situation.

## Section 10

### De-escalation Strategy

The elements of de-escalation strategies when dealing with a subject, will depend on the context and environment. However, the following principles may be applied:

1. Officers/staff should appear calm, centred and self-assured. Relax and look confident. Anxiety can make the subject feel afraid and unsafe which could escalate to aggression.
2. Officers/staff should use a modulated, low tone of voice (our normal tendency is to have a higher pitched voice when apprehensive).
3. Be aware of all the other resources that may be available for assistance, and remember the choice to withdraw is always an option.
4. Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for assistance. An agitated subject can be very sensitive to feelings of shame and disrespect. Always treat people with dignity and respect.
5. Do not argue or try to convince.
6. Don't be defensive or judgemental.
7. Do not shout, or try to talk over the subject. Wait until they pause or take a breath, and then talk. Speak calmly with a neutral tone and volume.
8. Whenever possible, answer the subjects questions no matter how rudely they are asked.
9. Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, but always respectful tone. Give choices where possible in which all options are safe.
10. Empathise with their feelings, but not with the behaviour, e.g., "I understand that you have every right to feel angry, but it is not okay for you to threaten me".
11. Do not ask "Tell me how you feel". But ask, "Help me to understand what you are saying." People generally do not attack someone while they are informing them of what they want them to know.
12. Suggest an alternative course of action and highlight the advantages where appropriate.
13. Inform the subject of the consequences inappropriate behaviour may bring, without being threatening.
14. Officers/staff should trust their instincts. If they assess, or feel de-escalation is not working, then STOP! officers/staff will know within a few minutes, if it is working or not.

### The Physical Stance

#### Rules:

1. **Never turn your back on a subject**, for any reason.
2. **If possible be at the same eye level.** - Encourage the subject to be seated, but if the subject stands, the officer/staff also stand.
3. **Do not get too close** - maintain an appropriate reaction gap.
4. **Do not stand directly in front of the subject.** -Stand at an angle in front, slightly to the side so officers/staff can sidestep away if needed.
5. **Do not stare them out.** -maintain eye contact, but allow the subject to break their gaze and look away.
6. **Do not point or shake your finger.**
7. **DO NOT smile** - This could look like mockery or anxiety.
8. **Do not touch** – no physical contact, even if this would be culturally appropriate and deemed normal in the circumstances. Cognitive dysfunction in agitated people can cause misinterpretation of physical contact to be hostile or threatening.

**Keep hands out of your pockets/body armour!  
Have them free and available to protect yourself!**

