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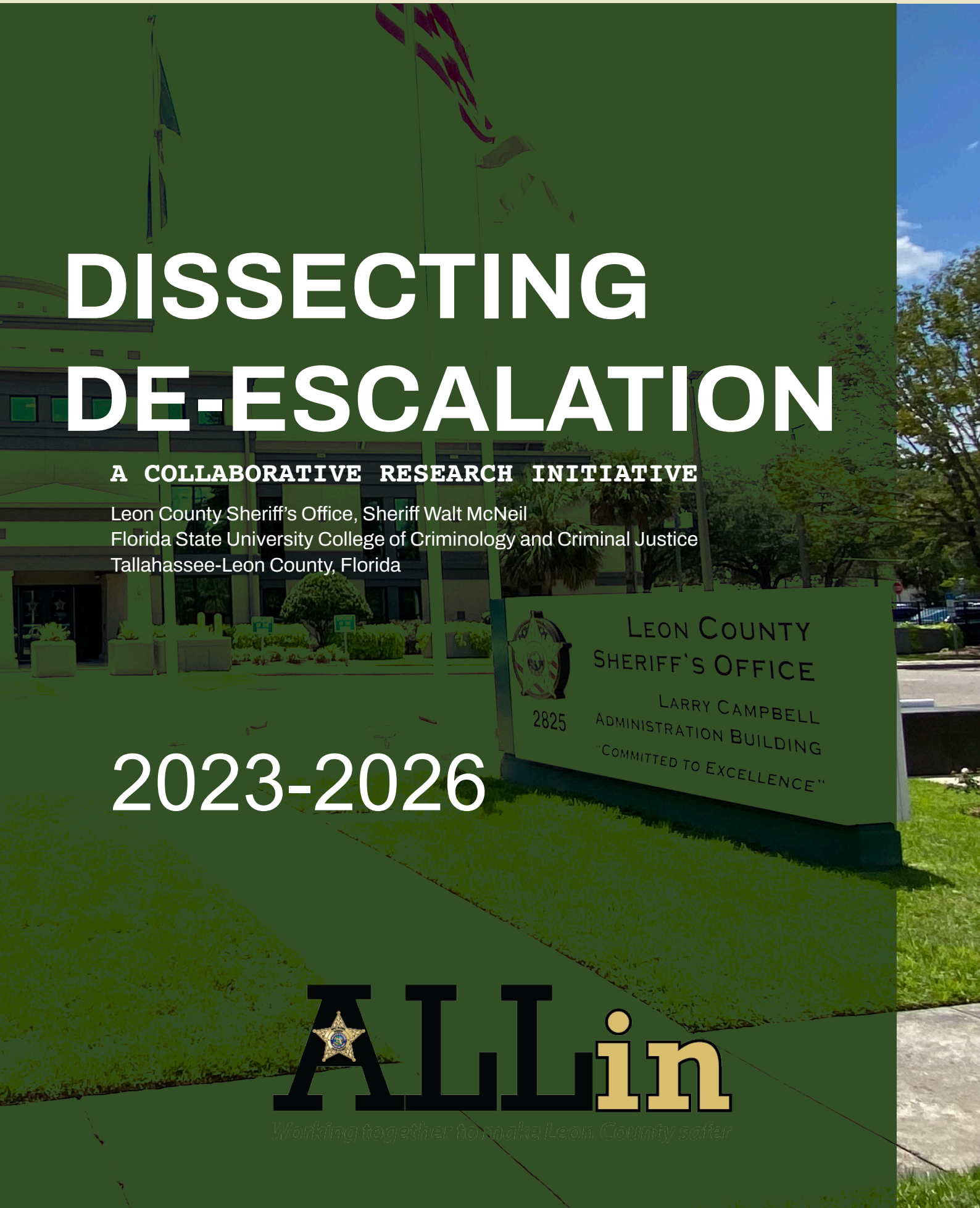
DISSECTING DE-ESCALATION

A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Leon County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff Walt McNeil
Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Tallahassee-Leon County, Florida



2023-2026

ALLin

Working together to make Leon County safer

MESSAGE FROM SHERIFF WALT MCNEIL

As Sheriff, one of my highest priorities is ensuring that every member of our community feels safe, heard, and respected. It was with this commitment in mind that I launched the Dissecting De-escalation Project, an initiative designed to advance how our agency approaches conflict resolution and community trust.

When we launched the Dissecting De-escalation Project in 2023, we did so with a bold vision: to set a new standard for modern policing, one that prioritizes safety and respect above all else. Far too often, the public sees only the most intense moments of law enforcement encounters, moments that can define community perception for years to come. Through this project, we sought to show that there is another side to the coin: one rooted in patience, empathy, and skill.

The Dissecting De-escalation Project represents our commitment to becoming law enforcement's benchmark for excellence. We recognized early on that, to achieve this, we had to go beyond traditional training models. We needed to look deeply at our own data, study every facet of our encounters, and be honest about where we could improve. By integrating research-backed practices, leveraging insights from body-worn camera footage, and partnering with top research institutions like the Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice, we set out to create a culture of learning and continuous improvement. This was not just about changing tactics; it was about changing mindsets. It required our deputies to think differently about how they approach tense situations, to develop an even greater sense of emotional intelligence, and to see every call for service as an opportunity to build trust. It also meant empowering our staff with advanced tools, realistic scenario-based training, and support systems that allow them to act confidently and compassionately under pressure.

"This was not just about changing tactics; it was about changing mindsets."

I am deeply proud of the men and women of this agency, from our sworn personnel to our civilian analysts and administrative staff, who embraced this mission wholeheartedly. Their dedication to our ALL IN philosophy has been inspiring. They have demonstrated time and again that true leadership in public safety is measured not only by the arrests we make or the crimes we solve but by the lives we protect and the relationships we build along the way. The successes we have already seen through this project reinforce my belief that Leon County can and should lead the way for de-escalation practices in law enforcement agencies across the nation. We are reducing the likelihood of force, enhancing officer and public safety, and building stronger bonds with our neighborhoods. We are showing that accountability and compassion can and must coexist in modern policing.

This project is not a finish line; it is a foundation to build upon. It is a promise to our community that we will always strive to improve, to listen, and to evolve. As we continue this work, I invite our community to remain engaged, to provide feedback, and to stand alongside us as partners in safety. Together, we are making Leon County stronger, safer, and more unified for generations to come. Thank you for your unwavering support, your trust, and your belief in our mission. We are, and always will be, ALLin for Tallahassee-Leon County.

Sheriff Walt McNeil
Leon County Sheriff's Office

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Origins

The Leon County Sheriff's Office launched the Dissecting De-escalation Project in 2023 to address a gap in modern policing. While de-escalation is widely discussed and "trained," it was not being measured in a meaningful or consistent way. LCSO recognized that most existing approaches relied on policy language or training hours, rather than real-world outcomes.

The goal of this project was to move beyond assumptions and build a data-driven understanding of how deputies manage volatile encounters. This effort focused on what actually happens during deputy–citizen interactions and how those actions influence outcomes, particularly the use of force.

Key Research Questions

What factors lead encounters to escalate or stabilize?

This question focuses on identifying the key drivers that influence whether an interaction becomes more volatile or begins to calm. It examines subject behavior, deputy actions, environmental conditions, and timing. By determining early indicators of escalation and/or incident stabilization, we aimed to help deputies recognize risk sooner and adjust their approach before situations intensify.

Which de-escalation techniques are most effective in real-world situations?

We ask what specific communication and tactical approaches deputies use in the field and how those approaches influence outcomes. We looked beyond theory to identify which techniques consistently lead to reduced tension. The goal was to determine what works across different scenarios so that effective strategies can be reinforced through training and practice.

Can de-escalation measurably reduce the use of force?

This question evaluates whether the use of de-escalation techniques has a direct and measurable impact on reducing force. By comparing encounters with and without de-escalation efforts, we sought to determine if these approaches lead to fewer or lower levels of force. The focus was on producing clear, data-driven evidence of impact.

How should policy and training be structured to improve outcomes?

We translated research findings into practical application. We examined how policies can support effective decision-making and how training can reinforce proven strategies. The goal was to ensure deputies are equipped with clear guidance and realistic preparation, allowing them to apply de-escalation techniques consistently and effectively in the field.

Partnership and Funding

This project was developed through a partnership between the Leon County Sheriff's Office and the Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Our academic partners played a key role in research design, statistical analysis, and independent review, ensuring the work met high scientific and methodological standards. The project was further supported in part by funding from the U.S. Department of Justice COPS Office, which made it possible to conduct the extensive data collection and behavioral coding required for Phase 3. This collaboration created a model that blends operational experience with academic rigor, producing findings that are both practical for law enforcement and credible within the research community.

PHASE ONE	PHASE TWO	PHASE THREE
Introduced de-escalation tracking methodologies to LCSO deputies.	**Expanded de-escalation tracking into a large operational dataset.**	**Added behavioral analysis using body-worn camera footage.**
This phase established standardized tracking codes, allowing deputies to document when de-escalation was used and whether it was successful. It created a consistent baseline across the agency and shifted understanding from informal observations to structured data collection, forming the foundation for more advanced analysis.	This phase scaled data collection to over 109,000 interactions across more than 53,000 law enforcement incidents. It provided a broad view of trends, patterns, and outcomes to identify where and how often de-escalation occurred. While valuable, it remained limited in explaining the specific behaviors and decisions that drove those outcomes.	This phase focused on high-stress encounters, using second-by-second coding to capture communication, behavior, and decision-making. Interactions were examined in real time, allowing researchers to identify specific behaviors linked to successful de-escalation, providing clear, practical insight to inform training, policy, and future improvements.

Encounter Coding Methodology

Encounters were analyzed using a structured behavioral coding framework that was designed in close collaboration with the Florida State University. The coding framework was applied to body-worn camera footage from hundreds of incidents. Deputies and subjects were coded sequentially to capture verbal communication, physical actions, resistance levels, and interaction outcomes. Variables included applied de-escalation techniques, use-of-force types, subject demeanor, environmental context, incident type, and indicators such as mental health or impairment. Data also incorporated deputy characteristics, number of personnel involved, and timing of actions, allowing for detailed analysis of how interactions evolved and were resolved.

Key Findings

Following multiple phases of research, data collection, and analysis, we are pleased to present the findings of the De-escalation Tracking Research Project.

KEY FINDING #1

Most law enforcement encounters are not tenuous, and when they are, they most often conclude without force.

Analysis of the encounter level dataset demonstrates that the vast majority of law enforcement interactions occur in stable, non-volatile conditions. During the study period, deputies documented more than 109,000 individual citizen interactions, the overwhelming majority of which were characterized as calm and cooperative. Only a small fraction, approximately 2.69%, involved any level of agitation or resistance, and an even smaller portion escalated to a reportable use of force. These findings establish a critical baseline for understanding deputy-citizen encounters. Contrary to common perceptions that emphasize conflict, the data show that most interactions are routine, controlled, and resolved without escalation. Even in situations where individuals displayed indicators commonly associated with volatility, such as apparent mental health concerns or impairment, deputies were still able to maintain cooperative conditions in most cases.

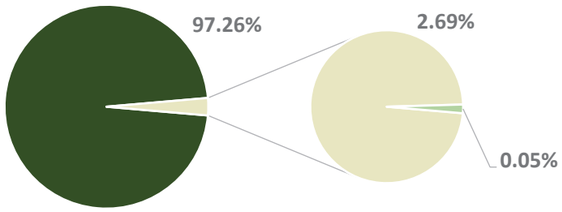


Figure: Proportion of the characterization of citizen demeanor during law enforcement interactions.

Importantly, when encounters did escalate or when deputies encountered citizens who were non-cooperative or agitated, they still rarely resulted in the use of force. Resistance itself was uncommon, and incidents requiring a reportable use of force were exceptionally rare. This indicates that deputies frequently manage challenging situations without resorting to physical force, relying instead on communication, and other stabilization strategies.

These findings reinforce a central conclusion of the project: volatility in police encounters is the exception, not the norm, and even when it does occur, it is most often resolved without force.

KEY FINDING #2

The use of de-escalation techniques significantly decrease the likelihood of the use of force.

The analysis showed a clear and measurable relationship between the use of de-escalation techniques and reduced reliance on force during law enforcement encounters. Focusing on interactions in which force would have been authorized, the study applied statistical modeling to isolate the impact of deputy behavior while accounting for other situational factors. The results show that the application of de-escalation techniques consistently increases the likelihood that an encounter will be resolved without force. Importantly, this relationship is cumulative. As deputies employ more de-escalation techniques throughout an interaction, the probability of avoiding force increases accordingly. Encounters in which no de-escalation efforts were observed were significantly more likely to result in force, while those involving multiple techniques were more likely to conclude without it. This pattern reinforces the idea that de-escalation is not a single action, but an ongoing process that can shape the direction of an encounter over time.

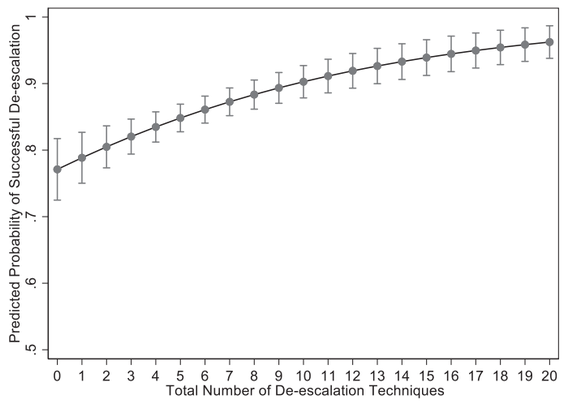


Figure: Predicted probability of successful de-escalation by the number of de-escalation techniques employed.

These findings provide strong empirical support for de-escalation as an effective strategy for law enforcement. Deputies who actively engage in de-escalation can influence outcomes in a measurable way. The data confirm that de-escalation is directly associated with safer resolutions, reducing the need for force while maintaining control of the situation.

KEY FINDING #3

De-escalation training is effective when the right curriculum is used and implemented properly.

The findings demonstrate that de-escalation training had a measurable impact on deputy behavior and performance in the field. Using a randomized controlled trial design, deputies were assigned to receive a specially designed de-escalation training, allowing for a direct comparison between trained and untrained groups. The analysis found that deputies who completed the training used a greater number of de-escalation techniques during encounters, indicating a clear behavioral effect of the training.

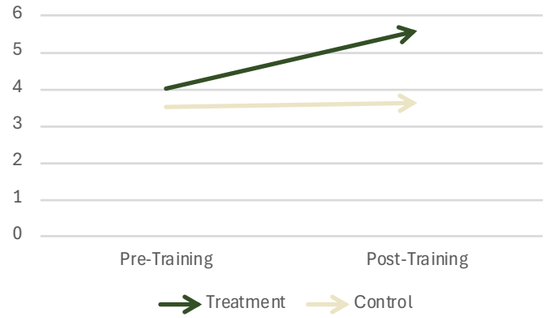


Figure: Increase in treatment group's use of de-escalation techniques after training, compared to control group.

This difference in technique use is critical, as the study also found that the application of more de-escalation techniques was directly associated with a higher likelihood of resolving encounters without the use of force. As a result, trained deputies were not only behaving differently, but their actions were linked to improved outcomes.

Within the behavioral sample, deputies were able to stabilize or reduce resistance in the majority of encounters, with nearly 70% of interactions ending at or below the initial level of resistance and more than 80% ending below peak resistance. These outcomes point to the practical impact of training in real-world conditions.

The training itself was based on the LEADS program but modified to fit LCSO's operational environment. Overall, the results provide strong evidence that the LCSO-adapted LEADS training produced meaningful improvements in both deputy behavior and encounter outcomes.

KEY FINDING #4

Certain de-escalation techniques, such as showing empathy and offering assistance, are more effective than others.

Statistical modeling identified clear differences in how individual techniques influenced the likelihood of resolving encounters without force and reducing resistance levels.

Providing individuals with a voice emerged as one of the strongest predictors of success, increasing the odds of resolving encounters without force by approximately 25%.

Similarly, separating individuals from sources of agitation was associated with a substantial increase in successful outcomes, improving the odds of de-escalation by approximately 57%. These techniques appear to directly influence a subject's emotional state and ability to regain control, making them particularly effective in volatile situations.

> **"Providing individuals with a voice emerged as one of the strongest predictors of success, increasing the likelihood of resolving encounters without force by approximately 25%."**

Other techniques, such as offering assistance or providing explanations, also showed consistent positive effects, increasing the likelihood of successful de-escalation by 15 to 24% depending on the outcome measure. These approaches reinforce the importance of communication that is clear, respectful, and solution-oriented.

In contrast, certain behaviors were associated with worse outcomes. Notably, the use of profanity by deputies significantly reduced the likelihood of avoiding force, indicating that communication style can negatively influence an interaction.

We have learned that de-escalation is not simply about using any single technique but about using the right techniques at the right time. Targeting the most effective strategies in training can further improve outcomes and reduce reliance on force.

Policy Implications

The review of agency policy found that, while policy plays an important role in setting expectations, it cannot effectively dictate how de-escalation should occur in the field. This conclusion was developed through a structured review led by the LCSO's Policy and Training Committee, which included representatives from patrol operations, training, command staff, and research partners. The committee examined existing agency directives alongside national models and best practices, with the goal of determining whether policy changes could meaningfully improve de-escalation outcomes.

As part of this process, the committee closely evaluated how de-escalation is currently addressed in policy and explored whether more detailed or prescriptive language would enhance deputy performance. Through this review, it became clear that de-escalation does not function as a fixed or linear process. Unlike procedural tasks that can be standardized, de-escalation depends on a deputy's ability to assess behavior, communicate effectively, and adapt to conditions that can change rapidly within seconds. Each encounter presents a unique combination of factors, including subject demeanor, environmental context, and evolving risk.

The committee considered whether more specific policy language could provide clearer guidance but ultimately determined that overly prescriptive policy would not improve outcomes. Instead, it risked creating unrealistic expectations and limiting a deputy's ability to exercise sound judgment. In high-stress situations, rigid policy language can introduce hesitation or confusion, particularly when deputies feel constrained by requirements that may not align with the realities of the encounter. Comparisons to other professional skills, such as interviewing or crisis communication, reinforced this conclusion. These are skills that can be guided by principles, but not effectively scripted through policy.

The committee ultimately concluded that policy should define expectations, establish boundaries, and reinforce the importance of de-escalation as a core professional responsibility; however, the development of de-escalation as a skill must be driven through training, reinforced through experience, and supported by organizational culture. The most effective path forward is not to legislate de-escalation through increasingly detailed policy, but to invest time, energy, and resources into training deputies to apply these skills in real-world conditions.

Read more about this in the *Policy & Training* section of this report.

Conclusion

The Dissecting De-escalation Project demonstrates that de-escalation can be measured, analyzed, and improved through a structured, data-driven approach.

The Path Forward

The Dissecting De-escalation Project is a shift in how law enforcement approaches one of the most discussed, and often misunderstood, aspects of modern policing. Rather than relying on assumptions, isolated incidents, or generalized training models, this project established a structured, data-driven approach to understanding deputy-citizen interactions. It demonstrates that meaningful progress is possible when agencies are willing to measure their work, examine it critically, and apply those lessons in a practical way.

From the very beginning, this project was designed not only to answer questions but to build a framework that can continue to evolve. The systems developed through this effort, including structured data collection and behavioral coding, provide a foundation that can support ongoing evaluation of de-escalation practices. This will allow LCSO to move beyond a one-time study and toward a continuous process of assessment and improvement. Future efforts will focus on maintaining and expanding this capability, ensuring that de-escalation remains measurable, trackable, and responsive to change over time.

There is also a clear opportunity to deepen the analysis. While this project captured a wide range of variables, future research can further examine the role of environmental conditions, supervisory presence, team dynamics, and other contextual factors that influence how encounters develop. Expanding the dataset and continuing to refine analytical methods will strengthen the reliability of findings and allow for more precise insights into what shapes outcomes in the field. Sustainability of training effects is another important area for continued study. Understanding how skills are retained over time, how often training should be reinforced, and how performance changes with experience will help ensure that gains are not temporary. Integrating training evaluation with operational data will allow LCSO to assess whether or not training is delivered with efficacy and whether it continues to influence behavior in meaningful ways.

Replication is equally important. The methods developed in this project were intentionally designed to be scalable and transferable. Other agencies can adopt similar approaches, allowing for broader comparisons and contributing to a more consistent, evidence-based understanding of de-escalation across jurisdictions. Expanding this work beyond a single agency will strengthen the profession as a whole and help establish shared standards for measurement and evaluation. LCSO stands ready to assist any agency seeking to engage in similar research.

This project also points to the value of collaboration. The partnership between operational personnel and academic researchers was critical to ensuring both practical relevance and methodological rigor. Continued collaboration will be essential as the field moves forward, particularly in refining methods, validating findings, and exploring new areas of inquiry.

Beyond research, the project carries a clear call to action. Agencies must commit to ongoing self-examination and continuous improvement. This requires a willingness to look closely at real-world performance, to accept both strengths and areas for growth, and to make informed changes based on evidence. Transparency and accountability are not one-time efforts but ongoing responsibilities that must be built into the culture of the organization.

The findings of this project tell us that effective de-escalation is not something that can be mandated through increasingly detailed policy. Instead, it is a skill that must be developed, practiced, and reinforced over time. As such, agencies should focus their time, energy, and resources on effective, research-backed training. Investment in training is an investment in outcomes.

For policymakers, the implications are similar. Support for de-escalation should prioritize funding for training, research, and evaluation rather than relying solely on prescriptive requirements. Policies that establish expectations are important, but they must be paired with the resources necessary to build the skills those expectations require.

Ultimately, this project contributes to a broader commitment to advancing the profession. It demonstrates that law enforcement can take a thoughtful, evidence-based approach to complex challenges and produce meaningful results. It also shows that progress requires effort, collaboration, and a willingness to adapt.

The work does not end with this report. It continues through sustained investment in training, ongoing research, and a continued commitment to improving how deputies engage with the communities they serve.

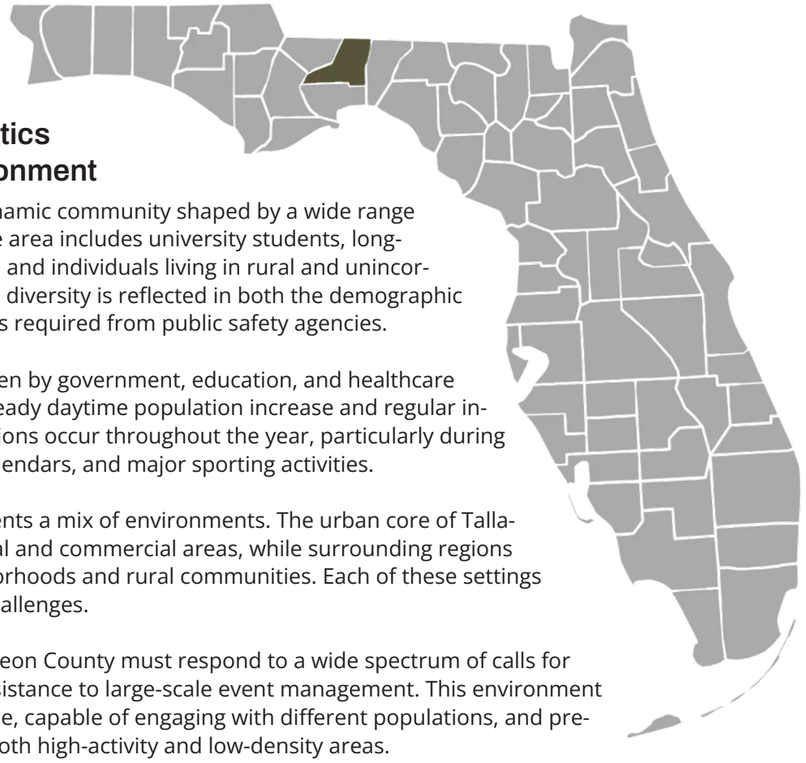
ABOUT LEON COUNTY

The Leon County Sheriff's Office is a full-service law enforcement agency serving the citizens of the Tallahassee-Leon County area of Florida, the state's capital.

Leon County, Florida sits in the state's Big Bend region and serves as the political and administrative center of state government. At its core is the City of Tallahassee, the capital of Florida and one of the most influential governmental hubs in the Southeast. The presence of the Florida State Capitol, along with numerous state agencies and legislative offices, brings a constant flow of officials, employees, students, and visitors into the region.

Leon County is home to a population of approximately 300,000 residents, though its daytime population regularly exceeds that number due to commuters, students, and government personnel. The area is also defined by its strong academic presence, anchored by Florida State University and Florida A&M University. These institutions contribute significantly to the local culture, economy, and population dynamics.

The community reflects a unique blend of government operations, higher education, and residential life. This combination is a setting that is both stable and constantly evolving, requiring public safety services that can operate effectively within a complex and high-visibility environment.



Community Characteristics and Public Safety Environment

Leon County is a diverse and dynamic community shaped by a wide range of populations and lifestyles. The area includes university students, long-term residents, state employees, and individuals living in rural and unincorporated parts of the county. This diversity is reflected in both the demographic makeup and the types of services required from public safety agencies.

The local economy is largely driven by government, education, and healthcare sectors, which contribute to a steady daytime population increase and regular influx of visitors. Seasonal fluctuations occur throughout the year, particularly during legislative sessions, academic calendars, and major sporting activities.

Geographically, the county presents a mix of environments. The urban core of Tallahassee includes dense residential and commercial areas, while surrounding regions transition into suburban neighborhoods and rural communities. Each of these settings presents distinct public safety challenges.

As a result, law enforcement in Leon County must respond to a wide spectrum of calls for service, ranging from routine assistance to large-scale event management. This environment requires deputies to be adaptable, capable of engaging with different populations, and prepared to respond effectively in both high-activity and low-density areas.

Tallahassee, Florida (Leon County) Skyline

POPULATION
~300,000 Residents

TOTAL COUNTY AREA
702 Square Miles

COUNTY SEAT
City of Tallahassee

POPULATION DENSITY
~450 People per sq mi

The Role of LCSO

The Leon County Sheriff's Office serves as the primary law enforcement agency for the unincorporated areas of Leon County and provides a full range of public safety services.

These responsibilities include patrol operations, detention services, court security, and specialized support functions.

As the largest sheriff's office in the surrounding region, the Leon County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) plays a major role in public safety. The agency works closely with nearby counties and provides mutual aid when other agencies need support. Its size and resources allow it to take the lead during large or complex incidents and to assist with operations that extend beyond local boundaries. This regional role makes LCSO a key partner in maintaining safety across the region.

Within Leon County, LCSO operates alongside the Tallahassee Police Department, sharing responsibility for protecting the community. This partnership requires regular communication and coordination to ensure that services are delivered consistently and effectively. Many incidents involve more than one agency, which makes teamwork essential. The presence of state government buildings and offices adds another layer to daily operations. Deputies often work with state agencies, which increases the need for planning and coordination.

Being located in the capital of Florida brings a higher level of visibility and responsibility. Deputies regularly work in environments that involve public officials, large crowds, demonstrations, and major events. These situations often draw increased public attention, which makes professionalism, good judgment, and clear communication especially important. Deputies must be prepared to handle these situations calmly and effectively while maintaining public trust.

"LCSO is committed to providing professional law enforcement services that focus on public trust, accountability, and community engagement."

LCSO is committed to providing professional law enforcement services that focus on public trust, accountability, and community engagement. The agency's mission centers on service, integrity, and doing the job the right way. This includes treating people with respect, using sound judgment, and working to build strong relationships with the community.

LCSO's responsibilities include patrol operations, detention services, and a variety of specialized units, such as critical incident response and special investigations. These duties require deputies to respond to a wide range of situations, from routine calls to serious incidents. In each case, deputies must balance enforcement with communication, problem solving, and respectful interaction with the public.

With ongoing training, strong leadership, and partnerships with other agencies, LCSO continues to strengthen its operations. LCSO will continue to focus on improving how we respond to calls for service and how we serves the community as a whole. With a clear commitment to professionalism and service, LCSO works to build trust and provide reliable, effective law enforcement for the people of Leon County.

Our Vision

United in a spirit of teamwork, we are committed to being law enforcement's benchmark for excellence by providing World Class public safety and community services to the people of Leon County, while maintaining respect for individual rights and human dignity.

Our Mission

The mission of the Leon County Sheriff's Office is to safeguard the lives and property of the people we serve, to reduce the incidence and fear of crime, and to enhance public safety by working in partnership with our diverse community.

Our Values

Honesty & Integrity
The members of the Leon County Sheriff 's Office will be truthful and trustworthy at all times, and in all places. Our commitment is to the highest level of standards as measured by the policing profession, the Law Enforcement Canon of Ethics, and standing up for one's belief.

Accountability
Each member will be responsible for his or her actions, not only to our fellow members, but to the community we serve. The community is our customer, and we will strive to meet their expectations for quality service.

Teamwork
We are committed to the spirit of cooperation and will maintain our partnership with the community. We will never knowingly let a member of our team fail.

Trust & Respect
Our actions serve to enhance the public's trust and respect for the Sheriff 's Office. We will strive to safeguard that trust and pledge to protect the rights of all citizens we serve.

Commitment to Excellence
We are dedicated to achieving the vision, mission, and goals of this Office. We will always strive to do our best and continuously improve to achieve our goals

STATEMENT OF INTENT

Captain James Pittman, Dissecting De-escalation Project Manager

When we set out to design and carry out the Dissecting De-escalation Project, our goal was straightforward. We wanted to better understand how de-escalation actually works in real encounters and how we can improve it. Deputies are regularly placed in situations that can change quickly, where a single decision or even a few words can shape the outcome. These moments carry real consequences for the people involved and for the public's trust in law enforcement. We knew early on that if we were going to take this seriously, we had to look closely at what really happens, not just what is reported after the fact.

The problem we were facing was not a lack of effort, and it was not a lack of interest in de-escalation. The problem was that, across the profession, we simply do not collect meaningful data on it. In criminology and in law enforcement practice, there is a strong focus on events that require documentation for administrative or legal reasons, especially use of force. Those events are tracked, reviewed, and studied in detail. But when a situation is resolved without force, which is often the result of effective de-escalation, there is usually no formal record of how or why it worked. In simple terms, no one is required to document what did not happen.

This creates a major gap. If we only collect data on force, then most of what we study is centered on the point where de-escalation has already failed or was no longer possible. We miss the earlier parts of the encounter, where communication, patience, and decision making often shape the outcome. As a result, de-escalation is talked about as a goal, but it is rarely measured in a consistent or detailed way. Without that data, it is difficult to move beyond general ideas or assumptions about what works.

There is also a practical reason for this gap. Data collection in law enforcement is usually tied to administrative need. Reports are written to document crimes, justify actions, or meet legal requirements. De-escalation, when it is successful, does not always trigger those same requirements. A calm resolution often results in less paperwork, not more. Because of that, the most common and effective outcomes are often the least studied. Over time, this has left the profession with a limited understanding of de-escalation as it actually occurs in the field.

This was the challenge we set out to address. If the data did not exist in a usable form, then it had to be built. That meant creating a way to capture and study interactions that are not typically documented in detail. It also meant accepting that there was no ready-made model to follow. In many ways, we had to build the process from the ground up, deciding what to measure, how to measure it, and how to do it in a way that would be both practical and credible.

At the start of this project, success meant developing a clearer and more complete picture of deputy and citizen interactions, especially the moments that do not usually make it into formal reporting. We were not looking for simple answers or one size fits all solutions. The goal was to better understand patterns, recognize early signs of escalation, and identify the kinds of actions that help bring situations under control before force becomes necessary. Just as important, we wanted to focus on what can actually be observed in real encounters, rather than relying on assumptions or general impressions about behavior.

"...this project has reaffirmed the need for ongoing self-examination and growth within our profession"

To do that, we built a structured approach from the ground up. We combined large scale review of agency data with detailed analysis of body worn camera footage, focusing on encounters that showed signs of tension, resistance, or changing conditions. Each interaction was broken down into observable behaviors, including communication, positioning, and decision making by both deputies and citizens. Trained reviewers applied a consistent coding process, followed by secondary review and quality checks to make sure the data was reliable. By focusing on what could be clearly seen and documented, we were able to create a dataset that captures not just when force is used, but how encounters develop and how they are resolved in real time.

I want to acknowledge the deputies who took part in this effort. Their willingness to have their work reviewed in detail shows professionalism and a commitment to improving the craft. I also want to recognize our academic partners and research team, whose work helped bring structure and clarity to an issue that has long been difficult to study. This project required time, focus, and a shared belief that the effort was worth it.

This work is about more than filling a gap in data. It is about improving how we understand one of the most important parts of the job. Every interaction has the potential to affect safety and public trust, and the ability to manage those interactions well is a core part of professional law enforcement. If we want to improve, we have to be willing to look at the full picture, not just the moments where things go wrong.

This project is not the final word on de-escalation. It is a starting point. The responsibility now is to continue building on this work, to refine how we collect and use information, and to make sure what we learn is applied in a practical way. That means focusing on training, continuing to study real encounters, and staying open to change where it is needed. This report reflects a serious effort to better understand our work and to improve how we do it. It is meant to guide future efforts and support continued growth within the agency and the profession. The work continues with how we carry these lessons forward into the field.

Captain James Pittman
Dissecting De-escalation Project Manager

LITERATURE REVIEW

Captain James Pittman, Dissecting De-escalation Project Manager
Keller Sheppard, PhD., College of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Florida State University

Introduction

De-escalation has become a central focus in modern policing as law enforcement agencies seek to reduce the frequency and severity of force incidents while improving community relations. The growing public scrutiny over police use of force, combined with high-profile incidents of excessive force, have led to widespread adoption of de-escalation training programs across the United States; however, despite the increasing emphasis on de-escalation, empirical evaluations of its effectiveness remain limited and, in some cases, inconclusive. While some studies suggest that de-escalation training reduces force incidents and improves officer decision-making, others indicate that the effects are marginal or short-lived.

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of de-escalation training within the Leon County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) and identify key predictors of escalation through multivariate statistical modeling. By analyzing real-world law enforcement encounters, this research will contribute to the growing body of knowledge regarding when and how de-escalation techniques are most effective and under what circumstances encounters escalate to volatile or forceful outcomes. This literature review explores existing research on de-escalation training, predictive factors of escalation, and methodological approaches for measuring police behavior.

De-escalation Training and its Effectiveness

Numerous law enforcement agencies have implemented de-escalation training in response to national calls for police reform; however, the effectiveness of such training remains a subject of debate. Two of the most widely used training programs are Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training and Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) training, both of which emphasize communication skills, situational awareness, and decision-making to reduce the likelihood of force application.

The CIT model was originally developed to improve law enforcement responses to individuals experiencing mental health crises. CIT-trained officers are expected to use verbal de-escalation strategies to prevent forceful interactions and, when possible, connect individuals to mental health resources rather than the criminal justice system.

"While some studies suggest that de-escalation training reduces force incidents and improves officer decision-making, others indicate that the effects are marginal or short-lived."

Empirical research on CIT training has produced mixed results. Compton et al. (2014) found that CIT-trained officers demonstrated more favorable attitudes toward de-escalation and were significantly more likely to divert individuals to mental health services rather than arrest them.

While this suggests that CIT training alters officer decision-making, it does not necessarily indicate a reduction in use-of-force incidents. Taheri (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of CIT evaluations and found no consistent evidence that CIT training reduced force incidents, though it did improve officers' decision-making abilities in crisis situations.

Engel et al. (2022) argue that simply implementing training is insufficient and that organizational reinforcement and supervision play a crucial role in determining whether officers effectively apply de-escalation techniques in the field. James and James (2023) further emphasize the importance of using body-worn camera (BWC) footage to evaluate officer behavior, as self-reported assessments may overstate the effectiveness of training.

Beyond mental health-related incidents, CIT has been promoted as a general de-escalation framework; however, Alpert, Dunham, and MacDonald (2004) found that officers still resort to traditional compliance techniques when they perceive resistance, reinforcing concerns about training decay and the need for sustained organizational reinforcement. Without regular refresher courses and supervisor reinforcement, officers may revert to prior behaviors, limiting the long-term impact of de-escalation training.

ICAT is a structured approach to de-escalation developed by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). It integrates communication techniques with critical decision-making strategies to manage volatile encounters involving unarmed or non-firearm-armed individuals. Unlike CIT, which primarily focuses on mental health crises, ICAT is designed for a broader range of police encounters, including calls involving emotionally disturbed individuals, individuals in distress, or those in nonviolent conflict situations.

Empirical research on ICAT training suggests that it may be effective in reducing use-of-force incidents. Engel et al. (2020) conducted a stepped-wedge randomized controlled trial (RCT) in the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD) and found that ICAT training resulted in a 28% reduction in use-of-force incidents, a 26% decrease in citizen injuries, and a 36% reduction in officer injuries. These findings suggest that ICAT training can yield measurable benefits, but whether these results are replicable in other law enforcement agencies remains an open question.

Other research suggests that de-escalation training can also promote more effective officer communication styles, and improve citizen satisfaction with police (White et al., 2023, 2025; McLean et al., 2026)."

Bennell et al. (2020) provide further insights into promising practices for de-escalation training. Their systematic review highlights several key factors that contribute to the effectiveness of training programs:

- Scenario-based training that simulates real-world encounters.
- Ongoing reinforcement through supervision and policy changes.
- Objective performance assessments using body-worn camera (BWC) footage.

Despite these promising findings, training decay remains a challenge. Engel et al. (2022) observed that while officer attitudes toward de-escalation improved immediately post-training, these attitudes deteriorated within six months, emphasizing the need for regular refresher courses and supervisory reinforcement. Hickman, Piquero, and Garner (2008) further emphasize the importance of standardized national data collection in evaluating police use of force, as many departments lack uniform reporting mechanisms.

Predictive Factors of Escalation in Law Enforcement Encounters

While de-escalation training aims to reduce force incidents, certain factors continue to influence how and when police encounters escalate. Understanding what drives escalation is essential to improving training effectiveness and developing more accurate predictive models of police behavior.

Officer and Suspect Demographics

There is a large body of literature related to officer and suspect demographics. Some of the research suggests that officer gender and experience influence escalation likelihood, but it is not clear why. Nowacki et al. (2022) found that female officers were more likely to employ de-escalation techniques, though gender did not directly predict escalation outcomes. Similarly, Schuck and Rabe-Hemp (2007) found that female officers use less force overall, while Porter and Prenzler (2017) found that they also receive fewer complaints related to use of force.

From the suspect perspective, Todak and James (2018) conducted a systematic social observation (SSO) study of police-citizen interactions and found that officers were more likely to use de-escalation tactics when suspects exhibited a calm demeanor. However, when suspects displayed hostility, officers often defaulted to compliance-based tactics rather than attempting verbal de-escalation.

Situational and Contextual Factors

Situational factors such as time of day, presence of bystanders, and officer dispatch type can significantly impact an encounter's escalation potential. James and James (2023) found that officers were more likely to use de-escalation in encounters initiated by citizens rather than those initiated by law enforcement. Similarly, Engel et al. (2020) noted that de-escalation efforts were more frequent in encounters involving individuals in crisis but less common in cases involving violent crime suspects.

Hollis (2018) critiques how use-of-force and de-escalation are measured, pointing out data inconsistencies in officer self-reporting and challenges in BWC analysis, which can lead to underreported force incidents.

Literature Review Conclusion

The existing body of research on de-escalation highlights both its importance and its limitations and identifies a clear gap that this study was designed to address. While de-escalation has become a central focus in modern policing, the literature shows that empirical evidence on its effectiveness remains mixed. Some training programs demonstrate measurable reductions in force, while others primarily influence officer attitudes without producing consistent operational change. The field lacks a clear, data-driven understanding of how de-escalation actually functions during real-world encounters.

A key limitation identified throughout the literature is the reliance on incomplete or indirect measures of officer behavior. Many studies depend on self-reported data, administrative records, or outcomes such as arrests and use of force, which fail to capture the full sequence of actions that occur during an interaction.

"…existing research emphasizes that de-escalation is highly dependent on context…yet these variables are rarely examined…LCSO's study was designed to bridge that gap."

As a result, prior research often cannot explain how encounters escalate, how they stabilize, or which specific behaviors influence those outcomes.

Additionally, existing research emphasizes that de-escalation is highly dependent on context. Factors such as subject behavior, environmental conditions, and officer decision-making all influence outcomes, yet these variables are rarely examined together in a comprehensive way. This creates a gap between theoretical models of de-escalation and the realities of policing in the field.

LCSO's study was designed to bridge that gap. By combining large-scale operational data with detailed behavioral coding of real encounters, it moves beyond broad outcome measures to examine how interactions unfold moment by moment. It provides a more complete and practical understanding of de-escalation, directly addressing the limitations identified in the literature and contributing meaningful insight to both research and practice.

POLICY & TRAINING

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Introduction to Policy and Training

In late 2023, the Leon County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) launched a parallel initiative to examine and improve its approach to de-escalation, both in policy and in practice. This work was undertaken as part of the larger de-escalation project, with specific deliverables to review the agency's existing policies and evaluate the effectiveness of its training practices. To carry out this task, the De-escalation Policy and Training Committee was formed consisting of subject matter experts drawn from across the agency. Members included deputies and supervisors with backgrounds in SWAT, hostage negotiation, mental health response, and critical incident intervention, along with instructors from the training section, use of force specialists, accreditation experts, research staff, and command level leadership. The committee was tasked not only with reviewing LCSO's current policies but also with developing a cutting-edge training program that would place the agency at the forefront of modern de-escalation practice.

From the outset, the committee's review identified the challenges facing law enforcement nationwide in the area of de-escalation training. As the group began examining available programs and comparing them

"As the group began examining available programs…it quickly became clear that the field was defined by inconsistency."

to current practice, it quickly became clear that the field was defined by inconsistency. While many agencies claimed to offer de-escalation training, few relied on standardized definitions or evidence-based techniques. Instead, programs varied widely, often reflecting the individual preferences of trainers rather than a coherent or scientifically grounded approach.

Recognizing that this lack of consistency limited both the effectiveness of training and the credibility of the field, the committee determined that the project would require the involvement of a recognized expert with deep knowledge of de-escalation and use of force.

This decision led the group to begin searching nationally for experts who could partner with LCSO to design a program that was both research-based and operationally practical. After reviewing several proposals and meeting with leaders in the field, the committee ultimately selected Lieutenant Kevin Dillon, a retired law enforcement professional with decades of experience and the creator of the Law Enforcement Active Diffusion Strategies (L.E.A.D.S.) program. Dillon's work stood out not only for its proven success in the field but also for its grounding in neuroscience and behavioral science, which explained why de-escalation strategies work in real-world encounters. With Dillon's expertise incorporated into the process, the committee moved forward to create a program specifically tailored to the unique needs of LCSO.

Review of De-escalation Training Practices

As part of the project, the committee conducted a full review of how Leon County Sheriff's Office deputies are trained in de-escalation over the course of their careers. This review looked at the training pipeline from initial academy instruction through field training and into in-service and specialized courses. The goal was to understand not just what is taught, but how often, how consistently, and how effectively de-escalation is reinforced over time.

At the entry level, all deputies receive training through the Florida Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (CJSTC) curriculum. This curriculum introduces core concepts related to communication, officer presence, and the use of verbal commands. Recruits are taught to give clear, lawful orders and to provide individuals with an opportunity to comply before force is used. These principles form the foundation of what is often considered de-escalation in a traditional sense.

The committee found that this training is largely framed around command and control. While recruits are exposed to communication skills, the emphasis is typically on gaining compliance rather than reducing tension or stabilizing emotions. The concept of de-escalation is present, but it is not presented as a distinct, measurable skill set. Instead, it is embedded within broader instruction on use of force and defensive

tactics, often without clear definitions or structured techniques that deputies can apply in the field. Following the academy, deputies enter the Field Training Officer (FTO) program, where much of their practical learning takes place. This phase is critical, as it shapes how recruits apply what they learned to real-world situations. The committee found that the quality and consistency of de-escalation practices during FTO training can vary significantly depending on the individual trainer.

In some cases, recruits are exposed to strong communication skills and thoughtful approaches to handling difficult encounters. In others, they may observe practices that prioritize rapid control, command presence, and immediate compliance. While these approaches may be effective in certain situations, they can sometimes run counter to de-escalation principles, particularly when time, distance, and communication could be used to slow down an encounter. This variability means that a recruit's understanding of de-escalation is often shaped more by individual experience than by a standardized approach. As a result, deputies may leave the FTO program with very different interpretations of what de-escalation looks like in practice.

Once deputies are on their own, ongoing training opportunities are limited. Annual in-service training requirements include components related to use of force and legal updates, but de-escalation is not consistently emphasized as a standalone topic. When it is addressed, it is often tied back to the same concepts introduced in the academy, such as giving verbal commands and allowing an opportunity to comply.

While these elements are important, the committee found that they do not fully capture the range of skills involved in effective de-escalation. There is little structured training on techniques such as active listening, empathy, rapport building, or strategic disengagement. More importantly, there is no consistent system in place to reinforce these skills over time or to evaluate whether they are being used effectively in the field.

Some deputies have the opportunity to attend specialized training, such as Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) courses. These programs provide more in-depth instruction on communication, particularly when dealing with individuals experiencing mental health crises. Deputies who attend CIT training often gain valuable skills and report increased confidence in handling complex situations; however, CIT training is not universal. Only a portion of the agency receives this level of instruction, and the skills learned are not always integrated into broader agency training or practice. As a result, the benefits of CIT training tend to remain isolated rather than influencing the overall culture of the organization.

The committee also informally surveyed practices at other law enforcement agencies and found that these patterns were not unique to Leon County. Across agencies, de-escalation training is often limited to initial academy instruction, basic in-service reminders, and optional specialized courses. There is rarely a comprehensive, ongoing program that treats de-escalation as a core skill to be developed and maintained throughout an officer's career.

These findings led to the following conclusion: While de-escalation is widely recognized as important, it has not been consistently operationalized within training programs. At the Leon County Sheriff's Office, as in many agencies, there was no sustained, structured emphasis on building and reinforcing de-escalation skills over time.

This gap pointed to the need for a new approach. Rather than relying on fragmented instruction and informal learning, the committee determined that de-escalation should be treated as a defined, measurable competency. This would require dedicated training, ongoing reinforcement, and a clear connection between what is taught and what is expected in the field. The review of training practices made it clear that improving de-escalation outcomes would require a shift in how deputies are trained, supported, and evaluated throughout their careers.

De-escalation Training Composition

The de-escalation training course at the Leon County Sheriff's Office was built through a deliberate, research-driven process. A group of individuals, including program managers and members of the research team, set out to examine the national landscape of law enforcement de-escalation training. What they discovered was that, while many agencies claimed to provide such training, there was no universal definition of what de-escalation meant, no recognized standards, and no consistent set of techniques. In practice, most agencies were simply teaching whatever they thought de-escalation should be, resulting in wide variation, little accountability, and no quantifiable evidence.

Recognizing that the best work in the field was being led by private experts with both use-of-force and de-escalation expertise, the team reviewed several proposals and engaged with multiple leaders in this space. After careful consideration, they identified a clear standout in Lieutenant Kevin Dillon, a retired officer and nationally recognized trainer. Dillon's L.E.A.D.S. program offered not only practical strategies but also a science-based understanding of why de-escalation works, which set it apart from the vague and inconsistent models found elsewhere. Members of LCSO, including Captain Larry Bourdeau, chair of the De-escalation Policy and Training Committee, Greg Gibson, Executive Director of the Research, Analysis, Planning, and Innovation Division at LCSO, Project Manager James Pittman, and others, conducted multiple interviews with Dillon before formally entering into a partnership. The result was a course for the Leon County Sheriff's Office built largely on the L.E.A.D.S. program and tailored specifically to the agency's needs.

The LCSO De-escalation Course is not a simple checklist of verbal tricks or buzzwords but an in-depth program that explains not just how to de-escalate, but why de-escalation works. What makes this training stand out from many other de-escalation programs taught today is its focus on the science of the brain, human behavior under stress, integrated with use of force decision making, and the physiological changes that occur during conflict. Additionally, the course was designed for the learner to see the value of learning the material from the onset of training to maximize long term potentiation.

The foundation of the program is the understanding that de-escalation is not about avoiding enforcement, but about using communication and tactics to create conditions where people are more likely to comply voluntarily. Deputies are taught that real-world encounters often escalate quickly because both the officer and the individual are experiencing involuntary emotional changes that impact decision making. Under stress, blood flow is autonomically redirected away from the reasoning centers of the brain and toward survival mechanisms like fight, flight, or freeze. This process, sometimes described as an "amygdala hijack" which causes rapid heart rate, narrowed vision, loss of fine motor skills, and reduced cognitive flexibility—all adaptive for survival, but often counterproductive in modern confrontations. The training shows deputies how to recognize these states, how to manage their own reactions to them, and how to redirect subjects back toward rational thought using proven communication strategies.

The course places a heavy emphasis on understanding the how the brain and body react during stressful encounters. Deputies learn how breathing, word choice, tone, and body language can all redirect blood flow back to the prefrontal cortex, which restores logical thinking and problem-solving ability. They are taught to use questioning and reflective listening to re-engage the decision-making part of the brain, instead of relying on commands that often fuel further resistance and activate the emotional part of the brain.

Another key feature of the program is its focus on understanding empathy, (also known as compassionate communication), respect, and professional interpersonal communication. Deputies are reminded that treating people with courtesy often creates a cycle of cooperation, known as the rule of reciprocity. By exhibiting empathy, understanding bias, and acknowledging emotions without judgment, deputies can reduce hostility and build trust even in difficult circumstances. The training breaks down the difference between simply displaying empathy versus genuinely reflecting it back to people through tone, posture, and choice of words. Deputies are shown how to use small but powerful tools such as motivational interviewing, teaming language (using words like "we" and "together") to create subconscious bonds and reduce feelings of confrontation.

The training also goes beyond communication skills and ties them directly into officer safety. Participants learn to recognize pre-attack indicators through body language and subtle cues such as clenched fists, changes in stance, or target glances. They are trained

to balance de-escalation with tactical options such as stalling, repositioning, or calling for backup. The three Cs of conflict resolution—cooperation, control, and cover—are taught as a framework that ensures deputies prepare for multiple outcomes while still prioritizing de-escalation when possible.

A central theme is that deputies cannot de-escalate every encounter, and the training is realistic about this fact. Situations involving imminent deadly threats may require force, but the majority of law enforcement encounters involve service calls, disputes, or people in crisis who can be guided toward compliance without violence, verified by the project findings. The training stresses that deputies must document their de-escalation attempts clearly in their reports, as this not only protects them legally but also shows the community the effort made to resolve situations peacefully.

What separates this program from many modern de-escalation courses is its grounding in behavioral science and its practical application in the field. Instead of presenting de-escalation as a vague concept or as something that can be done with a single phrase, it shows how physiology, psychology, and communication all interact during conflict. By understanding the basic principles of how the brain reacts under stress, deputies gain insight into both their own reactions and those of the people they encounter. This makes the strategies taught in the program not just theoretical, but functional in the high-pressure reality of law enforcement.

The goal of the LCSO De-escalation Training is ultimately to build deputies who are both safer and more effective. They leave the course with an understanding that true excellence in policing does not lie in how often force is used but in how often its application can be avoided without sacrificing safety. By blending neuroscience, communication skills, and tactical awareness, the training provides deputies with a modern, evidence-based approach that is a step forward from the outdated models of de-escalation still used in many jurisdictions today.

In addition to designing the right program, another aspect that set the LCSO De-escalation Training apart was the way it was delivered. Traditional law enforcement training is most often built around block training, where deputies attend four hours here, eight hours there, or perhaps a two-day course, and then check the box as complete. While this approach is common across the profession, it does little to support long-term retention or meaningful application. Deputies are typically expected to attend a course once, absorb the material in a single sitting, and then carry it with them indefinitely without ever revisiting the concepts again.

The Leon County Sheriff's Office chose to take a different approach, one rooted in accepted adult learning principles and rapid skill acquisition. The team introduced the concept of "interleaving", dedicated, focused, spaced-out repetition, learning material, setting it aside, and then returning to it in cycles to reinforce knowledge and build deeper understanding. To achieve this, the course was structured into three learning iterations totaling twelve hours. Although the content could have been compressed into less than six hours, stretching it across three sessions created purposeful opportunities for repetition and reinforcement. Deputies attended a four-hour learning iteration, stepped away for 24 to 72 hours to return to their regular duties, and then re-engaged with the same material while adding new concepts in the next learning iteration. Each session built on the last, revisiting earlier lessons while layering in new skills and strategies. This structure allowed deputies to interact with the training multiple times over an extended period. Each cycle helps convert knowledge from declarative memory (knowing what to do) into procedural memory (knowing how to do it automatically). This supports a far greater likelihood of applying the material successfully in the field over longer periods of time.

Training Efficacy Measures

The Leon County Sheriff's Office recognized early that developing a new de-escalation training program was only half the task. Equally important was demonstrating that the program was not simply another set of untested ideas added into the national conversation but a rigorously evaluated intervention that could withstand academic scrutiny and serve as a model for other agencies. The team understood that much of the existing de-escalation training landscape in the United States lacked clear definitions, standardized practices, or validated outcomes. Agencies often created their own versions of training without any systematic assessment of whether the strategies actually worked. To avoid contributing to this problem, LCSO committed to implementing its training in a way that could produce credible, evidence-based findings suitable for publication and replication.

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The first step in measuring success was to carefully define the population most relevant to de-escalation encounters. Prior research within phase two of the project indicated that the vast majority of citizen interactions wherein de-escalation was required occurred in the Uniform Patrol Division. Unlike specialized units such as school resource deputies, traffic enforcement, or community relations, uniform patrol deputies were consistently engaged in calls for service that carried the highest likelihood of conflict or volatility. This made Uniform Patrol the most appropriate population for both training and evaluation.

Once the target population was identified, the research team employed a block-pair randomization design to create both treatment and control groups. All deputies assigned to Uniform Patrol were categorized by key demographic and professional variables, including gender, years of service, ethnicity, and age. Each deputy was then matched with a counterpart who shared similar attributes, ensuring balance across these factors. From each matched pair, one deputy was randomly selected to receive the new de-escalation training, while the other served as part of the control group. This design reduced the likelihood of bias and strengthened the internal validity of the study by ensuring that any differences observed post-training could be more confidently attributed to the intervention itself rather than preexisting characteristics of the deputies.

The implementation of the training coincided with the agency's ongoing Dissecting De-escalation Project, the large-scale research initiative in which all Uniform Patrol encounters were being analyzed. Under this project, body-worn camera footage was systematically reviewed and coded minute by minute to capture deputy behaviors, communication strategies, and escalation or de-escalation techniques. This provided a unique opportunity to integrate the training into an existing data collection framework, thereby allowing for robust pre- and post-intervention analysis. Deputies who received the training could be directly compared to their matched peers in the control group, with changes in behavior observed across actual citizen encounters rather than hypothetical scenarios.

This structure allowed for both formative and summative evaluation of the course. Formative evaluation occurred in real time as deputies re-entered the field following their training blocks, enabling researchers to examine whether the techniques were observable in practice and whether deputies appeared to retain and apply them. Summative evaluation focused on the cumulative impact of the training, measuring not only the frequency of de-escalation attempts but also their effectiveness in achieving compliance, and minimizing the need for physical force. By embedding the training evaluation and assessment within the broader tracking project, the Leon County Sheriff's Office ensured that its findings were both methodologically rigorous and directly tied to operational outcomes.

This experiment positioned the agency at the forefront of practitioner-led law enforcement research. By applying an experimental framework and using real-world behavioral coding as outcome data, LCSO created a model which ensured that as these results are shared with the broader community, they would stand not just as claims of success, but as scientifically grounded evidence of what works in the field of de-escalation, diffusion, and force mitigation.

Training Efficacy Findings

The evaluation of the training's effectiveness relied upon two primary sources of data. First, a post-training survey was distributed to all participants, allowing deputies to self-assess their learning, reflect on the

skills they gained, and provide direct feedback on the course content and delivery. This survey instrument, collected 45 days after the course, captured the perceived value of the training from the perspective of those who experienced it. Second, the research team conducted a review of empirical data gathered through the broader Dissecting De-escalation Project, which systematically analyzed body-worn camera footage of deputy-citizen encounters. This dataset provided an objective measure of whether the techniques taught in the course were applied in practice, allowing for a definitive assessment of the training's impact on real-world behavior.

Participant Feedback

Participant feedback was collected through a post-training survey administered to deputies who completed the course. The survey was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative responses in order to better understand how the training was received and whether deputies believed it was useful in their day-to-day duties. The instrument included Likert scale questions, yes or no responses, multiple choice questions, and open ended prompts that allowed participants to describe their experiences with the course in their own words. The survey was distributed approximately 45 days after the training sessions, allowing deputies time to return to the field and apply the concepts introduced during the program.

Overall, the results indicated a high level of satisfaction with the training. 82% of respondents reported that their overall satisfaction with the course was good or excellent, and the same percentage indicated that the course met or exceeded their expectations. In addition, 94% of respondents stated that they would recommend the course to a colleague. These responses suggest that the training was well received by participants and was viewed as relevant to their professional responsibilities.

Survey responses also suggested that deputies were able to translate elements of the training into practice soon after returning to patrol duties. 71% of respondents reported that they had occasionally used de-escalation techniques learned in the course during the weeks following the training. More than one third of respondents provided specific examples of field encounters in which they applied the techniques taught during the course. Participants described using the training during situations involving an unruly juvenile, a citizen who initially displayed hostility toward law enforcement, and a call involving a person experiencing a mental health crisis. In each case, deputies reported that the communication and conflict management strategies introduced in the course helped bring the situation to a calm and cooperative resolution.

Participants also reported that the course had a positive influence on their confidence and ability to manage difficult interactions. 76% of respondents indicated that they believed the training improved their ability to de-escalate volatile encounters with the public, and nearly one quarter reported that the course significantly improved their ability to manage those situations. In addition, 47% of respondents reported noticing positive changes in their interactions with citizens following the training.

The qualitative feedback reinforced these findings. Many participants praised the instructors, particularly noting the expertise and credibility of the lead instructor, Lieutenant Dillon. Deputies also emphasized the value of the communication focused elements of the curriculum and the practical way the concepts were presented. Several respondents described the course as well designed and effective, with comments noting that the training enhanced their ability to communicate and manage conflict during real encounters.

While the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, participants also identified opportunities to improve the course. The most common suggestion was the addition of more scenario-based training and hands-on exercises. Deputies expressed interest in expanding the number of scenarios used during instruction so that they could practice applying the techniques in situations that more closely resemble the calls they encounter in the field. This feedback provided useful guidance for future iterations of the program and informed ongoing refinements to the curriculum.

The participant feedback indicated that the course was well received by deputies and that many were able to apply the techniques in operational settings shortly after completing the training. These results complement the empirical findings drawn from the Dissecting De-escalation Project and provide an additional perspective on the training's perceived value and practical relevance.

Table 1. Regression models predicting total counts of de-escalation and potentially aggravating behaviors during the pre-training period, *N*=1,374

Variables	Coef. [Robust S.E.]	*P*-value
Total De-escalation Techniques	.005 [.004]	.225
Cursing	.001 [.014]	.929
Arguing	.002 [.020]	.909

Abbreviation. Coef.=coefficient; S.E.= standard error
Robust standard errors clustered by deputy (*N*=143)
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)

Related Phase 3 Findings

To assess the impact of training on deputy behavior, the utilization of de-escalation techniques before and after training was examined. 30 deputies completed the training between March 11, 2024 and April 3, 2024, who were designated as treatment deputies. All other deputies included in the Phase 3 dataset who did not complete the training served as control deputies. Among the treatment deputies, pre- and post-training periods corresponded with the completion date of their training. The median completion date, March 1, 2024, was used to differentiate between pre-and post-training for all control deputies.

As previously discussed, treatment deputies were randomly assigned to receive the treatment based on a blocked randomization design; however, it is still necessary to assess baseline similarities of deputies during the pre-training period. To this end, measures of total de-escalation techniques used, profanity, and unproductive arguing in the pre-training period are regressed on the dichotomous indicator of treatment status. Ordinary least squares regression was used and cluster robust standard errors were included to account for deputies participating in multiple interactions. This approach is consistent with prior research in this area (Gomila, 2021; McLean et al., 2026).

As shown in Table 1, no significant differences in pre-training behavior were observed, suggesting that treatment and control deputies were well balanced prior to training. A separate analysis noted that considering specific de-escalation techniques illustrated some baseline differences. This includes warning of

Table 2. Average counts and bivariate analyses of total and specific de-escalation techniques employed, disaggregated by LCSO de-escalation training status of deputy and pre-post-training period, N=1,780 deputy-citizen interactions

	Pre-Training			Post Training		
Variable	**Treatment (*N*=324)**	**Group Difference**	**Control (*N*=1,050)**	**Treatment (*N*=97)**	**Group Difference**	**Control (*N*=309)**
Total Techniques	4.01 (4.41)		3.51 (4.03)	5.58 (5.93)	***	3.62 (4.05)
Unique Techniques	2.17 (1.81)		2.00 (1.71)	2.67 (1.91)	**	2.02 (1.64)
Verbal						
Warning of immediate repercussions	.43 (1.01)		.39 (1.02)	.40 (.87)		.31 (.68)
Warning of long-term repercussions	.03 (.21)		.06 (.28)	.05 (.22)		.08 (.36)
Redirection or conversational distraction	.19 (.60)		.16 (.52)	.27 (.94)	**	.09 (.33)
Tactical stalling	.08 (.32)	*	.16 (.62)	.09 (.29)		.08 (.29)
Exhibiting empathy	.40 (.94)		.33 (.81)	.99 (1.61)	***	.5 (.97)
Providing explanations	1.63 (1.97)	**	1.31 (1.85)	1.56 (2.27)		1.21 (2.04)
Cognitive intermission	.08 (.32)	**	.17 (.56)	.07 (.3)		.17 (.53)
Providing voice	.43 (.99)		.36 (.92)	1.10 (2.27)	*	.56 (1.39)
Offering assistance or help	.17 (.52)		.2 (.64)	.6 (1.03)	***	.3 (.66)
Promoting teamwork	.02 (.17)		.03 (.2)	.07 (.30)		.04 (.19)
Avoiding the word "no"	.03 (.18)		.03 (.2)	.05 (.22)		.05 (.26)
Verbal mirroring or paraphrasing	.15 (.54)	***	.06 (.28)	0 (0)		.01 (.10)
Communications agreement	.09 (.35)		.06 (.32)	.10 (.47)		.07 (.32)
Motivational interviewing	.05 (.29)	**	.01 (.14)	.05 (.27)	***	0 (0)
Physical						
Creating physical space	.06 (.41)		.03 (.2)	.04 (.25)		.04 (.28)
Separating individuals from agitation	.15 (.49)		.15 (.41)	.12 (.39)		.12 (.49)
Potentially Aggravating Deputy Behaviors						
Cursing	.20 (.83)		.19 (.96)	.02 (.14)		.14 (1.10)
Arguing	.19 (.54)		.18 (.62)	.47 (1.03)	*	.24 (.72)

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)
Group differences assessed using ttests

long-term repercussions, tactical stalling, cognitive intermissions, verbal mirroring, and motivational interviewing.

Table 2 shows the average counts of total and specific de-escalation techniques and potentially aggravating behaviors deployed by treatment and control deputies during the pre- and post-training periods. Additionally, it considers the number of unique types of de-escalation techniques attempted. T-tests for differences in group means were also performed to average counts in the pre- and post-training periods. There were no significant differences in average total technique counts or potentially aggravating behaviors during the pre-training period. Again, however, there are some significant differences when examining specific techniques: tactical stalling, providing explanations, cognitive intermission, verbal mirroring or paraphrasing, and motivational interviewing.

"Following the training period, treatment deputies documented application of de-escalation techniques at significantly higher levels."

Following the training period, trained deputies documented application of de-escalation techniques at significantly higher levels. Indeed, deputies who received the training applied an average of 5.58 total techniques, compared to 3.62 among the control deputies. Training also appeared to increase the diversity of techniques applied, as trained and control deputies attempted 2.6 and 2 unique techniques, respectively. Trained deputies employed several specific techniques at statistically significantly greater frequencies after training. This includes redirection or conversational distraction, providing voice, offering assistance or help, and motivational interviewing. Notably, trained deputies had significantly higher frequencies of engaging in non-productive arguments than their control counterparts. With this one exception, the findings suggest that participation in training significantly increased the utilization of de-escalation techniques.

Review of Agency Policy

The committee's review of de-escalation policy began with the recognition that the existing framework was overly simplistic and lacked the depth needed to guide deputies in meaningful ways. The written directive affirmed the importance of de-escalation but left its application vague and open to broad interpretation. In practice, the language functioned more as a statement of principle than as an operational guide. While the directive communicated that de-escalation efforts were expected, it did little to clarify what that expectation looked like in actual encounters.

During the review process, the committee considered whether the solution was to expand the policy with more detailed procedural language. Early drafts experimented with incorporating specific strategies such as slowing encounters, creating distance, tactical repositioning, or using particular communication approaches. While these ideas reflected concepts that were already being developed for training, the effort to formalize them in policy quickly revealed several limitations.

De-escalation occurs in dynamic environments wherein conditions change rapidly and wherein deputies must constantly adapt their approaches based on the behavior of the subject, the presence of bystanders, environmental factors, and available resources. Attempting to translate this complexity into rigid procedural language risked creating a standard that would be unrealistic in practice. A highly prescriptive directive could unintentionally suggest that deputies must follow a defined sequence of actions during volatile encounters, even when those encounters unfold in ways that require immediate judgment and adaptation.

The committee ultimately concluded that de-escalation resembles other professional law enforcement skills that are difficult to fully capture through written directive language. Interviewing and interrogation is an excellent comparison. Effective interviewing requires preparation, communication skills, emotional awareness, and the ability to adapt in real time to the responses of the subject. While policy may establish ethical boundaries and professional expectations for interviews, it cannot dictate the exact phrasing of questions, the timing of rapport building, or the manner in which an investigator responds to unexpected developments during the conversation. The same principle applies to de-escalation. Both are complex interpersonal skills that rely on judgment, emotional regulation, and situational awareness rather than a fixed series of procedural steps.

For these reasons, the committee determined that policy alone could not serve as the primary mechanism for developing de-escalation capability within the agency. Policy could establish expectations, but it could not meaningfully teach the skill itself.

Policy Implications

Based on these findings, the committee recommended that the agency maintain policy language that clearly establishes de-escalation as an agency-wide expectation while avoiding overly prescriptive directives that attempt to dictate specific tactics or sequences of actions. The purpose of the written directive should be to communicate professional standards, reinforce the agency's commitment to preserving life, and affirm that deputies are expected to use reasonable efforts

to reduce the need for force when circumstances permit.

At the same time, the committee concluded that meaningful development of de-escalation capability must occur primarily through training and professional development rather than through expanded policy language. De-escalation is rooted in an understanding of human behavior, including involuntary physiological responses to stress, the influence of emotion on perception and decision making, and the ways in which communication and time can influence the trajectory of an encounter. These principles are difficult to translate into procedural mandates but can be effectively taught through structured training, scenario based learning, and continued reinforcement over time.

Under this approach, training serves to operationalize policy by providing deputies with the knowledge and practical tools needed to apply de-escalation concepts in the field. Rather than reducing the concepts to a checklist, the training program emphasizes judgment, emotional control, and communication strategies. This model recognizes that deputies will apply these principles differently depending upon the unique circumstances of each encounter.

The committee also recognized that organizational culture plays a critical role in shaping how policy is interpreted and applied. When training, supervision, and evaluation consistently reinforce the expectation that deputies will attempt to stabilize encounters and reduce the likelihood of force when possible, de-escalation becomes embedded in the agency's professional identity. In this way, training and culture effectively give meaning to the policy language, ensuring that the written directive reflects a lived practice rather than a symbolic statement.

The committee's findings suggest that effective de-escalation policy is best designed as a framework that establishes expectations while allowing the operational substance of the concept to be developed through training, experience, and organizational culture. This allows agencies to support their deputies by encouraging professional judgment and adaptability while maintaining clear standards for conduct.

TRACKING DE-ESCALATION

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Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the Dissecting De-escalation project was to better understand how law enforcement encounters develop and what factors influence whether an interaction stabilizes or becomes more volatile. While de-escalation is widely referenced in policy, training, and public discussion, it is often treated as a general concept rather than something that can be measured and examined through real encounters. This project was designed to move the discussion toward observable practice by examining what deputies and civilians actually do during encounters and how those actions relate to outcomes.

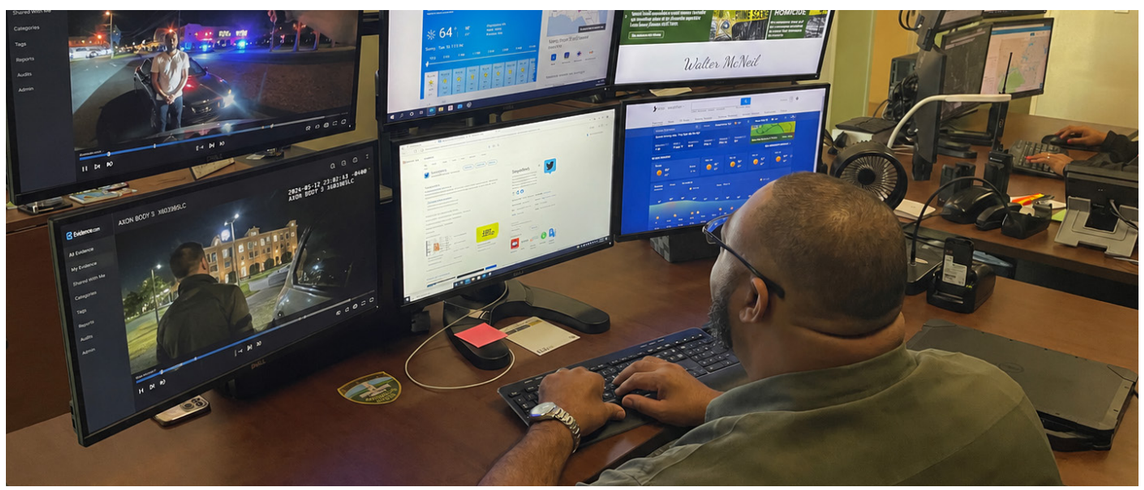
Through a partnership between the Leon County Sheriff's Office and the Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice, the project sought to create a structured way to document behaviors and situational conditions that shape the direction of an encounter. The goal was not to evaluate individual deputies or to judge single incidents but to build a body of data that allowed patterns to emerge across many interactions. By focusing on observable indicators rather than general impressions, the project aimed to provide a clearer understanding of how de-escalation operates in real policing environments.

The scope of this section focuses on the processes used to gather, prepare, and analyze the data that support the project's findings. Because the project relied on detailed review of actual encounters, the methods required a structured approach to incident selection, data collection, and behavioral coding. Encounters were identified using defined criteria and reviewed using a standardized framework that relied on both agency records and body worn camera footage. During this process, specific behaviors and contextual factors were documented in order to translate complex interactions into structured data points.

"...although de-escalation was widely recognized as an important component of modern policing, there was no mechanism in place to document when de-escalation occurred successfully."

To support consistency in this work, the project also required the development of a training process for those responsible for reviewing and coding encounters. This section describes both the methodological framework used to capture encounter level information and the procedures used to ensure that reviewers applied the coding structure in a consistent manner.

The methodology and training processes described in the sections that follow establish the analytical foundation of the project. They explain how encounter data were collected, how behaviors were documented, and how the information was prepared for analysis.



Data Collection: Phase 1

The first phase of the Dissecting De-escalation Project was designed to establish a practical foundation for measuring de-escalation activity within normal law enforcement operations. When the project was first commissioned in 2022, the agency faced a fundamental challenge: Although de-escalation was widely recognized as an important component of modern policing, there was no mechanism in place to document when de-escalation occurred successfully. Existing reporting systems primarily captured situations in which force was used, but they did not capture the far more common outcome in which an encounter was stabilized before force became necessary.

Because of this limitation, the first phase of the project focused on developing a simple method for capturing basic information about citizen encounters using existing operational systems. Rather than building an entirely new reporting process, the project incorporated new incident closure codes into the agency's Computer Automated Dispatching (CAD) computer system. Deputies already used CAD disposition codes to close calls for service, making this system a logical starting point for collecting encounter-level data without significantly altering workflow.

Three new disposition codes were introduced to capture the general outcome of encounters involving citizen contact. The first code identified situations wherein a deputy had a citizen contact but the application of force was neither authorized nor necessary. The second code captured situations wherein the application of force would have been justified based on the subject's behavior, but the deputy was able to resolve the encounter through de-escalation techniques. The third code identified situations wherein de-escalation was attempted but ultimately unsuccessful, resulting in the use of force and the completion of a Use of Force Report. Together, these codes allowed the agency to begin distinguishing between routine contacts, successful de-escalation, and encounters that ultimately escalated to force.

Agency-wide training was conducted to explain the purpose of the new codes and provide guidance on how they should be applied when clearing calls for service. Following the training, the codes were implemented operationally on January 1, 2023, marking the first formal attempt by the agency to systematically track de-escalation outcomes across patrol operations.

Data collected during this phase provided an early snapshot of how frequently deputies reported different types of citizen interactions. More importantly, it allowed project planners to evaluate whether CAD-based reporting could serve as a reliable mechanism for measuring de-escalation activity. Early analysis of the data revealed several limitations. Because the system relied on deputies to manually apply the codes, the quality of the data depended heavily on consistent usage and accurate interpretation of the coding definitions. Early feedback indicated that some deputies occasionally forgot to apply the codes or were uncertain about when they should be used. As a result, the data produced during Phase 1 was useful primarily as a baseline indicator rather than a precise measurement of de-escalation activity.

Despite these limitations, Phase 1 served an important role in the development of the overall project. It demonstrated that de-escalation outcomes could be incorporated into existing operational systems and provided an initial dataset that helped identify gaps in the agency's ability to capture meaningful encounter-level information. In particular, the phase highlighted two major deficiencies: the lack of data related to the characteristics of the individuals involved in the encounter and the absence of information about the specific techniques deputies used to stabilize situations.

These findings informed the design of Phase 2 of the project, which focused on refining the CAD coding structure, improving data reliability, and expanding the analytical value of the information being collected.

Data Collection: Phase 2

Phase 1 provided the first practical attempt to measure de-escalation activity using operational data, but early analysis of the results quickly revealed limitations that informed the design of Phase 2. While the initial CAD disposition codes allowed the agency to begin capturing basic information about citizen contacts and de-escalation outcomes, the usefulness of the data depended heavily on deputies consistently applying the codes when clearing calls for service. Early feedback indicated that deputies occasionally forgot to use the codes or were uncertain about when they should be applied, which raised concerns about the completeness and accuracy of the dataset.

The Phase 1 codes also framed encounters primarily around whether force was authorized, which limited the agency's ability to understand the broader dynamics of citizen interactions. Although the codes could identify when de-escalation occurred, they did not provide meaningful context about the nature of the encounter, the behavior of the subject, or other situational factors that might influence how deputies responded. As a result, the data produced during Phase 1 was not useful as an analytical tool, but it did serve as an excellent foundation for Phase 2, saving time on implementation.

These findings informed the revised coding framework, which shifted the focus away from whether force was authorized and instead centered on the behavioral state of the citizen during the encounter. Under the updated system, deputies classified contacts as either compliant or non-compliant, allowing researchers to better distinguish between routine interactions and encounters involving agitation or resistance. Additional sub-codes were also introduced to identify situations involving mental illness or chemical impairment, providing a clearer picture of the conditions under which deputies were operating.

To improve data reliability, Phase 2 also required deputies to apply one of the de-escalation related codes on all CAD screens, including the addition of a "no citizen contact" option. This change reduced the likelihood that deputies would forget to apply a code and ensured that every call for service produced a usable data point for analysis.

In addition to the encounter level information collected through CAD disposition codes, Phase 2 incorporated several supporting data sources to provide greater analytical context for citizen interactions. These additional data sources allowed the project to examine how situational factors, deputy characteristics, and enforcement outcomes relate to the stability or volatility of encounters.

One important category of information involved the context in which encounters occurred. CAD data allowed analysts to identify the type of event associated with each interaction, such as calls for service, traffic stops, arrests, or incidents involving mental health interventions such as Baker Act or Marchman Act situations. Examining these contexts made it possible to evaluate where deputies most frequently encounter agitation or resistance and where encounters are more likely to stabilize without the use of force. Understanding the situational environment of encounters provided insight into how the nature of the call itself may influence the behavior of the individuals involved and the tactical decisions made by deputies.

Phase 2 also incorporated information related to the deputies involved in each encounter. Human resources data provided variables such as deputy demographics, years of experience, and other employment characteristics. These variables allowed analysts to explore whether certain experience levels or background characteristics were associated with differences in encounter outcomes. The project also incorporated training records to identify whether deputies who had received particular types of instruction or training demonstrated different patterns of encounter management.

Finally, Response to Resistance (Use of Force) reports were incorporated to capture detailed information about encounters in which force ultimately occurred. These reports provided data related to the type of force used and served as a reference point for situations in which de-escalation efforts were unsuccessful. By examining these incidents alongside the broader dataset of citizen contacts, researchers were able to place use of force events within the larger context of interactions.

Although Phase 2 significantly expanded the agency's ability to measure citizen encounters and de-escalation outcomes, the analysis revealed several important gaps in the available data. Two deficiencies were particularly significant. First, the project was largely unable to capture demographic information about the individuals involved in encounters unless the interaction resulted in a reportable use of force. In most routine citizen contacts, demographic information was not consistently recorded in a structured way that could be analyzed alongside encounter outcomes. This limitation restricted the project's ability to examine how characteristics of the individuals involved might relate to the dynamics of the encounter.

Second, and more importantly, Phase 2 did not capture information about the specific techniques deputies used to stabilize encounters. The CAD disposition codes provided useful information about the overall outcome of the interaction, but they did not document the communication strategies, tactical positioning, pacing decisions, or other behavioral actions taken by deputies during the encounter. Without this level of detail in the data, researchers could determine when de-escalation occurred but could not explain how it occurred.

These limitations led researchers to develop the concept for Phase 3. Rather than relying solely on administrative data, Phase 3 proposed a more detailed analysis of encounters through systematic review of body worn camera footage. By examining recorded interactions, researchers could document both the characteristics of the individuals involved and the specific behaviors used by deputies to influence the direction of the encounter.

Data Collection: Phase 3

Phase 3 served as the intensive behavioral coding component of the broader de-escalation tracking project and was methodologically anchored within the Phase 2 interaction database. While earlier phases established agency-wide interaction tracking and constructed a structured database of law enforcement encounters, Phase 3 narrowed the analytic focus to a subset of interactions characterized by agitation, resistance, emotional escalation, or other indicators of behavioral tension. Its purpose was to systematically document how deputies and subjects behaved during high stress encounters and to produce a structured behavioral dataset capable of supporting both descriptive and predictive analysis of de-escalation in practice.

Phase 2 had created a comprehensive interaction level database capturing encounters across a wide range of call types and operational contexts. The dataset included variables such as call classification, location type, number of deputies present, and observable indicators of subject agitation or resistance when available. This phase provided a population level universe of measurable encounters and introduced categorical markers that identified interactions in which de-escalation processes were likely to be relevant. However, the database was limited to structured reporting fields and categorical summaries. Although it could identify encounters involving agitation or resistance, it could not capture how those interactions unfolded over time or how deputies and subjects responded to one another during the encounter.

Phase 3 addressed this limitation by introducing direct behavioral observation through systematic review of body worn camera footage. Encounters flagged in Phase 2 as involving agitation or resistance were selected for detailed review, creating an analytic layer within the broader dataset. Coders documented observable verbal and physical behaviors from both deputies and subjects using a structured behavioral framework. Codes were applied sequentially and timestamped, producing a temporally ordered record of interaction dynamics. This approach allowed the project to move beyond identifying volatile encounters and instead measure how those encounters developed, stabilized, or escalated during real world policing interactions.

Phase 3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The data for Phase 3 began from the Phase 2 interaction database, which contains a comprehensive record of law enforcement encounters during the study year. Phase 2 established the broader interaction framework and identified encounters with characteristics suggesting agitation, resistance, or elevated emotional dynamics. Phase 3 drew from this universe to isolate cases in which de-escalation behaviors were reasonably likely to be observable.

For purposes of workflow management and systematic processing, the study year was divided into 12 monthly blocks. Each monthly block functioned as a self-contained processing unit and was advanced through the full Phase 3 pipeline prior to moving to the next block. Monthly blocking served several methodological functions. First, it allowed for controlled production pacing and prevented backlog accumulation. Second, it reduced the risk of coder error over extended time periods by segmenting review into defined intervals. Third, it preserved seasonal and operational variation within the dataset by ensuring that cases were processed proportionally over time rather than selectively.

Within each monthly block, all encounters flagged as potentially meeting Phase 3 criteria were subjected to preliminary review. Phase 3 was designed to capture encounters in which de-escalation efforts were both possible and operationally relevant. Inclusion criteria required that the interaction involve observable behavioral tension, including agitation, emotional elevation, refusal to comply, resistance to instruction, interpersonal conflict, or other defined indicators of noncooperative dynamics.

Importantly, inclusion did not depend on the presence or absence of force. The focus was on behavioral interaction rather than outcome category. Encounters were included when they contained meaningful deputy subject engagement in which communication, positioning, pacing, or tactical decision making could plausibly influence the direction of the interaction.

Cases involving extended dialogue, negotiation, calming efforts, separation of parties, or resistance management were especially relevant. The methodological emphasis was on situations where behavioral choices by deputies were visible and potentially consequential. Encounters were excluded when de-escalation was not realistically possible due to immediate, sudden, or rapidly unfolding resistance. For example, situations that transitioned instantaneously from first contact to physical assault without opportunity for verbal engagement were not appropriate for detailed de-escalation coding. Similarly, encounters lacking sufficient body worn camera visibility to reliably observe behavior were removed.

Phase 3 Behavioral Coding Framework

Phase 3 used a structured behavioral coding framework designed to capture the observable actions of deputies and subjects during encounters identified as involving agitation, resistance, or elevated emotional dynamics. The framework was built around the principle that interactions should be documented through observable behavior rather than subjective interpretation. Coders were instructed to record specific verbal and physical actions that could be directly seen or heard in the body worn camera footage, rather than assigning broad characterizations of performance. For example, instead of labeling an interaction as handled well or handled poorly, coders documented whether a deputy issued a command, provided an explanation, used an empathy statement, repositioned physically, separated individuals, or initiated a defined use of force. Each action was treated as an independent behavioral unit.

The primary unit of analysis in Phase 3 was the encounter; however, many encounters involved multiple deputies and multiple subjects. To preserve analytical clarity, coding was structured around deputy-subject pairings within each event. A single incident could therefore produce multiple coded interaction lines when more than

one deputy directly engaged a subject. This approach allowed encounters to be examined at both the overall event level and at the level of individual behavioral exchanges between deputies and subjects.

The codebook was organized into several behavioral domains that reflected the structure of high stress encounters. Deputy verbal behaviors included directive commands, explanatory statements, empathy expressions, reassurance, warnings, negotiation attempts, and boundary setting. Deputy physical behaviors captured observable movements such as approach, repositioning, separation of parties, physical contact, restraint initiation, disengagement, and other tactical actions. Subject behaviors were coded separately and included both verbal reactions, such as compliance statements, argument, refusal, or emotional expression, and physical behaviors such as compliance, withdrawal, movement toward deputies, or active resistance. Additional categories captured responses to resistance and the closure of the encounter.

Demeanor indicators called "rider codes" were used as a supplemental layer when observable cues supported classification. Subject demeanor could be coded as calm, agitated, irate, emotional, or other defined categories, while deputy tone could be coded as professional, stern, or other structured descriptors. These indicators were always anchored to observable signals such as tone, pacing, volume, posture, or facial expression and did not replace behavioral coding.

All codes were entered sequentially and timestamped to the second. Coding began at the first observable interaction between a deputy and a subject and continued until the encounter reached a defined endpoint. This structure created a second-by-second behavioral timeline that allowed researchers to analyze the order, duration, and transition between behaviors, providing insight into how escalation and de-escalation unfolded during real world policing encounters.

Phase 3 Research Personnel

The behavioral coding component of Phase 3 relied on a structured workforce and oversight model designed to ensure methodological rigor, reliability, and independence from operational bias. Because the project required detailed behavioral observation and consistent application of a complex coding framework, coder supervision and training were treated as central elements of the research design rather than administrative support functions. The structure also emphasized collaboration with academic partners to provide ongoing methodological guidance and independent oversight.

The coding workforce operated within a tiered structure consisting of primary coders, secondary coders, administrative coders, and faculty oversight. Oversight of the entire structure was provided in collaboration with academic research partners from Florida State University's College of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Faculty researchers provided ongoing support and advisement throughout the development and execution of the project. Their role included assisting with methodological design, reviewing coding procedures, monitoring reliability results, and evaluating quality management findings. Faculty advisors also reviewed ambiguous cases and coding disputes when necessary to prevent systemic coder error and to ensure that operational coding decisions remained aligned with the research objectives. This partnership provided an additional layer of independent oversight and helped ensure that the project maintained both operational credibility and academic defensibility.

The coding workforce itself consisted primarily of graduate students, advanced undergraduate students, and research assistants, who all became employees or interns of the Leon County Sheriff's Office. Recruitment focused on analytical ability, attention to detail, and the capacity to apply operational definitions consistently. Prior law enforcement experience was not required for most coding roles, as the methodology was designed around observable behavioral indicators rather than practitioner intuition; however, individuals with law enforcement experience were incorporated at the administrative level when necessary to assist with making complex tactical distinctions.

All coders were required to complete Criminal Justice Information Services compliance training before accessing any body-worn camera footage or sensitive law enforcement data. This training covered confidentiality requirements, handling of protected information, secure system access, and restrictions on data dissemination. Coding activities were conducted within secure systems that complied with agency information security standards.

Following compliance certification, coders completed structured instruction on the Phase 3 codebook. Training sessions included detailed review of behavioral categories, inclusion and exclusion rules, and common areas of ambiguity. Instruction emphasized the project's central methodological principle that coders were to document only observable behavior. Coders were instructed to avoid inference or evaluative language and to rely solely on actions that were clearly visible or audible in the footage.

Before participating in production coding, each coder completed a supervised practice phase using a set of real encounters. These encounters represented varying levels of complexity, including simple agitation, multi subject interactions, resistance events, and extended verbal negotiation. After completing independent practice coding, participants attended calibration sessions where coding decisions were compared and discrepancies discussed. Administrative coders guided these sessions to ensure consistent interpretation of codebook definitions. Coders were required to demonstrate acceptable coding performance before being approved for independent production work.

During production coding, cases were assigned in a manner designed to prevent repeated pairing between the same primary and secondary coders over extended periods, reducing the risk of patterned agreement. Coders were also required to conduct work in limited intervals to reduce fatigue associated with intensive behavioral observation. When coders encountered situations that could not be resolved through codebook definitions, they were required to flag the issue rather than independently creating new interpretations.

The project incorporated several mechanisms to prevent coder error over time. Administrative staff conducted periodic spot checks of coded encounters and regular debrief sessions were held to address recurring ambiguities and reinforce adherence to coding standards. When clarification of definitions was necessary, adjustments were documented and distributed prospectively to all coders.

The structured oversight and training model also supported the reliability assessment procedures used in Phase 3.

Phase 3 Coding Workflow and Quality Procedures

Phase 3 employed a structured multistage workflow designed to ensure that behavioral coding was both systematic and reliable. Because the process relied on detailed review of body worn camera footage and the application of a granular behavioral codebook, the project incorporated several layers of review and quality control.

Each encounter moved through a defined sequence of screening, coding, verification, and reconciliation stages before being finalized in the dataset. The workflow began with a preliminary screening stage. Encounters identified from the Phase 2 database were reviewed at a high level to confirm that they met the inclusion criteria for Phase 3. During this step, coders verified that the case involved observable interaction dynamics consistent with the project's focus on agitation, resistance, or elevated emotional behavior. Encounters that did not meet these criteria were removed before further analysis. Coders also recorded basic descriptors of the event, including the number of deputies involved, environmental context such as whether the encounter occurred indoors or outdoors, and observable subject characteristics when relevant. This step ensured that cases entering the behavioral coding pipeline were consistently classified and that resources were not spent coding encounters that did not align with project objectives.

Following preliminary screening, cases entered the primary coding stage, which served as the core production step of Phase 3. Coders conducted detailed reviews of body worn camera footage and documented the behavioral actions of deputies and subjects according to the definitions contained in the codebook. Video playback was frequently slowed to ensure accurate observation of verbal and physical behaviors. On average, the coding process required approximately two minutes of coder time for every minute of recorded video, an indication of the level of detail required to capture behavioral sequences.

Codes were entered sequentially and timestamped according to the moment the behavior occurred. When encounters involved multiple subjects, separate interaction lines were created for each deputy subject pairing. Coders adhered strictly to the established categories and were not permitted to create new or ad hoc classifications. The objective of this stage was to produce a complete chronological map of the interaction, documenting each defined behavioral action as it occurred.

Once primary coding was complete, the case advanced to a secondary review stage. A second coder independently reviewed the coded encounter to verify the accuracy of the entries. The reviewing coder did not overwrite the primary coder's work. Instead, areas of agreement were documented, and discrepancies were flagged for further evaluation. Discrepancies could include missed behavioral codes, incorrect category assignments, timestamp inaccuracies, sequencing issues, or differences in the application of demeanor indicators. This stage provided structured verification while preserving the original coding record.

Cases containing discrepancies were then forwarded to an administrative stage. An administrative coder with advanced familiarity with the codebook and operational policing practices reviewed the flagged entries and made final determinations regarding disputed codes. This step was particularly important when resolving nuanced distinctions within the coding framework, such as differentiating incidental physical contact from a use of force or distinguishing between explanatory statements and directive commands. After these determinations were made, the encounter record was finalized and locked within the dataset.

In addition to these workflow safeguards, the project incorporated a formal quality management process to evaluate the reliability of the coding system. Because

full re-coding of the entire dataset would have been impractical given the time intensive nature of the process, a stratified random sample of encounters was drawn from across all monthly data blocks. The sampling strategy included cases of varying complexity and behavioral intensity to ensure representation of different encounter types.

For each sampled case, the original coding record was removed before reentering the encounter into the coding pipeline. The encounter then underwent full blind recoding beginning after the preliminary screening stage. A new primary coder completed the behavioral mapping, a different secondary coder reviewed the case, and a separate administrative coder adjudicated any discrepancies. This procedure ensured independence from the original coding decisions and eliminated the possibility of recall bias influencing the assessment.

Discrepancies identified during blind re-coding were evaluated using a predefined inconsistency scoring framework. Minor variations, such as small timestamp differences or limited disagreement in demeanor classification, were categorized as low impact inconsistencies. More significant issues, including omitted responses to resistance, incorrect closure codes, or major behavioral omissions, were classified as high impact inconsistencies. Threshold criteria were established in advance to determine whether the observed rate of inconsistency required broader corrective action or recoding of larger portions of the dataset.

The results of the blind recoding assessment did not exceed the predetermined threshold for corrective action. While minor variations were present, the overall level of agreement across coders indicated that the coding framework was being applied with sufficient consistency to maintain the integrity of the dataset. The structured workflow and reliability procedures ensured that the behavioral data produced in Phase 3 were systematically documented and methodologically defensible.

At the conclusion of the Phase 3 data collection process, the completed behavioral coding database was transferred to the research team at Florida State University for advanced statistical analysis. The academic partners applied additional analytical techniques to the finalized dataset to examine behavioral patterns, sequencing of escalation and de-escalation actions, and the relationship between encounter context and outcomes.

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

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Analysis of the Phase 1 data proved limited in practical value because the CAD disposition codes relied heavily on deputy self-reporting and were not applied consistently across all encounters. As a result, the dataset could not reliably represent the full scope of citizen interactions or de-escalation activity, and the information collected lacked the contextual detail necessary to support meaningful analysis of encounter dynamics.

Analysis of the Phase 2 database focused primarily on descriptive statistical methods intended to summarize the characteristics of encounters and establish baseline patterns within the data. Because the project was still in an exploratory stage, the goal of the analysis was not to test predictive models but to provide a clear picture of how different types of encounters were distributed across the dataset.

Initial analysis involved calculating frequencies and proportions across key variables captured in the database. These measures were used to quantify the overall volume of citizen contacts, the proportion of encounters involving compliant versus agitated individuals, and the relative frequency of incidents resulting in a reportable use of force. Similar descriptive summaries were produced for contextual variables such as call classification, location type, and the number of deputies present during the encounter. These calculations allowed analysts to identify the operational environments in which agitation and resistance were most commonly observed.

Descriptive comparisons were also conducted across indicators of subject condition, including encounters involving apparent mental illness or chemical impairment. These summaries provided insight into how often deputies encountered individuals experiencing behavioral health challenges or substance related impairment and how those encounters were distributed across different call types.

The Phase 2 analysis relied on frequency distributions, proportional comparisons, and cross tabulations across key variables. These descriptive statistics provided a foundational understanding of encounter characteristics and helped identify patterns that informed the more detailed behavioral analysis conducted in Phase 3.

“While Phases 1 and 2 established the structural foundation of the project, the majority of the project’s analytical effort was concentrated in Phase 3.”

While Phases 1 and 2 established the structural foundation of the project, the majority of the project’s analytical effort was concentrated in Phase 3. The earlier phases were designed primarily to develop the data infrastructure necessary to identify, organize, and contextualize law enforcement encounters at scale. Phase 1 introduced the first operational mechanism for tracking de-escalation outcomes, and Phase 2 expanded this framework into a structured encounter level database capable of supporting descriptive analysis. These phases provided important baseline information about the frequency and distribution of citizen contacts, agitation, and use of force across the agency’s operational environment; however, their analytical capacity was limited by the nature of the data collected through administrative reporting systems.

Phase 3 addressed these limitations by shifting the project’s focus from encounter classification to behavioral process analysis. Rather than examining encounters only through categorical indicators or summary statistics, Phase 3 generated detailed behavioral data through systematic review of body worn camera footage. This phase required extensive manual coding, layered review procedures, and reliability validation to produce a temporally structured record of deputy and subject behavior. Because of the time intensive nature of this work and the methodological safeguards required to maintain reliability, Phase 3 represented the most resource intensive component of the project.

For this reason, the majority of the project’s analytical capital was devoted to the Phase 3 database. The behavioral sequences generated during this phase

provided the level of detail necessary to examine how encounters unfolded in practice, allowing researchers to move beyond identifying volatile encounters and instead analyze the behavioral dynamics that contribute to stabilization, escalation, and de-escalation in real world policing interactions.

Current Study

De-escalation encompasses an array of processes and tactics designed to prevent escalation, reduce levels of resistance, and stabilize threats during police–citizen encounters (Engel et al., 2020). Although there is considerable variation in the focus of de-escalation training across agencies, these approaches are generally intended to inform how officers respond to citizen resistance. Training frequently emphasizes both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including calm and respectful dialogue, active listening, and minimizing interruptions during interactions. These communication approaches are often paired with tactical strategies such as maintaining physical distance, slowing the pace of an encounter, or stalling for time to allow tensions to subside.

Emerging research suggests that de-escalation training can reduce both officer and citizen injuries, promote more effective officer communication styles, and improve citizen satisfaction with police (Engel et al., 2022; White et al., 2023, 2025; McLean et al., 2026); however, the multifaceted nature of de-escalation—and the varying emphasis placed on different techniques across training programs—make it difficult to identify which specific components are most effective at reducing levels of citizen resistance.

Phase 3 of the Dissecting De-escalation Project sought to address this issue by examining the relative effectiveness of 14 verbal and 2 physical de-escalation techniques incorporated into the agency's de-escalation training. Specifically, the study assessed how these techniques influence citizen disposition at the conclusion of police–citizen interactions and use of force. To do so, the study used data from 1,781 unique deputy–citizen interactions occurring across 968 distinct incidents. systematic social observation of this footage was employed to examine the relationship between the use of these de-escalation tactics and these outcomes.

Phase 3 Data and Sample

These analyses build on Phase 2 of the De-Escalation Tracking Project. During this phase, all full-time LCSO deputies, from the rank of deputy to lieutenant, reported citizen disposition for every citizen interaction occurring between July 2023 and June 2024. Deputies documented whether citizens were calm and cooperative, agitated and uncooperative, or involved in incidents featuring a reportable use of force. This information was recorded in the agency's CAD system and ultimately identified 109,152 unique deputy–citizen interactions.

Phase 3 focuses on the subset of these interactions in which the use of de-escalation techniques would be most relevant. Accordingly, the preliminary sampling frame for Phase 3 consisted of the 2,935 interactions initially classified as involving agitated and uncooperative citizens and 56 interactions that involved a reportable use of force. These records were subsequently reviewed to confirm the availability of body-worn camera footage, ensure that the encounters met a minimum length necessary to observe meaningful deputy–citizen interactions, and verify the accuracy of the deputy's preliminary coding of citizen disposition. This process ultimately resulted in a final sample of 1,780 unique deputy–citizen interactions occurring across 967 distinct incidents. The sample included 1,157 citizens. The majority of citizens (N= 694, 59.98%) interacted with a single deputy during the incident. As shown in Table 1, 29.39% of citizens interacted with two deputies, while 10.62% interacted with three or more deputies.

Table 1. Citizen interactions by number of deputies, *N*=1,157 citizens

Number of Deputies	%	*n*
1	59.98%	694
2	29.39%	340
3	8.04%	93
4	2.16%	25
5	0.26%	3
6	0.17%	2

The analyses tracked citizens' dispositions throughout an incident, including interactions involving multiple deputies. For citizens who interacted with more than one deputy, all coding and deputy-related information were consolidated to assess citizen disposition over the full course of the interaction. This approach captured how citizen behavior evolved throughout the incident as deputies engaged with the individual. Future assessments will explore alternative methods, including analyses examining each unique citizen–deputy interaction separately. Such an approach would facilitate the inclusion of deputy-level characteristics in analyses and provide a more granular assessment of how individual deputies' actions relate to citizen behavior; however, as the focus of this initial study is on the efficacy of de-escalation techniques, all deputy information was aggregated together. This resulted in a sample of 1,157 citizens who had interactions with one or more deputies.

Phase 3 Analytical Measures

Additional measures were incorporated into the Phase 3 analytical process to provide contextual depth and analytical flexibility beyond the core behavioral codes. These measures used the coded behaviors to identify a general definition of encounters involving successful de-escalation, the use of specific de-escalation techniques, and the application of control measures.

Measuring Successful De-escalation

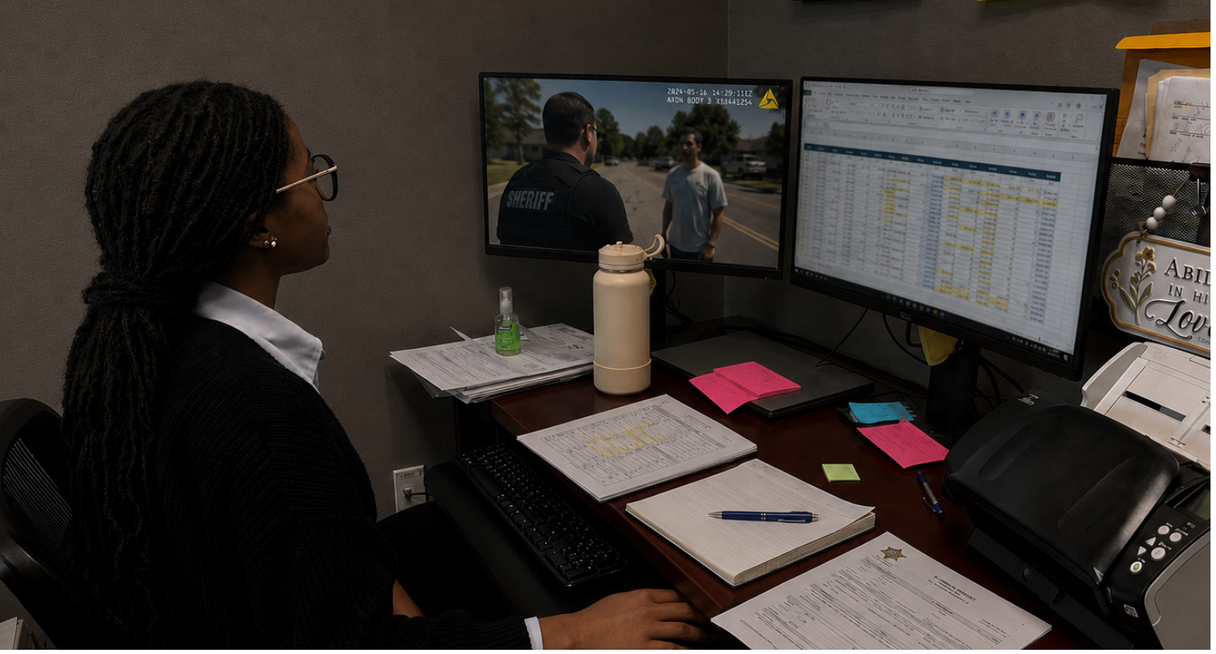
Consistent with the conceptual breadth of de-escalation, there are numerous ways to define successful de-escalation in police–citizen encounters. Broadly, de-escalation includes situations in which officers reduce tension, promote voluntary compliance, or avoid physical harm to citizens and officers alike. These elements may be reflected through several distinct operationalizations of deputy–citizen interactions. For example, successful de-escalation could be indicated by reductions in use of force, fewer assaults on officers, the cessation of force and resistance at lower thresholds, more civil communication, or other related outcomes.

The Phase 3 analysis focused on two potential indicators of successful de-escalation: citizen disposition at the conclusion of the interaction and deputy use of force. Deputies are routinely called to situations involving agitated citizens, and in some cases, officers themselves introduce potentially agitating circumstances, such as delivering upsetting news or making an arrest. Nevertheless, deputies retain the capacity to reduce citizen agitation and secure compliance through their behavior, including the successful application of de-escalation techniques (McIver & Parks, 1982).

Subject reactions and verbal responses to deputies were categorized by level of resistance. These categories correspond to five distinct levels: (1) limited resistance, (2) moderate resistance, (3) significant resistance, (4) use of force possible, and (5) use of force likely. The classification considers both primary citizen codes and, when applicable, code riders described in Appendix 2. For example, citizen reactions such as complying with an instruction, order, or direction are coded at the lowest level of resistance, limited resistance. In contrast, citizens who are unresponsive to or ignore deputies and fail to comply with instructions are classified as demonstrating moderate or significant resistance, respectively. Behaviors at the highest levels of resistance authorize deputies to apply physical force and are differentiated by the likelihood that force may be required. Situations coded as a possible use of force include instances wherein citizens make verbal threats to harm deputies or others, often accompanied by agitated demeanor or language. Likely responses to resistance involve more severe behaviors, such as assaultive or aggressively resisting citizens. Appendix 3 provides a comprehensive list of these citizen verbal and reaction codes and their corresponding resistance levels.

This classification scheme was applied to all citizen verbal and behavioral reactions observed during the encounters. The codes were then sequenced by timestamp to capture the progression of the interaction. Using these data, the study examined three related indicators of citizen disposition at the conclusion of an encounter. First, the analysis assessed whether citizens returned to the lowest level of resistance (Level 1) by the end of the incident, an operationalization consistent with prior studies of de-escalation effectiveness (Todak & James, 2018).

Successful de-escalation does not necessarily require that a citizen become fully calm or cooperative. Accordingly, two additional measures were included. The



second indicator assessed whether the final resistance level was lower than or equal to the starting level, while the third evaluates whether the final resistance level was lower than the maximum resistance level observed during the interaction. These measures captured situations in which deputies begin encounters with non-cooperative or agitated citizens or must manage citizens who become upset in response to the circumstances of the contact. In both cases, the indicators reflected whether deputies were able to prevent escalation by the conclusion of the encounter, even if the citizen did not exhibit complete cooperation.

A supplemental set of all three measures was calculated for which interactions in which all incidents featuring physical use of force, described below, were coded as unsuccessful de-escalation. There are circumstances where the use of force is necessary to prevent the escalation of resistance; however, these supplemental measures capture instances in which deputies were able to return citizens to the lowest level of resistance through verbal, non-physical techniques alone.

Another method for measuring the efficacy of de-escalation techniques is to assess their ability to prevent physical use of force. Indeed, this has been a key behavioral measure used to evaluate the impact of de-escalation training (Engel et al., 2022; White et al., 2025). As previously mentioned, 13 distinct types of deputy physical use-of-force, which vary in degree or level of force, were coded. These include the following types of force: hands on, takedown, TASER deployed (effective), TASER deployed (ineffective), TASER re-energized, chemical agent deployed (oleoresin capsicum, pepper ball), strikes or kicks, push or shove, firearm discharged (effective), firearm discharged (ineffective/miss), weapon of opportunity, subject forced into handcuffs/restraints, and other reportable use of force. Dichotomous measures were constructed to indicate the deployment of any force and each type of force at any point during the interaction. In these analyses context, successful de-escalation was operationalized as a dichotomous measure (no force=1, any force=0) and was defined as interactions in which deputies avoided the use of force.

Measuring De-escalation Efforts

The analysis focused on de-escalation techniques exhibited by deputies during their interactions with citizens. The coding protocol was designed to identify specific examples of verbal and physical de-escalation techniques represented in the LCSO de-escalation training administered to deputies. In total, the protocol captured 16 techniques, including 14 verbal and 2 physical. The verbal techniques included warning of immediate repercussions (e.g., arrest or use of force), warning of long-term repercussions, redirection or conversational distraction, tactical stalling, exhibiting empathy (relating, understanding, or caring), providing explanations, cognitive intermission, providing voice, offering assistance or help, promoting teamwork, avoiding the word "no", verbal mirroring or paraphrasing, communications agreement, and motivational interviewing. The two physical techniques consisted of creating physical space between the deputy and the subject and separating individuals from sources of agitation.

This list does not represent a comprehensive inventory of all de-escalation strategies included in LCSO training. Instead, it was restricted to techniques that could be readily captured through BWC footage and reliably interpreted by coders. The ability to identify some techniques may also be limited by technological issues inherent to BWC footage, such as obstructed audio or video. As a result, these measures likely underestimate the extent to which deputies employed these techniques, as well as other de-escalation strategies not incorporated into the coding protocol.

Counts of each de-escalation technique were calculated for all deputy interactions with individual citizens and used to construct several measures. When multiple deputies interacted with the same citizen, the counts of techniques used by each deputy were combined to reflect the full set of de-escalation strategies applied during the interaction. These measures included counts of each technique and a total count of all techniques used over the course of the entire interaction.

Continuous measures indicating two potential deputy actions that may escalate tension during an interaction, cursing and arguing with citizens in a non-productive manner, were also examined. Both actions were represented with unique codes and, in incidents featuring multiple deputies, all behaviors were aggregated to the interaction level.

Alternative versions of these measures were constructed for models predicting deputy use of force. Deputy behavior following the application of force would not be temporally relevant for this outcome; therefore, counts of de-escalation techniques and the potential aggravating deputy behaviors reflect only actions prior to use of force, if any were used during the interaction.

Control Measures

A series of control measures were also included in the analysis. First, indicators captured whether the citizen involved in the encounter was experiencing a mental health crisis or disorder and whether the citizen appeared to be chemically impaired. These measures were drawn from deputy-reported indicators of mental health issues or impairment recorded in the Phase 2 CAD data. Each was operationalized as a dichotomous variable indicating the presence or absence of these conditions during the encounter.

Next, the analysis incorporated measures describing the type of incident that precipitated the deputy–citizen interaction. These incident classifications were also drawn from the CAD system. Although the original data included 163 unique incident codes, these were consolidated into broader categories to facilitate analysis. The resulting incident types included burglary or home invasion, civil issues, disturbances, mental health incidents, miscellaneous service calls, missing persons, proactive patrol activities, suspicious incidents, theft or fraud, traffic incidents, traffic stops, warrant arrests, and an other category for incidents that did not fit within the primary classifications.

Several citizen demographic characteristics were also included as control variables. Race was categorized as white, black, Hispanic, or other. Gender was also recorded for each citizen. Age was measured using categorical groupings, including child (≤12), teen (13–17), college-age (18–24), young adult (25–30), adult (31–40), adult (41–50), adult (51–60), and senior (61+).

Finally, deputy characteristics were consolidated to the encounter level. These measures included information on the number of deputies who had substantial interactions with the citizen during the incident, as indicated by the presence of multiple interaction codes in the data. Deputy race was captured using a series of dichotomous indicators indicating whether at least one deputy was present during the encounter, corresponding to four racial categories: White, Black, Hispanic, or Other. Deputy age was calculated as the mean age of the deputies involved in the encounter, and a dichotomous indicator was included to indicate whether at least one female deputy was present.

Phase 3 Analytical Strategy

The analyses proceeded in two stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for citizen interactions in the full sample. It began with a detailed overview of citizen resistance levels throughout the interaction, deputy use of force, and the study's various indicators of successful de-escalation. Next, it examined the frequency of observed de-escalation techniques. This included both an overall description of these techniques and patterns of use disaggregated by successfully and unsuccessfully de-escalated interactions.

Second, multivariate regression models were estimated to examine the relationship between de-escalation techniques, final citizen level of resistance, and deputy application of force. This approach allowed for the assessment of these relationships while controlling for other circumstances of the incident. Models predicting final citizen levels of resistance included all 1,157 interactions; however, estimates of deputy use of force were restricted to a subsample of total interactions in which citizen resistance levels reached a threshold (level 4 in the current study) that LCSO policy would authorize deputies to use force. Consequently, these models considered only the 649 interactions in which the citizens' maximum resistance level is 4 or 5.

Logistic regression was employed to account for the dichotomous outcome measures. Although neighborhood context was not directly examined in the analysis, the models account for the nesting of interactions within the same neighborhood—measured as Census blocks—by estimating cluster-robust standard errors (Cameron & Miller, 2015). All analyses were conducted using Stata 16.1.

PROJECT FINDINGS

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Following multiple phases of research, data collection, and analysis, we are pleased to present the findings of the De-escalation Tracking Research Project.

Phase 2 Findings

The findings presented in this section summarize the results of the Phase 2 analysis of the encounter level dataset. A more detailed report was completed and released in 2024 and is available on LCSO's website.

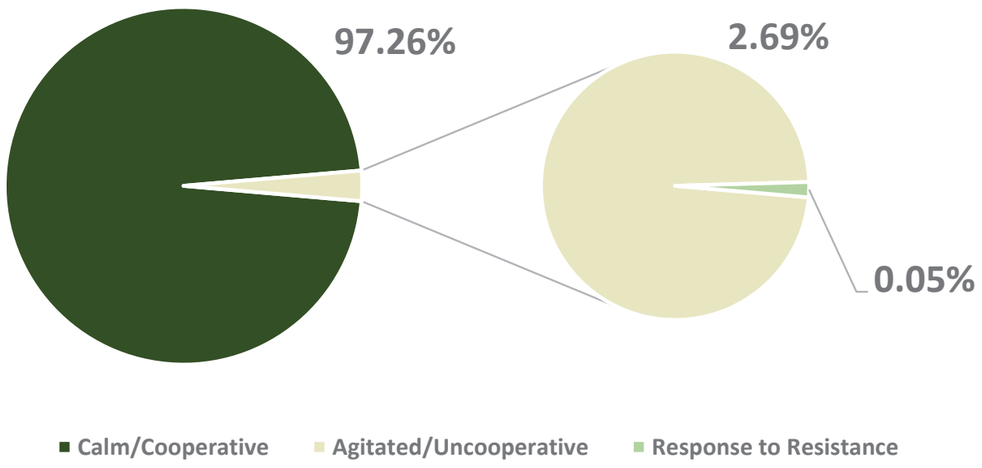
Using descriptive statistical methods, the analysis examined patterns in citizen contacts, encounters involving agitation or resistance, and incidents that resulted in a reportable use of force. These findings provide a broad overview of the operational context in which deputies interact with the public and establish baseline patterns in the distribution of volatile encounters across different call types and conditions.

Descriptive Statistics: Citizen Characteristics

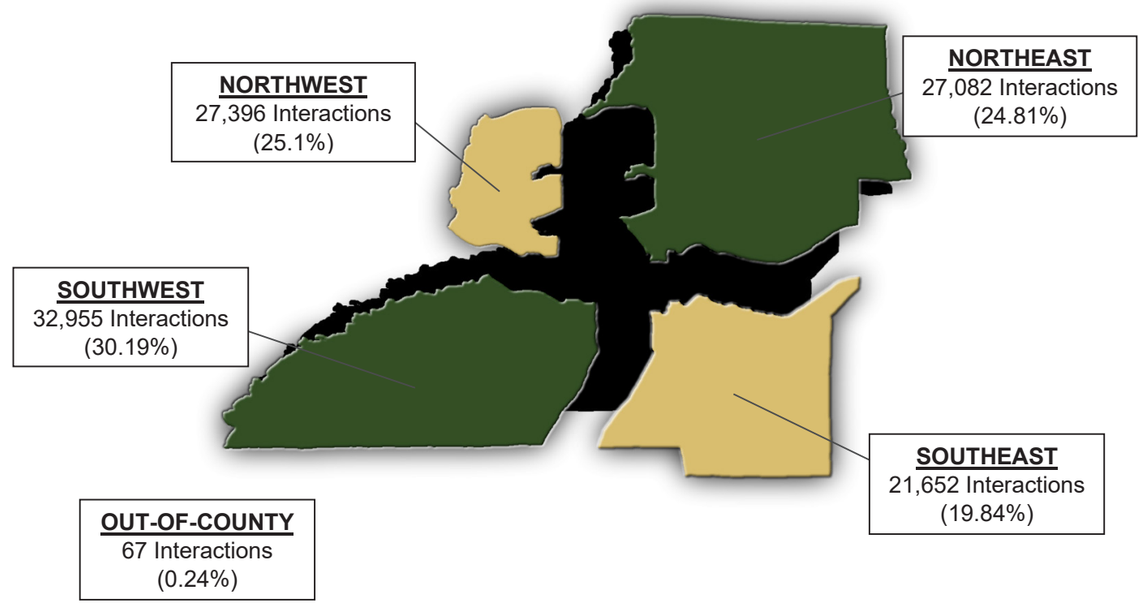
During the Phase 2 data collection period, deputies documented a total of 109,152 individual citizen interactions occurring across 53,535 incidents. The overwhelming majority of these interactions were characterized by deputies as calm and cooperative. Specifically, 106,161 interactions, or 97.26% of all recorded encounters, fell into this category. Only 2,935 interactions, representing 2.69% of the total, were characterized as agitated or uncooperative. Incidents that escalated to a reportable use of force were extremely rare, occurring in only 56 interactions, or 0.05% of all encounters.

"Only 2.69% of the total, were characterized as agitated or uncooperative."

When examined in greater detail, the majority of calm and cooperative interactions involved citizens who did not appear to be experiencing mental health concerns or chemical impairment; however, a small number of interactions included individuals who were either chemically impaired or experiencing an apparent mental health crisis. Even in these circumstances, most encounters remained calm and cooperative. These findings highlight an important baseline observation of the dataset: most law enforcement interactions occur without escalation and are resolved without the need for application of force.



***N*=109,152**



Descriptive Statistics: Geographic and Temporal Distribution of Interactions

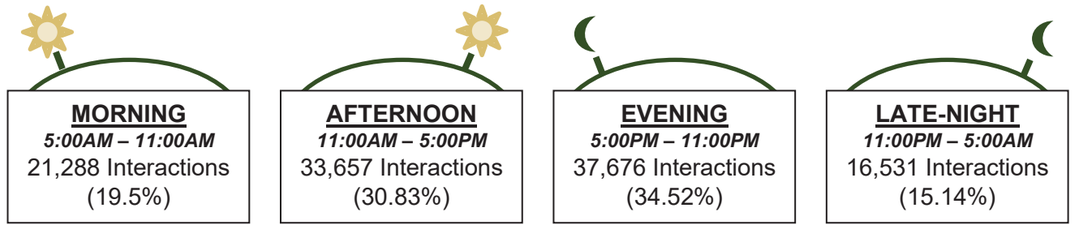
Citizen interactions were distributed relatively evenly across the four patrol sectors of Leon County. The Southwest sector accounted for the largest share of interactions, with 32,955 encounters representing approximately 30.19% of the total. The Northwest and Northeast sectors each accounted for roughly one quarter of interactions, with 27,396 and 27,082 encounters respectively. The Southeast sector accounted for 21,652 interactions, or 19.84% of the total dataset. A small number of interactions, 67 in total, occurred outside the county.

Although overall interaction volume was fairly balanced across sectors, the distribution of agitated or uncooperative encounters varied somewhat by geography. The Southwest sector recorded the largest share of these interactions, accounting for 35.67% of all agitated encounters. The remaining sectors reported similar proportions, each representing approximately one fifth to one quarter of these interactions. These patterns suggested that while routine law enforcement activity occurs broadly across the jurisdiction, certain geographic areas may experience slightly higher concentrations of encounters requiring active de-escalation efforts.

Citizen interactions varied by time of day, with the highest number of encounters occurring during evening hours. Interactions between 5:00 PM and 11:00 PM accounted for 37,676 encounters, representing approximately 34.52% of the dataset. Afternoon interactions between 11:00 AM and 5:00 PM accounted for 33,657 encounters, or 30.83%. Morning interactions between 5:00 AM and 11:00 AM represented 21,288 encounters, while late-night interactions between 11:00 PM and 5:00 AM accounted for 16,531 encounters.

"Although fewer interactions occurred during late-night hours, encounters during this period were somewhat more likely to be characterized as agitated or uncooperative."

Although fewer interactions occurred during late-night hours, encounters during this period were somewhat more likely to be characterized as agitated or uncooperative. Approximately 3.38% of late-night interactions were classified in this manner, compared with roughly 2 to 3% during other time periods. These findings sug-



gested that while the overall volume of interactions declines overnight, the relative likelihood of encountering agitation increases modestly during late-night hours.

Descriptive Statistics: Arrest Incidents

Only a small proportion of incidents resulted in arrests. Of the 53,535 incidents included in the dataset, 942 resulted in at least one arrest, representing approximately 1.76% of incidents overall. Among those arrest incidents, the majority of interactions were still characterized as calm and cooperative. Only 156 arrest incidents, or 16.56% of arrest cases, involved interactions described as agitated or uncooperative. Reportable responses to resistance occurred in only 26 arrest incidents, representing 2.76% of arrest cases.

These findings reinforced the broader pattern observed across the dataset: even when enforcement actions such as arrests occur, the majority of encounters are resolved without escalation or force.

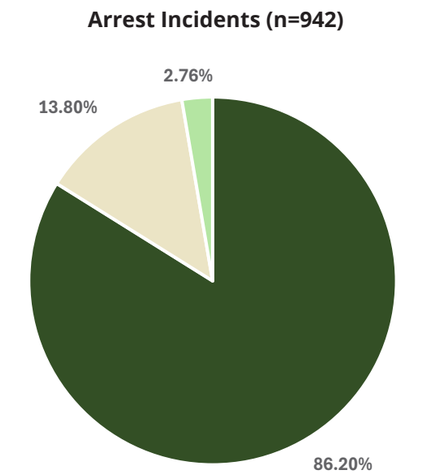
Descriptive Statistics: Incident Types

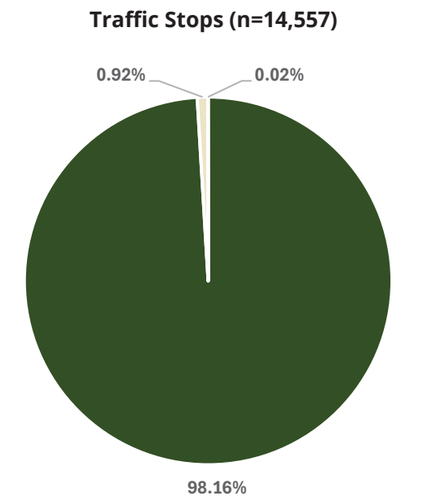
Disturbance calls represented one of the more common categories of incidents within the dataset. A total of 3,335 incidents were classified as disturbances. Of these incidents, 173 resulted in an arrest, representing approximately 5.19% of disturbance cases. Disturbance incidents were more likely than many other call types to involve interactions characterized as agitated or uncooperative. Deputies documented such behavior in 378 disturbance incidents, representing 11.33% of cases. Despite this increased likelihood of agitation, escalation to a reportable use of force remained rare, occurring in only nine disturbance incidents, or 0.27% of cases. These findings demonstrated that even within incident types traditionally associated with conflict or emotional volatility, deputies were able to resolve the vast majority of encounters without the use of force.

Traffic stops represent one of the most common and visible forms of police–citizen interaction. During the Phase 2 data collection period, deputies initiated or participated in 14,557 traffic stop incidents. Across these stops, deputies interacted with approximately 19,000 motorists and passengers. Of the total traffic stops recorded, only 201 resulted in an arrest, representing 1.38% of traffic stop incidents.

Traffic stop encounters rarely involved agitation or resistance. Only 134 traffic stops, representing 0.92% of incidents, involved interactions characterized as agitated or uncooperative. Escalation to a reportable use of force occurred in just three traffic stop incidents, or approximately 0.02% of all stops. The majority of traffic stops were conducted by members of the Uniform Patrol Division, which initiated approximately 69.69% of all stops, followed by the Traffic Unit at 24.46%.

Deputies also documented encounters in which individuals appeared to be chemically impaired by drugs or alcohol. A total of 933 interactions involved individuals characterized as chemically impaired. Among these, 661 interactions, or 70.85%, were characterized as calm and cooperative; however, agitation was more common in this group than in the general interaction population. Deputies characterized 272 interactions with chemically impaired individuals, representing 29.15% of such encounters, as agitated or uncooperative. Temporal analysis indicated that interactions with chemically impaired individuals occurred most frequently during evening hours, accounting for 42.34% of these encounters, followed by late-night hours at 30.87%. These patterns align with broader expectations regarding the timing of alcohol- and drug-related activity.





"… individuals who were chemically impaired or experiencing mental health crises were more likely to exhibit resistance or agitation compared to the general population of citizen interactions."

Deputies recorded 2,394 interactions involving individuals who appeared to be experiencing a mental health crisis or other mental health concerns. The majority of these encounters were still characterized as calm and cooperative, with 2,001 interactions, or 82.67%, falling into this category; however, agitation was more common than in the general dataset, with 393 interactions, representing 17.33%, classified as agitated or uncooperative. The agency has prioritized Crisis Intervention Techniques (CIT) training to better equip deputies to respond to such encounters. Among the deputies included in the sample group, 51.74% had completed CIT training. Notably, CIT-trained deputies handled approximately 57.93% of the interactions involving individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. These findings suggest that CIT training plays a meaningful role in these complex encounters involving behavioral health concerns.

Together, these findings indicated that individuals who were chemically impaired or experiencing mental health crises were more likely to exhibit resistance or agitation compared to the general population of citizen interactions.

Phase 3 Findings

The findings in this section present the results of the Phase 3 behavioral analysis of encounters identified as involving elevated emotional dynamics. Drawing on the detailed behavioral coding of body worn camera footage, this analysis examines how deputies and subjects behaved as interactions unfolded. The results focus on patterns in communication, tactical actions, resistance behaviors, and stabilization processes, providing a closer examination of the behavioral dynamics that shape escalation and de-escalation during real world encounters.

Descriptive Statistics: Citizen Resistance and Indicators of Successful De-escalation

Table 2 depicts the starting and final levels of subject resistance observed during the encounters. Citizen resistance was classified into five categories: (1) limited resistance, (2) moderate resistance, (3) significant resistance, (4) use of force possible, and (5) use of force likely. A sizable portion of interactions (31.11%, N = 360) began with limited resistance; however, most deputies encountered citizens exhibiting at least moderate resistance at the onset of the interaction. This included 3.11% and 4.32% of interactions that began with citizen behavior in which a deputy's use of force would be possible or likely.

Considerable volatility in citizen resistance was observed throughout the encounters. On average, there were 6.03 escalations and 5.67 de-escalations in resistance levels during an interaction. These values were calculated based on the number of changes in sequential citizen resistance levels, as indicated by the verbal and reaction codes. Examining the maximum level of resistance exhibited by citizens at any point during the encounter further illustrates the overall level of resistance. Although the most common peak level of resistance was significant resistance, more than half of all citizens exhibited resistance at levels that would authorize deputies to use force (23.42% use of force possible; 32.61% use of force likely).

Table 3 presents three key outcome measures that demonstrate successful de-escalation by deputies during citizen encounters. One primary indicator of success is that approximately 45.46% of citizens who exhibited some form of resistance during an interaction ultimately returned to the lowest level of resistance (Level 1) by the conclusion of the incident. Furthermore, an analysis of resistance levels relative to both the starting and peak points of the interaction reveals that deputies were generally effective at stabilizing or de-escalating tension.

Table 2. Citizen resistance levels over the course of deputy-citizen interactions, *N*=1,157

Variable	%	*n*
Starting Resistance Level		
Limited Resistance	31.11	360
Moderate Resistance	44.08	510
Significant Resistance	17.37	201
Response to Resistance Possible	3.11	36
Response to Resistance Likely	4.32	50
Ending		
Limited Resistance	45.46	526
Moderate Resistance	28.26	327
Significant Resistance	19.71	228
Response to Resistance Possible	4.41	51
Response to Resistance Likely	2.16	25
Max		
Moderate Resistance	8.38	97
Significant Resistance	35.52	411
Response to Resistance Possible	23.42	271
Response to Resistance Likely	32.67	378

Table 3. Outcome measures indicating successful de-escalation, *N*=1,157		
Variable	**%**	***n***
Concluded with Level 1		
Unsuccessful	54.54	631
Successful	45.46	526
Relative to Start Level		
Unsuccessful	30.42	352
Successful	69.58	805
Relative to Maximum Level		
Unsuccessful	17.55	203
Successful	82.45	954
Concluded with Level 1 (No RTR)		
Unsuccessful	63.96	740
Successful	36.04	417
Relative to Start Level (No RTR)		
Unsuccessful	45.98	532
Successful	54.02	625
Relative to Maximum Level (No RTR)		
Unsuccessful	38.12	441
Successful	61.88	716

Abbreviation. RTR=Response to Resistance

Specifically, 69.58% of all interactions concluded with a resistance level that was either lower than or equal to the level observed at the start of the encounter, while 82.54% of incidents ended with citizen resistance levels that were lower than the maximum level observed at any point during the interaction.

The supplemental de-escalation success measures also accounted for incidents in which deputies used force, where incidents featuring application of force were re-coded as unsuccessful de-escalation regardless of citizen resistance levels. Even when considering this more restrictive method for measuring successful de-escalation, these results suggest that deputies frequently stabilized or reduced resistance levels without the use of physical force; notably, 61.88% of all interactions ended with lower resistance levels than the maximum observed during the interaction.

"... 69.58% of all interactions concluded with a resistance level that was either lower than or equal to the level observed at the start of the encounter, while 82.54% of incidents ended with citizen resistance levels that were lower than the maximum level observed at any point during the interaction."

Descriptive Statistics: Deputy Use-of-Force

The proportion of interactions featuring any and specific types of deputy use of force tracked during the BWC review process is depicted in Table 4. This table presents use of force patterns for all interactions and disaggregated by the maximum level of citizen resistance. Among the full sample, force was rarely applied, occurring in just 22.82% of interactions. Further, the types of force levels were at the lower end of the use-of-force continuum. Hands-on force was applied in 18.67% of interactions, which includes instances wherein deputies grabbed, strong-armed, or otherwise attempted to physically control the citizen. 13.40% of interactions featured deputies forcing citizens into handcuffs, and all remaining types of force—including takedowns, strikes or kicks, push or shove, and TASER deployment—were used in fewer than 5% of total interactions. There were no instances of deputies deploying chemical weapons, weapons of opportunity, or deadly force (e.g., discharging a firearm) in this sample.

Disaggregating use-of-force patterns by level of resistance demonstrates that almost all force was applied in incidents with maximum levels of resistance at levels 4 or 5, where responses to resistance was possible and likely based on the type of resistance. No force was deployed in interactions with citizens exhibiting moderate resistance, level 2, and only 1.22% (N=5) of the 411 interactions with citizens engaging in significant resistance, level 3, at one point during the encounter. Among these rare instances of deputy force application in level 3 interactions, there were two hands-on force, two in which citizens were handcuffed, and one other form of force.

Use of force was overwhelmingly concentrated in incidents featuring citizens resisting at level 5. Indeed, of the 264 total interactions involving force, 249 of them occurred with citizens displaying the highest level of resistance; even though force was most common in these interactions, deputies still resolved them without using force (34.13%, N=249). The rarity of force, even when authorized, was especially evident when examining the 271 incidents where the maximum level of resistance was 4, as deputies used force in only 3.69% (N=10) of these incidents.

Descriptive Statistics: De-escalation Techniques

Following the review of the BWC footage, patterns of de-escalation techniques used by deputies during interactions with non-cooperative citizens were examined. As detailed in Table 5, which displays the aver-

Table 4. Proportion of citizen interactions involving any and specific types of deputy force by level of maximum citizen resistance										
			Maximum Level of Citizen Resistance							
	All (N=1,157)		**Level 2 (*n* =97)**		**Level 3 (*n* =411)**		**Level 4 (*n* =271)**		**Level 5 (*n* =378)**	
Variable	**%**	***n***	**%**	***n***	**%**	***n***	**%**	***n***	**%**	***n***
Any Force	22.82	264	0	0	1.22	5	3.69	10	65.87	249
Hands On	18.67	216	0	0	0.49	2	2.95	8	54.5	206
Takedown	4.32	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	13.23	50
TASER (Effective)	0.78	9	0	0	0	0	0.37	1	2.12	8
TASER (Ineffective)	0.78	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.38	9
TASER (Reenergized)	0.26	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.79	3
Chemical Agent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strikes or Kicks	0.17	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.53	2
Push or Shove	2.07	24	0	0	0	0	0.74	2	5.82	22
Firearm Discharged (Effective)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Firearm Discharged (Ineffective)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Weapon of Opportunity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Citizen Forced into Handcuffs	13.4	155	0	0	0.49	2	0	0	39.95	151
Other RTR	1.56	18	0	0	0.24	1	0.74	2	4.5	17

Table 5. Average counts of total and specific de-escalation techniques employed, *N*=1,157		
Variable	**Mean (SD)**	**Range**
Total Techniques	5.74 (6.3)	0-43
Verbal		
Warning of immediate repercussions	.60 (1.32)	0-19
Warning of long-term repercussions	.09 (.35)	0-4
Conversational redirection/distraction	.24 (.71)	0-8
Tactical stalling	.20 (.72)	0-8
Exhibiting empathy	.63 (1.28)	0-12
Providing explanations	2.10 (2.87)	0-29
Cognitive intermission	.23 (.70)	0-6
Providing voice	.69 (1.67)	0-23
Offering assistance or help	.36 (.87)	0-7
Promoting teamwork	.05 (.27)	0-5
Avoiding the word "no"	.05 (.26)	0-3
Verbal mirroring or paraphrasing	.10 (.45)	0-8
Communications agreement	.11 (.45)	0-7
Motivational interviewing	.03 (.22)	0-3
Physical		
Creating physical space	.06 (0.34)	0-5
Separating individuals from agitation	.22 (0.61)	0-6
Potential Aggravating Deputy Behaviors		
Cursing	.27 (1.18)	0-19
Arguing	.32 (.86)	0-10

Table 6. Average counts of total and specific de-escalation techniques employed disaggregated by successful and unsuccessful de-escalation as indicated by citizen resistance level 1 at conclusion of the interaction, *N*=1,157

	Successful (*n* =526)	Unsuccessful (*n* =631)
Variable	**Mean (SD)**	**Mean (SD)**
Total Techniques[a]	6.65 (6.77)	4.99 (5.76)
Verbal		
Warning of immediate repercussions	.66 (1.42)	.55 (1.24)
Warning of long-term repercussions	.10 (.39)	.08 (.30)
Conversational redirection/distraction[a]	.31 (.82)	.18 (.59)
Tactical stalling	.20 (.77)	.19 (.68)
Exhibiting empathy[a]	.81 (1.46)	.48 (1.09)
Providing explanations[a]	2.45 (3.05)	1.81 (2.67)
Cognitive intermission	.23 (.71)	.23 (.69)
Providing voice	.75 (1.62)	.64 (1.71)
Offering assistance or help[a]	.43 (.98)	.30 (.77)
Promoting teamwork[a]	.07 (.35)	.03 (.17)
Avoiding the word “no”	.05 (.26)	.06 (.26)
Verbal mirroring or paraphrasing	.12 (.42)	.08 (.47)
Communications agreement	.14 (.53)	.09 (.37)
Motivational interviewing	.04 (.25)	.03 (.19)
Physical		
Creating physical space	.07 (.37)	.05 (.31)
Separating individuals from agitation	.23 (.64)	.20 (.59)
Potential Aggravating Deputy Behaviors		
Cursing[a]	.41 (1.62)	.15 (.58)
Arguing	.28 (.78)	.35 (.93)

[a] Statistically significant differences (p<.05) between average counts between successfully and unsuccessfully de-escalated interactions

age application counts for the 14 verbal and 2 physical techniques observed, deputies routinely employed a diverse range of strategies. In fact, these interactions featured an average of 5.74 distinct de-escalation techniques per encounter. Only 12.45% of interactions did not include any observed techniques, whereas 66.03% included at least two distinct types of techniques.

The most common techniques employed in this sample were all verbal techniques: providing explanations ($\bar{x}$=2.10), providing voice ($\bar{x}$=.69), and exhibiting empathy ($\bar{x}$=.63). Provision of explanations included instances where deputies explain the situation by providing clear, objective reasons for their actions and outcomes. This can include statements by deputies that provide legal advice or recourse. Deputies providing citizens voice afforded them opportunities to explain their situation without strictly serving an investigative purpose. Finally, empathetic displays included any overt attempts to demonstrate that deputies were relating to, understanding of, or caring for the citizens’ situation.

Preliminary support for the efficacy of de-escalation techniques arises by examining counts of total and specific techniques during successful and unsuccessful de-escalation attempts, as indicated by citizens concluding the encounter on the lowest level of resistance.

As shown in Table 6, deputies deployed 6.65 techniques in successfully de-escalated interactions relative to only 4.99 in unsuccessful interactions. Additionally, this pattern applied to almost all specific techniques, where each was applied more frequently in successfully de-escalation interactions; however, these differences were only statistically significant, as calculated by independent two-sample t-tests, for five techniques: redirection or conversational distraction, exhibiting empathy,

“… deputies deployed 6.65 techniques in successfully de-escalated interactions relative to only 4.99 in unsuccessful interactions.”

Table 7. Average counts of total and specific de-escalation techniques employed, disaggregated by successful and unsuccessful de-escalation as indicated by deputy use of force during interactions with maximum citizen resistance of 4 and 5, *N*=649

	Successful No Force Used (*n* =390)	Unsuccessful Force Used (*n* =259)
Variable	**Mean (SD)**	**Mean (SD)**
Total Techniques[a]	7.14 (7.37)	3.31 (5.09)
Verbal		
Warning of immediate repercussions	.70 (1.57)	.52 (1.06)
Warning of long-term repercussions[a]	.13 (.43)	.03 (.22)
Conversational redirection/distraction[a]	.28 (.75)	.13 (.47)
Tactical stalling	.24 (.83)	.25 (.80)
Exhibiting empathy[a]	.81 (1.42)	.32 (1.15)
Providing explanations[a]	2.44 (3.43)	1.09 (2.13)
Cognitive intermission[a]	.26 (.77)	.15 (.55)
Providing voice[a]	.98 (2.14)	.35 (1.19)
Offering assistance or help[a]	.45 (.98)	.12 (.48)
Promoting teamwork	.05 (.23)	.05 (.37)
Avoiding the word “no”	.06 (.31)	.03 (.18)
Verbal mirroring or paraphrasing	.13 (.55)	.06 (.31)
Communications agreement[a]	.17 (.62)	.06 (.32)
Motivational interviewing	.04 (.22)	.02 (.21)
Physical		
Creating physical space[a]	.09 (.43)	.02 (.15)
Separating individuals from agitation[a]	.31 (.78)	.10 (.44)
Potentially Aggravating Deputy Behaviors		
Cursing	.25 (.90)	.15 (.68)
Arguing[a]	.37 (.95)	.12 (.49)

[a] Statistically significant differences (p<.05) between average counts between successfully and unsuccessfully de-escalated interactions

providing explanations, offering assistance or help, and promoting teamwork.

The two potentially aggravating deputy behaviors, cursing and non-productive arguing, were also routinely observed. Interactions averaged .27 and .32 for each of these behaviors. While counts of argumentative behaviors did not vary across successfully and unsuccessfully de-escalated interactions, cursing was more common in successful cases.

Patterns of de-escalation utilization among interactions that did and did not involve deputy use of force also suggest these behaviors are more common in successfully de-escalated interactions (i.e., those in which force is not applied). As shown in Table 7, deputies employed more than twice as many de-escalation techniques in encounters without application of force ($\bar{x}$=7.14) as in interactions with application of force ($\bar{x}$=3.31). Ten specific techniques were used significantly more frequently in successful encounters: warning of long-term repercussions, redirection or conversational distraction, exhibiting empathy, providing explanations, cognitive intermission, providing voice, offering assistance or help, communications agreement, creating physical space, and separating individuals from agitation. The two potentially aggravating behaviors, cursing and arguing, also occurred more frequently in the successful interactions. Notably, counts of de-escalation techniques and potentially aggravating deputy behavior in cases involving the use of force only count actions preceding the first use of force incident. Appendix 4 contains these behaviors for the duration of the interaction.

Descriptive Statistics: Interaction Control Measures

Table 8 provides a breakdown of the situational factors used as control measures in the study. The data reveals that a significant portion of the interactions involved vulnerable individuals, as 25.50% of the citizens exhibited signs of mental health crises or disorders, while 20.40% displayed indications of chemical impairment.

Table 8. Control measures descriptive statistics, N=1,157

Variable	%/Mean	*n*/SD	Range
Citizen Mental Health			
No	74.50	862	
Yes	25.50	295	
Citizen Chemical Impairment			
No	79.60	921	
Yes	20.40	236	
Incident Type			
Burglary or Home Invasion	1.12	13	
Civil Issue	2.16	25	
Disturbance	49.09	568	
Mental Health	14.87	172	
Misc. Service Call	8.99	104	
Missing Person	.61	7	
Proactive Patrol	1.73	20	
Suspicious Incident	3.63	42	
Theft or Fraud	2.59	30	
Traffic Incident	2.42	28	
Traffic Stop	6.14	71	
Warrant Arrest	3.03	35	
Other	3.63	42	
Citizen Race			
Black	54.54	631	
White	43.22	500	
Hispanic	1.73	20	
Other	.52	6	
Citizen Gender			
Female	41.92	485	
Male	58.08	672	
Citizen Age			
Child (≤12)	1.47	17	
Teen (13–17)	12.45	144	
College Age (18–24)	12.36	143	
Young Adult (25–30)	13.31	154	
Adult (31–40)	27.92	323	
Adult (41–50)	18.76	217	
Adult (51–60)	8.56	99	
Senior (61+)	5.19	60	
Number of Deputies	1.54	0.78	1-6
Deputy Race Indicators			
Black			
No	70.35	814	
Yes	29.65	343	
White			
No	23.51	272	
Yes	76.49	885	
Hispanic			
No	91.27	1,056	
Yes	8.73	101	
Other			
No	93.78	1,085	
Yes	6.22	72	
Deputy Age	35.22	7.89	21-60
Female Deputy Present			
No	81.68	945	
Yes	18.32	212	
De-escalation Trained Deputy Present			
No	92.31	1,068	
Yes	7.69	89	

Furthermore, the interactions were precipitated by a variety of incident types; however, disturbance calls were the most prevalent, accounting for nearly half (49.09%) of all encounters.

An examination of the citizen demographics highlights considerable diversity within the sample population. Racial distribution was primarily concentrated between Black (54.54%) and White (43.22%) individuals, with an additional 1.73% representing Hispanic citizens. Regarding gender, the sample was majority male at 58.08%. While the study encompassed citizens across numerous age groups, the data indicate that the most frequent age groups represented in the sample of uncooperative or resistant citizens were middle-aged people, specifically those between 25 and 40 years old.

To account for instances in which multiple deputies were present, deputy characteristics were consolidated at the incident level for analysis. On average, these interactions involved 1.54 deputies. In terms of racial composition, the presence of at least one White deputy was the most frequent characteristic, occurring in 76.49% of the incidents. The average age of the deputies was 35.22 years old, which closely mirrored the average age range of the citizens they encountered. Finally, the study noted that only 18.32% of interactions involved at least one female deputy.

Multivariate Models: Citizen Disposition

The study used logistic regression models to estimate the association between the application of de-escalation techniques and successful interaction outcomes. The results are presented as standardized coefficients, expressed as odds ratios, which represent the change in the odds of successful de-escalation for every one-unit change in the covariate. In these models, coefficients exceeding 1 denote a positive association, while values below 1 indicate a negative association. These can reflect the percentage of increase or decrease in odds of the outcome by subtracting 1 from the odds ratio, then multiplying by 100. For example, an odds ratio of 1.2 represents a 20% increase in the odds of the outcome ([1.2-1]*100=20%), and an odds ratio of .8 indicates a 20% decrease([0.8-1]*100=-20%). To account for potential spatial dependencies, all models cluster robust standard errors by the neighborhood of the interaction.

"...each additional de-escalation technique increased the odds of a citizen concluding the interaction at the lowest level of resistance by 6.21%."

Table 9. Logistic regression models predicting successful de-escalation of an interaction with total number of de-escalation techniques, *N*=1,157

Variables	Model 1 Low Resist End O.R. [95% C.I.]	Model 2 Low Relative Start O.R. [95% C.I.]	Model 3 Low Relative Max O.R. [95% C.I.]
Total De-escalation Techniques	1.06 [1.03-1.09]***	1.03 [1.01-1.06]*	1.11 [1.06-1.16]***
Cursing	1.33 [1.11-1.58]***	1.23 [1.04-1.46]*	1.12 [.93-1.35]
Arguing	.85 [.74-.98]*	.79 [.69-.90]***	.89 [.75-1.07]
Citizen Mental Health	.91 [.62-1.33]	1.08 [.73-1.59]	1.54 [.93-2.58]†
Citizen Chemical Impairment	.80 [.61-1.06]	.68 [.53-.88]**	1.34 [.9-2.02]
Incident Type[a]			
Civil Issue	1.43 [.40-5.05]	.82 [.19-3.56]	1.61 [.23-11.18]
Disturbance	2.18 [.82-5.83]	1.61 [.46-5.61]	1.69 [.34-8.53]
Mental Health	1.61 [.56-4.58]	.94 [.26-3.44]	1.24 [.23-6.66]
Misc. Service Call	1.71 [.56-5.28]	1.61 [.47-5.53]	1.54 [.31-7.74]
Missing Person	2.28 [.71-7.28]	.31 [.06-1.49]	.45 [.05-4.05]
Proactive Patrol	2.10 [.58-7.60]	1.10 [.26-4.71]	1.00 [.18-5.55]
Suspicious Incident	1.47 [.37-5.84]	2.41 [.4-14.60]	2.97 [.3-28.95]
Theft or Fraud	3.05 [1.04-8.92]*	2.23 [.57-8.69]	2.03 [.28-14.91]
Traffic Incident	1.91 [.47-7.76]	1.39 [.33-5.82]	3.74 [.55-25.32]
Traffic Stop	2.96 [1.09-8.02]*	2.10 [.59-7.46]	3.72 [.46-29.85]
Warrant Arrest	2.87 [.9-9.19]†	1.29 [.32-5.18]	3.21 [.57-18.03]
Other	1.26 [.39-4.10]	1.00 [.23-4.39]	1.67 [.24-11.58]
Citizen Race[b]			
White	.87 [.68-1.11]	.94 [.72-1.23]	.75 [.53-1.06]
Hispanic	.78 [.30-2.01]	.73 [.23-2.29]	1.10 [.27-4.57]
Other	1.23 [.23-6.62]	.71 [.19-2.64]	.11 [.02-.61]*
Male Citizen	1.35 [1.04-1.76]*	1.18 [.88-1.59]	1.32 [.98-1.77]†
Citizen Age[c]			
Teen (13–17)	.83 [.24-2.83]	.76 [.15-3.78]	.47 [.03-6.70]
College Age (18–24)	.75 [.19-2.94]	.53 [.09-2.96]	.19 [.01-2.71]
Young Adult (25–30)	.62 [.16-2.37]	.54 [.09-3.24]	.15 [.01-2.23]
Adult (31–40)	.68 [.20-2.32]	.51 [.10-2.74]	.21 [.01-2.86]
Adult (41–50)	.69 [.18-2.62]	.51 [.10-2.72]	.21 [.01-3.04]
Adult (51–60)	.75 [.23-2.49]	.43 [.09-2.22]	.18 [.01-2.52]
Senior (61+)	.52 [.14-1.92]	.58 [.11-3.09]	.2 [.01-3.05]
Number of Deputies	.96 [.78-1.18]	1.17 [.93-1.46]	1.23 [.87-1.75]
Deputy Race Black	.78 [.56-1.09]	1.01 [.66-1.56]	1.1 [.63-1.91]
Deputy Race White	.88 [.59-1.30]	.92 [.54-1.58]	1.34 [.76-2.37]
Deputy Race Hispanic	1.1 [.63-1.91]	1.32 [.76-2.31]	1.69 [.86-3.33]
Deputy Race Other	.72 [.46-1.13]	.68 [.41-1.15]	.95 [.47-1.9]
Deputy Age	1.03 [1.01-1.04]***	1.01 [.99-1.03]	1.02 [1-1.03]
Female Deputy Present	.86 [.64-1.16]	.59 [.42-.82]**	.59 [.43-.83]**
De-escalation Trained Deputy Present	.64 [.37-1.12]	.68 [.44-1.04]†	1.16 [.58-2.3]
Constant	.22 [.04-1.25]†	1.63 [.18-14.82]	2.56 [.11-57.42]

Abbreviation. O.R.=odds ratio; C.I.= confidence interval
†p<.10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)
Standard errors clustered by census block (*N*=140)
a Reference = Burglary or Home Invasion
b Reference = Black
c Reference = Child (≤12)

The analyses began by evaluating the relationship between the total count of de-escalation techniques employed and three distinct measures of successful interaction resolution. As shown in Table 9, the application of these techniques significantly increased the odds of success across all outcome measures. Specifically, each additional de-escalation technique increased the odds of a citizen concluding the interaction at the lowest level of resistance by 6.21%. Similarly, for each technique applied, the odds of achieving equal or lower levels of resistance at the conclusion compared to the start of the interaction increased by 3.21%. The most pronounced effect size was observed in the third operationalization of success—ending an interaction with a lower level of resistance than the maximum level experienced—where the use of de-escalation techniques increased the odds of a successful resolution by 10.67%.

"The most pronounced effect size was observed in the third operationalization of success—ending an interaction with a lower level of resistance than the maximum level experienced—where the use of de-escalation techniques increased the odds of a successful resolution by 10.67%."

Figure 1 illustrates these effects using the third measure of de-escalation success, lower resistance at the conclusion relative to the maximum level. This figure illustrates the predicted probability of success for varying totals of de-escalation techniques, holding all other variables at their mean values. The model predicts that when deputies use no de-escalation techniques, approximately 77.11% of interactions were successfully resolved. As the number of techniques increased, so did the probability of success; the model estimates an 84.83% success rate for the use of five techniques, and the predicted probability of a successful resolution exceeds 90% once deputies utilize 10 or more techniques.

To ensure the robustness of these findings, alternative measures of successful de-escalation were examined. These recode all interactions involving the use of force as unsuccessful de-escalation attempts. These supplemental analyses consistently affirm the initial findings. The total count of de-escalation techniques increases the odds of success across all three outcome measures, with effect sizes ranging from 5.34% to 7.86%. Outputs for these secondary models are provided in Appendix 5.

While most other control measures will be addressed in subsequent studies, it is worth noting the relationship between the two potentially aggravating deputy behaviors, cursing and arguing, and successful de-escalation. Deputy profanity counts are positively associated with successful de-escalation when considering the lowest concluding resistance level (OR=1.33, p <0.001) and concluding relative to the beginning resistance level (OR=1.23, p <0.05). This is a counterintuitive finding that merits additional consideration; however, the statistical significance of this relationship varies across these models and the supplementary models in Appendix 5, suggesting the finding may not be robust to all operationalizations of success. Conversely, the counts of argumentative deputy interactions are significantly and negatively associated with successful de-escalation in most models, but again, these relationships are not consistently statistically significant.

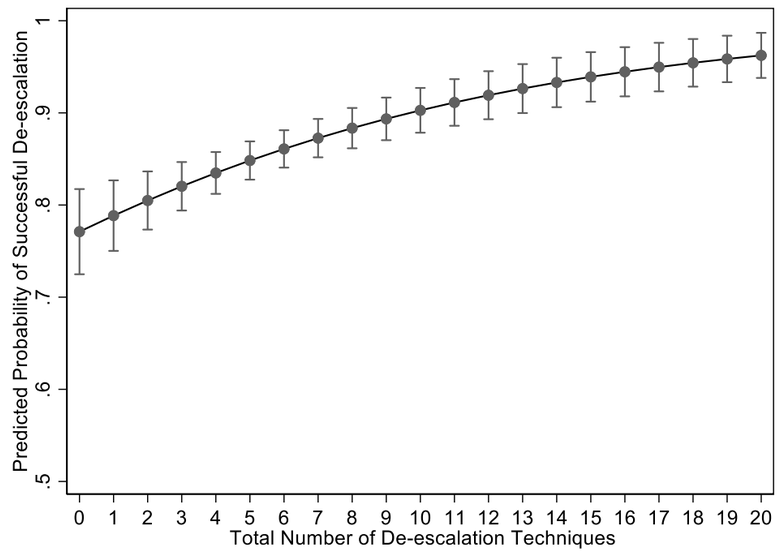


Figure 1. Predicted probability of successful de-escalation (citizen returns to lower level of resistance relative to the maximum) by the number of de-escalation techniques employed.

The analyses then attempt to parse out the effectiveness of individual de-escalation techniques. The outcome measures were regressed on all 16 techniques along with all control measures. Table 10 displays the coefficients for each technique and uncovers important nuances among the various de-escalation strategies. Several techniques appear to be more salient for success. For example, exhibiting empathy and offering assistance significantly increased the odds of successful de-escalation across all three outcome measures. Three additional techniques significantly improved the outcome of interactions for some, but not all, of the operationalizations of success: warning of immediate, providing explanations, and promoting teamwork. Meanwhile, 10 of the techniques were not associated with interaction outcomes and one, providing voice, significantly reduced odds of success by 12%. Expanding consideration to the supplemental measures of successful de-escalation, which consider use of force as unsuccessful interactions, affirms the efficacy of offering assistance or help. Each application of this technique increased the odds of successful de-escalation by 15%-24%, depending on the outcome measure. Additionally, there was robust support for providing explanations in these models, which was also significant in the model predicting concluding interactions at the lowest level of resistance (OR=1.07, p <0.01). Exhibiting empathy only appeared to be impactful in ending interactions with minimal resistance when accounting for the use of force in measuring success, whereas it was consequential for the main models. Further, several techniques that were statistically significant in the main models—e.g., warning of immediate and promoting teamwork—were no longer significant with these operationalizations. Only one measure, separating individuals from agitation, was significant in these models, but not in the main models. This technique was associated with a 23% increase (OR=1.23, p <0.05) in the odds of concluding an interaction with a resistance level less than or equal to the interaction's beginning.

Table 10. Logistic regression models predicting successful de-escalation of an interaction with specific de-escalation techniques, *N*=1,157

Variable	Model 1 Low Resist End O.R. [95% C.I.]	Model 2 Low Relative Start O.R. [95% C.I.]	Model 3 Low Relative Max O.R. [95% C.I.]
Verbal			
Warning of immediate repercussions	1.01 [0.88-1.16]	0.95 [0.85-1.07]	1.4 [1.12-1.77]**
Warning of long-term repercussions	0.8 [0.57-1.14]	0.68 [0.44-1.06]†	1.18 [0.65-2.15]
Redirection or conversational distraction	1.2 [0.91-1.58]	1.26 [0.99-1.59]†	1.37 [0.88-2.13]
Tactical stalling	1.04 [0.89-1.23]	0.93 [0.78-1.11]	1.03 [0.8-1.33]
Exhibiting empathy	1.23 [1.1-1.36]***	1.18 [1.05-1.34]**	1.77 [1.31-2.4]***
Providing explanations	1.07 [1.02-1.12]**	1.02 [0.97-1.07]	1.08 [0.99-1.19]†
Cognitive intermission	0.86 [0.7-1.05]	0.92 [0.74-1.14]	0.85 [0.61-1.18]
Providing voice	0.98 [0.89-1.08]	0.94 [0.87-1.01]†	0.88 [0.79-0.99]*
Offering assistance or help	1.17 [1.01-1.35]*	1.28 [1.02-1.62]*	1.38 [1.05-1.81]*
Promoting teamwork	1.72 [1.07-2.77]*	2.05 [1.18-3.55]*	0.81 [0.38-1.74]
Avoiding the word "no"	0.85 [0.52-1.39]	0.66 [0.36-1.21]	1.06 [0.48-2.33]
Verbal mirroring or paraphrasing	0.97 [0.71-1.33]	0.93 [0.65-1.32]	1.09 [0.77-1.55]
Communications agreement	1.18 [0.9-1.55]	1.37 [0.9-2.07]	1.6 [0.88-2.9]
Motivational interviewing	0.98 [0.58-1.65]	1.43 [0.67-3.07]	1.1 [0.36-3.35]
Physical			
Creating physical space	1.01 [0.68-1.5]	1.19 [0.76-1.84]	0.85 [0.48-1.52]
Separating individuals from agitation	0.95 [0.8-1.14]	0.95 [0.76-1.19]	0.75 [0.54-1.04]†

Abbreviation. O.R.=odds ratio; C.I.= confidence interval
†p<.10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)
Standard errors clustered by census block (*N*=140)
Models include all control measures displayed in Table 7

Next, the analysis assessed the relationship between the deployment of de-escalation techniques and deputy use of force. These models were restricted to interactions in which deputy use of force was permissible according to LCSO policy. Specifically, the sample included encounters in which citizens exhibited either level 4 or level 5 resistance at some point during the interaction (N=649). Within this context, successful de-escalation was defined as encounters in which deputies resolved the situation without employing any form of force. Several modifications were made to the control variables to account for the characteristics of this subsample. Table 11 has two models which include total and specific counts of de-escalation techniques.

"…each additional de-escalation technique used was associated with a 6% increase in the likelihood of successful resolution of the interaction"

As indicated in Model 1, each additional de-escalation technique used was associated with a 6% increase (OR=1.06, p <0.001) in the likelihood of successful resolution of the interaction (i.e., no use of force with a citizen exhibiting high levels of resistance). Figure 2 presents the predicted probabilities of success at various degrees of de-escalation technique deployment, 0 to 20, while controlling for all other measures. Deputies deploying no techniques were predicted to avoid force in just 53.89% of interactions, whereas deputies utilizing 5 and 10 total techniques increase the predicted probability of avoiding force to 60.51% and 66.77%, respectively.

Model 2 considers counts of specific de-escalation techniques. Only two techniques, providing voice (OR=1.25, p<0.05) and separating individuals from agitation (OR=1.57, p<0.05), significantly increased the odds of successful de-escalation. These emerged as unique significant predictors, not observed in analyses predicting citizen demeanor at the conclusion of interactions. Further, deputy use of profanity also appeared to impact the likelihood of de-escalation success. Each instance of deputy swearing reduced the odds of avoiding force by 17%.

Inferences and Interpretation

Synthesizing Key Findings

The Dissecting De-Escalation Project provides important and novel insights into the nature of police-citizen encounters, patterns of de-escalation technique use, and the efficacy of these techniques in successfully resolving interactions with citizens exhibiting resistance. Phase 2 documented the relative rarity of non-cooperation or resistance occurring during deputy-citizen interaction in Leon County. Only 2.69% of the total interactions during the study period involved any resistance, highlighting the generally high level of civility in most interactions; therefore, Phase 3's sample of interactions was drawn from just a fraction of the broader population of deputy-citizen encounters. Even within these noncooperative interactions, the level of citizen resistance was typically low. Indeed, only 56.09% of citizen behavior reached a level of resistance that could authorize a potential physical use-of-force response by deputies.

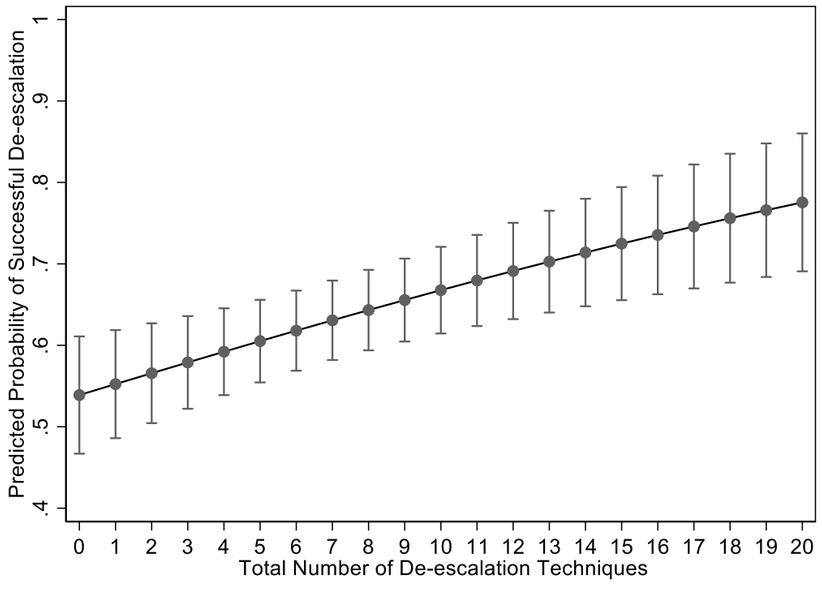


Figure 2. Predicted probability of successful de-escalation (deputy does not utilize force with resisting citizen) by the number of de-escalation techniques employed.

Table 11. Logistic regression models predicting successful de-escalation of an interaction as indicated by no force used with a resisting citizen, *N*=649

Variables	Model 1 O.R. [95% C.I.]	Model 2 O.R. [95% C.I.]
Total De-escalation Techniques	1.06 [1.02-1.09]***	
Verbal		
Warning of immediate repercussions		0.86 [0.7-1.05]
Warning of long-term repercussions		1.30 [0.79-2.13]
Redirection or conversational distraction		1.21 [0.9-1.64]
Tactical stalling		0.89 [0.72-1.11]
Exhibiting empathy		0.99 [0.82-1.19]
Providing explanations		1.07 [1-1.14]†
Cognitive intermission		0.95 [0.73-1.26]
Providing voice		1.25 [1.03-1.52]*
Offering assistance or help		1.12 [0.85-1.48]
Promoting teamwork		0.61 [0.34-1.1]†
Avoiding the word "no"		0.97 [0.43-2.19]
Verbal mirroring or paraphrasing		0.92 [0.63-1.33]
Communications agreement		1.23 [0.76-1.99]
Motivational interviewing		0.61 [0.32-1.16]
Physical		
Creating physical space		1.74 [0.95-3.18]†
Separating individuals from agitation		1.57 [1.15-2.15]**
Cursing	0.83 [0.73-0.94]**	0.84 [0.75-0.94]**
Arguing	0.98 [0.77-1.26]	0.99 [0.8-1.23]
Citizen Mental Health	0.34 [0.21-0.54]***	0.31 [0.19-0.5]***
Citizen Chemical Impairment	0.41 [0.25-0.68]***	0.38 [0.23-0.63]***
Incident Type[a]		0 [0-0]
Mental Health	0.49 [0.26-0.96]*	0.54 [0.28-1.05]†
Traffic	0.63 [0.27-1.49]	0.78 [0.31-1.94]
Arrest Warrant	0.24 [0.09-0.59]**	0.33 [0.1-1.11]†
Theft or Fraud	0.64 [0.22-1.86]	0.85 [0.3-2.41]
Suspicious Incident	0.25 [0.06-1.07]†	0.29 [0.06-1.28]
Other	0.96 [0.51-1.81]	1.05 [0.53-2.1]
Citizen Race Non-White[b]	0.74 [0.52-1.06]†	0.7 [0.49-0.98]*
Male Citizen	0.89 [0.6-1.32]	0.91 [0.62-1.34]
Citizen Age[c]	0 [0-0]	0 [0-0]
Teen (13–17)	0.74 [0.3-1.78]	0.64 [0.24-1.68]
College Age (18–24)	2.86 [1.09-7.48]*	2.07 [0.63-6.86]
Young Adult (25–30)	1.89 [0.7-5.12]	1.57 [0.48-5.1]
Adult (31–40)	3.93 [1.71-9.04]***	3.3 [1.14-9.56]*
Adult (41–50)	3.65 [1.51-8.86]**	2.75 [0.91-8.36]†
Adult (51–60)	2.04 [0.69-6.04]	1.61 [0.42-6.23]
Senior (61+)	3.44 [1.22-9.69]*	2.76 [0.8-9.48]
Number of Deputies	0.49 [0.38-0.64]***	0.46 [0.36-0.61]***
Deputy Race Black	0.99 [0.62-1.58]	0.92 [0.56-1.51]
Deputy Race White	1.62 [0.83-3.16]	1.74 [0.87-3.49]
Deputy Race Hispanic	1.45 [0.78-2.69]	1.42 [0.68-2.95]
Deputy Race Other	1.36 [0.59-3.09]	1.63 [0.72-3.69]
Deputy Age	1 [0.97-1.02]	1 [0.97-1.03]
Female Deputy Present	1.35 [0.89-2.03]	1.4 [0.89-2.19]
De-escalation Trained Deputy Present	2.81 [1.32-5.98]**	2.69 [1.18-6.14]*
Constant	3.49 [0.9-13.5]†	3.78 [0.85-16.82]†

Abbreviation. O.R.=odds ratio; C.I.= confidence interval
†p<.10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)
Standard errors clustered by census block (*N*=116)
a Reference = Disturbance
b Reference = White
c Reference = Child (≤12)

It is in these rare interactions, however, that information on some of the most pressing public policy issues facing law enforcement today, such as use of force and police-citizen cooperation, can be observed. The detail afforded by the systematic social observation of BWCs during this phase unveiled critical information about these encounters. While citizens occasionally presented with high resistance levels at the onset of the interaction, it was far more typical for them to exhibit cooperation (31.11%) or moderate resistance (44.08%) initially before escalating as the interaction unfolded. This indicates the importance of preventing escalation for deputies, not just stabilizing interactions with elevated levels of resistance.

“While citizens occasionally presented with high resistance levels at the onset of the interaction, it was far more typical for them to exhibit cooperation (31.11%) or moderate resistance (44.08%) initially before escalating as the interaction unfolded. This indicates the importance of preventing escalation for deputies, not just stabilizing interactions with elevated levels of resistance. ”

Further, this pattern, along with the generally high volatility in citizen resistance levels across interactions, demonstrates the opportunity to use effective de-escalation techniques to improve deputy-citizen outcomes. Sample interactions had an average of 6.03 escalations and 5.67 de-escalations during the encounter. Resistance levels are not static but rather dynamic, capable of repeated fluctuations (Terrill, 2001). This malleability is a necessary precursor to the potential efficacy of de-escalation techniques.

These findings were largely consistent with prior research on general patterns of citizen resistance; however, by this agency incorporating systematic social observation methods applied to BWC footage facilitates important advancements. Extant research typically examines citizen resistance and noncooperation, frequently only captures the highest levels of resistance through administrative data tracking, resisting arrest charges, assault on police, or police use of force (Belvedere et al., 2005; Crawford & Burns, 2002; den Heyer, 2023; Hickman et al., 2021; Hine et al., 2018). These affirm that these indicators of more extreme levels of resistance are rare in the context of millions of police-citizen encounters occurring nationally; however, it is comparatively rare to consider lower levels of resistance, fluctuations in resistance, and both deputy and citizen behaviors over the course of the interactions (McCluskey et al., 1999; Engel, 2003; Dai et al., 2011; Todak & James, 2018; Foster et al., 2024; Piza & Sytsma, 2024). Doing so enables consideration of how situational factors and deputy behaviors—i.e., application of de-escalation techniques—can influence citizen behavior.

The findings demonstrate that LCSO deputies routinely employed de-escalation techniques during encounters with citizens. Only 12.45% of interactions did not involve any de-escalation techniques, and the average number of techniques used per interaction was 5.74. Again, this figure likely underestimates the true level of de-escalation activity, as the analysis focused on a specific set of techniques and identifying all techniques from body-worn camera footage presents inherent challenges (Makin et al., 2021; McCluskey & Uchida, 2023; Worden et al., 2025). Nonetheless, the results indicated that the application of de-escalation strategies was relatively routine, even prior to the agency’s concerted effort to implement formal de-escalation training.

The central research question motivating this study concerned whether de-escalation techniques improve interaction outcomes. Across all models, the results consistently indicate that these techniques are associated with outcomes indicative of successful de-escalation. Specifically, the total number of techniques used during an interaction was significantly associated with lower levels of citizen resistance at the conclusion of encounters and a lower likelihood that deputies would utilize physical force; however, it is important to recognize that these represent only two potential indicators of success in the context of de-escalation (White et al., 2023). Further, these outcomes used to operationalize successful de-escalation are necessarily simplified relative to the dynamic and multifaceted nature of real-world deputy–citizen interactions. Even in the context of these limitations, the consistent ability of de-escalation techniques to improve the outcomes of these interactions is overwhelmingly supportive of their efficacy. This adds to the growing body of work demonstrating empirical support for law enforcement de-escalation and de-escalation training (Engel et al., 2022; White et al., 2023, 2025; McLean et al., 2026).

Although the results demonstrate robust support for the overall use of de-escalation, consideration of the relative effectiveness of specific techniques produced more nuanced findings. Several individual techniques emerged as salient; however, these effects were not consistent across all outcomes examined. When assessing the effectiveness of techniques for reducing citizen resistance levels, only offering assistance demonstrated a robust association across all models. Other techniques, such as exhibiting empathy and providing explanations, also appeared to significantly reduce citizen resistance, though these effects were conditional

on the specific outcome measure used. Similarly, when examining the ability of individual techniques to help deputies avoid the physical use of force, only providing voice and separating individuals from agitation consistently demonstrated significant effects. Officer profanity also appeared to undermine efforts to avoid use of force and may be an unnecessary agitator during deputy-citizen interactions.

These findings underscore the importance of nuance when evaluating the effectiveness of different de-escalation strategies. Certain techniques may be more effective for achieving outcomes, and their effectiveness may also depend on the situational context in which they are applied. Consequently, rather than if all de-escalation techniques operate uniformly, it is important to recognize that their utility may vary depending on the circumstances confronting deputies in the field. While these findings can highlight several techniques that show promise, they should not be used to discount or deprioritize any techniques that did not emerge as significant due to limitations in the study’s methodological design.

“…the findings encourage law enforcement agencies and public policymakers to facilitate de-escalation training opportunities throughout all stages of the police professionalization process.”

Implications for Police Training, Policy, and Supervision

The findings from this study affirm the efficacy of de-escalation techniques in reducing the level of citizen resistance and avoiding the use of force during police–citizen encounters. These results provide further support for integrating de-escalation principles into law enforcement training and professional development. Specifically, the findings encourage law enforcement agencies and public policymakers to facilitate de-escalation training opportunities throughout all stages of the police professionalization process. This includes incorporation within cadet academy curricula, reinforcement during field training programs, and continued emphasis through in-service training.

In addition to initial instruction, agencies should also prioritize periodic refresher training to ensure that officers maintain proficiency in these techniques over time. Although research has not yet examined the long-term or sustained impact of de-escalation training specifically, a substantial body of literature has documented skill decay for comparable policing techniques and tactical skills (Bennell et al., 2021; Woodman et al., 2021 Bennell et al., 2022;). This suggests that without ongoing reinforcement, officers may experience declines in their ability or willingness to apply de-escalation strategies effectively. As such, refresher training may be essential to maintaining the competency and confidence required to employ these techniques during real-world encounters.

"...strategies such as offering assistance, exhibiting empathy, providing explanations, allowing citizens an opportunity to voice their concerns, and separating individuals from sources of agitation may be particularly effective in facilitating successful de-escalation. "

At the same time, additional research is needed to inform the optimal structure and delivery of de-escalation training. Key questions remain regarding the most effective components of the curriculum, the appropriate duration and frequency of training sessions, and the most effective instructional modalities. Because this area remains underdeveloped, future research should continue to examine which elements of de-escalation training produce the greatest improvements in deputy behavior and interaction outcomes. Numerous techniques could potentially be incorporated into these trainings (van Lith et al., 2025). The current study suggests that strategies such as offering assistance, exhibiting empathy, providing explanations, allowing citizens an opportunity to voice their concerns, and separating individuals from sources of agitation may be particularly effective in facilitating successful de-escalation.

Caution is warranted in interpreting these findings as evidence that other techniques lack value. The effectiveness of a given strategy may vary depending on the characteristics of the citizen, the situational context, or broader environmental factors present during the encounter. Officer decision-making regarding whether and how to employ de-escalation techniques is likely shaped by these contextual dynamics (James & James, 2024; van Lith et al., 2026). Consequently, future research should seek to identify situations in which officers are less likely to employ de-escalation strategies and examine how training programs can better prepare officers to apply these techniques under those conditions.

In addition to identifying effective techniques, prior research has identified several best practices to maximize the effectiveness of de-escalation training programs. Ideally, training should provide officers with repeated exposure to high-stress scenarios that closely emulate real-world encounters, allowing them to practice applying de-escalation techniques under realistic conditions (Bennell et al., 2021; Orosco et al., 2025). Agencies must also ensure that trainers are appropriately selected and qualified to deliver this instruction, as the credibility and expertise of instructors can influence both deputy engagement and learning outcomes. Furthermore, the modality of instruction is consequential. Training that incorporates adult-learning principles has been shown to improve both skill retention and officer buy-in (Chappell, 2008; Werth, 2009, 2011; Oliva & Compton, 2010; Vander Kooi & Bierlein Palmer, 2014; Donohue & Kruis, 2021). BWC footage can serve as a valuable component of de-escalation training by providing real-world examples of officer–citizen interactions, enabling officers to analyze both effective and ineffective responses to resistance (Orosco et al., 2025).

Beyond training initiatives, these findings also identify several avenues for more directly incorporating de-escalation into police policy. One potential approach is to integrate de-escalation more explicitly into use-of-force continuums. Doing so may reinforce the idea that de-escalation techniques should be considered a standard component of deputy responses to subject resistance rather than an optional strategy available at a deputy's discretion. The findings also raise concerns about the use of profanity during high-resistance encounters. In these interactions, profanity appeared to increase the likelihood that deputies would resort to force, even though it did not consistently influence the level of citizen resistance at the conclusion of encounters. As a result, agencies may consider providing clearer guidance or regulation regarding profanity in deputy communication, particularly given its potential implications for use-of-force outcomes (Adams, 2025).

Supervision also plays a critical role in supporting effective de-escalation practices. Frontline supervisors are particularly important in shaping deputy behavior and reinforcing departmental expectations related to de-escalation training and application (Engel et al., 2022). Supervisors may be especially influential in encouraging deputy buy-in to de-escalation principles and reinforcing the value of specific techniques through consistent guidance, feedback, and accountability. By emphasizing these expectations during routine supervision, review processes, and training reinforcement, supervisors can help ensure that de-escalation principles are consistently applied in the field.

More broadly, promoting de-escalation may require a shift in the traditional orientation of police agencies and officers. Historically, police culture and training have emphasized moving quickly, acting decisively, and establishing control over situations. In contrast, de-escalation strategies often prioritize slowing encounters down, creating time and space, and resolving situations through communication rather than immediate control. Encouraging deputy buy-in for this revised orientation requires clear departmental support for deputies who, when necessary, spend additional time on scenes to attempt de-escalation. Prior research suggests that deputies who receive de-escalation training frequently spend more time on scene (White et al., 2025), highlighting the importance of organizational support for these approaches. This may be especially challenging for agencies facing high call volumes, staffing shortages, and ongoing hiring and retention difficulties (Bennell et al., 2021; Wilson & Miles-Johnson, 2024).

In addition to policy changes and supervisory encouragement, formal departmental recognition for successful de-escalation may further reinforce these practices. For example, agencies may implement peer nomination processes to identify deputies who demonstrate exceptional proficiency in de-escalation techniques and formally recognize these individuals (Todak & White, 2019). Such recognition can help reinforce the value of de-escalation within the organizational culture and encourage broader adoption of these strategies among officers.

Key Limitations

These findings should be interpreted in the context of several important limitations. First, the research design limits the ability to make strong causal claims about the relationship between deputy behavior and citizen outcomes (Lum & Koper, 2024). Deputies may employ de-escalation techniques in response to citizen behavior rather than causing behavioral change themselves, and citizens who are already becoming compliant may prompt officers to use certain techniques. Because police–citizen encounters involve dynamic and reciprocal interactions, isolating clear cause-and-effect relationships is inherently challenging. Relatedly, this methodology consolidated deputy behaviors to the incident level, which may obscure important variation within encounters. Many incidents involve a team-based response in which multiple deputies contribute to managing the situation, making it difficult to distinguish the actions of a lead deputy from those of supporting deputies. This aggregation may also mask inconsistencies in how techniques are applied during the interaction.

Second, the systematic social observation protocol tracked multiple de-escalation techniques; however, it did not account for the fidelity or proficiency of technique application. This could be especially problematic, as the efficacy of de-escalation, generally or with specific techniques, is likely dependent on the quality of their delivery. For example, nonverbal communication plays a central role in police–citizen interactions. Much of human communication occurs through nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, all of which may meaningfully influence the trajectory of an encounter (Mehrabian, 2017). While body-worn camera footage provides some insight into these elements, the coding process offers only limited capacity to capture such subtle and complex forms of communication. Additionally, the study focused on a subset of de-escalation techniques. Numerous other strategies exist that were either not included in the LCSO training curriculum or are difficult, if not impossible, to reliably observe and code from body-worn camera footage (van Lith et al., 2025).

Finally, as with any study conducted in a single agency, the generalizability of the study findings should be cautioned. The analysis relied on data from a single law enforcement agency during a specific time period, and patterns of deputy behavior, citizen resistance, and training implementation may vary across agencies and jurisdictions. Replication of this study in additional agencies and communities is warranted to affirm these findings.

These limitations highlight several important directions for future research. Chief among these, it is essential to understand the relative effectiveness of de-escalation techniques across different circumstances of interactions, as their success may be highly context dependent. Citizen and deputy characteristics, call type, and the stage of the interaction may all attenuate the efficacy of de-escalation. Future research should also seek to better understand de-escalation and citizen resistance at a more granular, micro-level. The present study assessed interactions as a whole, but both this study and prior research indicate that citizen resistance can fluctuate throughout an encounter. Examining how deputy actions and citizen responses evolve moment by moment may provide deeper insight into the dynamics of successful de-escalation.

CONCLUSION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As you reach the conclusion of this report, please take a moment to reflect on what this work represents and where we go from here.

The Dissecting De-escalation Project was never intended to be a simple internal review or a one-time research effort. From the beginning, the goal was to better understand how actual encounters unfold and to explore whether de-escalation, a concept often discussed in policing, could be measured, studied, and improved through careful analysis.

The work presented in these pages reflects several years of effort by members of the Leon County Sheriff's Office working alongside our academic partners at the Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Together, they developed new methods to track encounters, analyze patterns, and examine the behavioral dynamics that shape interactions between deputies and the citizens they serve. This collaboration allowed us to move beyond assumptions and begin building a clearer picture of how deputies manage volatile situations in the real world.

From my perspective, de-escalation is not a single technique or a simple decision point. It is a complex process shaped by communication, judgment, training, and the unpredictable nature of human interactions. Understanding that process requires more than policy or training alone. It requires ongoing research, open dialogue, and a willingness to examine our work with honesty and humility. While this report marks the conclusion of this phase of the project, it should not be seen as the end of the conversation. In many ways, it is the beginning. The findings presented here create opportunities for continued research, improved training, and deeper collaboration between law enforcement agencies, academic institutions, and the communities we serve.

For that reason, I extend a call to action. To researchers and scholars: I encourage you to continue exploring this field and build upon the work presented here. To law enforcement professionals: I encourage you to engage with these findings, share your experiences, and remain open to innovation. To community leaders and citizens: I encourage you to stay involved in the ongoing effort to strengthen trust and improve how public safety is delivered.

At the Leon County Sheriff's Office, we often use the phrase "ALLin" to describe our commitment to our collaborative mission and to the people we serve. Advancing the understanding and practice of de-escalation requires that same commitment from all of us. Researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and community members each have a role to play in improving the future of policing. We are proud to share this work with you, and we hope it contributes to a broader effort to study, understand, and continually improve the way law enforcement serves our communities.

Sheriff Walt McNeil
Leon County Sheriff's Office

Future Research

The Dissecting De-escalation Project represents one of the first efforts to systematically measure de-escalation across both large-scale encounter data and detailed behavioral observation. While the analyses presented in this report provide important insights into how deputies manage volatile encounters, the project was also designed to establish a foundation for continued research and program development. The infrastructure created through this effort—including the encounter-level tracking system, the behavioral coding framework, and the collaborative partnership with academic researchers—creates several pathways for future work.

Replication

One of the most important opportunities for future research is the replication of this methodology in other jurisdictions. The encounter tracking model and behavioral coding framework developed during this project provide a structured approach for measuring de-escalation that could be implemented by other law enforcement agencies.

Replication across agencies would allow researchers to examine whether the patterns observed in Leon County are consistent across different operational environments. Agencies vary significantly in terms of call volume, community demographics, staffing models, and training practices. Implementing similar data collection and behavioral analysis frameworks in other jurisdictions would allow researchers to evaluate whether certain de-escalation behaviors consistently influence encounter outcomes across diverse policing contexts.

Multi-agency replication could also contribute to the development of standardized approaches for measuring de-escalation at a national level. Currently, most agencies rely on policy language, training records, or use-of-force reporting to demonstrate de-escalation practices. Expanding the methodology developed in this project would allow future researchers to compare encounter dynamics across agencies using consistent behavioral indicators.

Longitudinal Analysis

Another important area for future research involves longitudinal analysis of encounter patterns over time. The research structure developed through this project allows agencies to continue collecting encounter data using the same tracking mechanisms and coding framework.

Longitudinal research could examine how encounter dynamics evolve as agencies implement new training programs, adjust operational policies, or introduce new supervisory practices. Over time, this type of analysis could help identify whether certain behaviors become more common, whether encounter outcomes shift, or whether particular strategies become more effective in stabilizing volatile interactions.

Because the current project provides a baseline measurement of encounter characteristics and behavioral patterns, future longitudinal studies could evaluate whether organizational learning and training initiatives produce measurable changes in real-world interactions.

Integration with Community and Legitimacy Research

The behavioral framework developed during this project also creates opportunities for research examining the relationship between deputy behavior and community perceptions of legitimacy. While the current study focuses on the operational dynamics of encounters, future research could explore how specific behaviors documented through body-worn camera analysis influence citizen perceptions of fairness, professionalism, and procedural justice. Researchers could examine whether encounters involving particular communication strategies or stabilization behaviors are associated with lower complaint rates, reduced civil claims, or improved citizen satisfaction. Integrating behavioral observation with community feedback would allow future studies to connect operational practices with broader public trust outcomes.

Application in a Detention Environment

One of the long-term objectives identified during the project's early planning stages is the potential expansion of de-escalation tracking into the detention facility environment. Interactions between detention deputies and incarcerated individuals frequently involve situations that require stabilization, conflict management, and behavioral control. For this reason, the conceptual framework underlying the Dissecting De-escalation Project may have important applications within correctional settings.

Expanding the methodology into a detention environment presents several unique challenges. Unlike patrol encounters, interactions inside correctional facilities occur within a semi-controlled environment wherein deputies maintain continuous authority over individuals who are already in custody. The dynamics of these interactions differ significantly from those observed during citizen contacts in the community.

Additionally, body-worn cameras are not typically used in detention facilities in the same manner as they are in patrol operations. Without widespread body-worn camera footage, researchers may need to rely on alternative video sources such as fixed surveillance cameras. These systems often provide limited audio and restricted camera angles, which can make it more difficult to capture the verbal exchanges and subtle behavioral cues that are central to the Phase 3 coding framework. Another challenge involves the structure of detention interactions themselves. Encounters within correctional facilities often involve group settings, repeated interactions between the same deputies and inmates, and institutional routines that differ from the event-based nature of patrol encounters. These factors may require modifications to the behavioral coding framework in order to accurately capture the dynamics of correctional interactions.

Despite these challenges, expanding the project into the detention environment offers important opportunities for future research. Correctional settings frequently involve situations requiring verbal stabilization, conflict resolution, and behavioral management. Applying a structured observational framework to these interactions could provide valuable insight into how detention deputies manage volatile situations and how de-escalation practices function within a custodial environment.

Continuing the Collaborative Research Model

A key lesson of the Dissecting De-escalation Project is the value of sustained collaboration between law enforcement practitioners and academic researchers. Projects of this scale require both operational access and methodological rigor. Law enforcement agencies possess the practical knowledge of encounter dynamics and access to operational data, while academic institutions provide expertise in research design, statistical analysis, and methodological oversight. When these capabilities are combined, they create opportunities for research that is both scientifically sound and grounded in real-world policing practice.

Throughout this project, researchers from the Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice provided ongoing advisement, methodological support, and independent oversight of several project elements. Their involvement helped ensure that the coding framework, reliability assessments, and analytical approaches aligned with accepted research standards while remaining operationally relevant.

At the conclusion of the project, the finalized behavioral dataset was provided to Florida State University for advanced statistical analysis and continued academic study. Our collaboration is testimony to how partnerships between agencies and research institutions can expand the impact of operational projects and contribute to a deeper understanding of the criminal justice field.

Training Fidelity

Future work should directly evaluate the impact of LCSO's de-escalation training on deputy behavior, citizen behavior, and other relevant outcomes. In doing so, it will be important to consider the role of deputy buy-in, as the effectiveness of de-escalation training depends heavily on whether officers accept and consistently apply the techniques in practice. Training initiatives are unlikely to produce meaningful changes in behavior without strong implementation fidelity and sustained organizational follow-through.

Acknowledgements

The completion of the Dissecting De-escalation Project reflects the efforts of many individuals and organizations whose support, expertise, and commitment made this work possible.

First and foremost, we extend our sincere appreciation to Sheriff Walt McNeil and the leadership of the Leon County Sheriff's Office for their vision and continued support of this initiative. Their commitment to transparency, innovation, and evidence-based policing created an environment in which a project of this scope could be undertaken. Their willingness to examine operational practices through a research lens demonstrates a strong commitment to continuous improvement in service to the citizens we serve. A special thanks is offered to Undersheriff Ron Cave, Undersheriff Argatha Gilmore, Inspector General Gregory Gibson, and Executive Director Sara Bourdeau.

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We are also deeply grateful to our academic partners at the Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Faculty researchers provided ongoing guidance, methodological advisement, and independent oversight throughout the development of the project. Their partnership helped ensure that the research design, coding framework, and analytical processes met rigorous academic standards while remaining grounded in operational realities. Special thanks to Dr. Keller Sheppard, who provided material support and significant contributions to the project's success.

The success of this project was made possible by several key contributors whose work laid the foundation for both its design and execution.

Rachel Strickland, Senior Data Analyst, played a critical role in the early stages of the project, particularly in shaping the methodological design and establishing quality review processes that ensured the integrity of the data. Her work set the standard for how the project would be conducted and was instrumental in its overall success.

Thomas Perkins, who served as a Law Enforcement Administrative Coder, brought a depth of law enforcement knowledge and a high level of dedication to the project. His contributions to quality coding and his consistent training and mentorship of the coding team helped maintain reliability and consistency throughout phase three of the project.

The project also relied on the dedicated efforts of a coding workforce of graduate students, undergraduate research assistants, and project staff who carried out the detailed behavioral coding that formed the foundation of the Phase 3 analysis. A special thank you to Sydney Frankel, Hayden Kelley, Evelynn Kite, Jessica Rose, Miguel Hernandez, Sarah Shamoun, and Nicole Cook. Their careful review of body worn camera footage and commitment to methodological precision made it possible to construct the detailed behavioral dataset that supports the findings presented in this report.

Several units within the Leon County Sheriff's Office provided critical operational support throughout the project. We extend our thanks to the Information Technology Buerau, Training Bureau, and the Research, Analysis, Planning, and Innovation Division (RAPID) for their assistance in developing the data infrastructure necessary to support this work. Their expertise in systems management, data extraction, and operational coordination ensured that the project could be implemented effectively within the agency's existing technological environment.

We would also like to recognize the members of the Policy and Training Committee, whose insights and feedback helped shape several elements of the project and ensured that the research remained aligned with the agency's operational practices and training objectives. A special thanks to Captain Larry Bourdeau for chairing the committee, and to Captain Jason Glover, Lieutenant Justin Woodall, Sergeant Mac Dills, Sergeant Brad Reilly, and Deputy Lee Harwood.

Finally, and most importantly, we acknowledge the deputies of the Leon County Sheriff's Office whose daily work formed the foundation of this research. Their willingness to embrace the project, participate in new data collection efforts, and allow their encounters to be studied reflects a genuine commitment to professionalism and continuous improvement. The findings presented in this report are a reflection of their work in the field and their dedication to serving the community with integrity.

To all who contributed their time, expertise, and support, we offer our sincere thanks. This project represents a collective effort to better understand the dynamics of law enforcement encounters and to continue improving the practice of policing.

CONTACT US

We welcome you to contact the Leon County Sheriff's Office and our research partners if you have questions, would like more information, or are interested in learning more about our services and programs.

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•K-9 Unit •Judicial Services •Detention
•H.O.S.T. (Homeless Outreach Street Team) •M.H.U. (Mental Health Unit)

SCAN ME!

APPENDICES

Appendix A: References

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Appendix B: Phase 3 Primary Codebook

INTERACTION INITIAL CODES SECTION		
VARIABLE	**DESCRIPTION**	**VALUES**
UID	INTERACTION UID	UID Number
PRIC	Coder Name	Last name
DEST	Officer De-escalation Trained	YES NO
LEP	Law Enforcement already present	YES NO
INTS	Confirm time of start OR time the continuation starts	HH:MM
VSL	Video begins in the middle of the interaction, during agitation or de-escalation efforts.	YES NO
LOCD	Encounter begins inside, or outside.	Inside Outside Partial (open garage, porch, etc.)
LOCT	Location Type	List
CPLX	Complexity	1: easy coding decisions with little to no ambiguity or other challenges 2: up to 2 difficult coding decisions where the appropriate code was difficult to determine 3: 3 or more difficult coding decision where the appropriate code was difficult to determine
FLAG	Flag	Supervisor Review Required
EXCL	Recommend Exclude	Include detailed note
NOTE	Note	Notes

INTERACTION PRIMARY CODING SECTION		
CODE	**VARIABLE**	**INSTRUCTIONS/EXAMPLE**
DEPUTY VERBALS		
DV01*	Converses with or interviews subject.	Deputy speaks to a person. Engages in friendly banter, non-investigation
DV03*	Makes a suggestive or advising order or instruction.	ex: “Why don’t you sit down for a moment.”, with the apparent goal
DV04*	Gives a polite, unimposing, clear, direct order or instruction.	ex: “Sit down, please.”
DV05*	Gives a stern, clear, direct order or instruction.	ex: “Sit down, now!”
DV06*	Informs subject they are detained, or otherwise not free to leave.	The member verbally indicates in any way that they are not free to leave.
DV07*	Informs subject they are under arrest or protective custody.	Must use words "under arrest", "protective custody" or otherwise
DV08*	Gives subject other bad news.	Any news that the subject apparently does not like (not including arrest or
DV09*	Provides the Miranda Warning.	ex: "You have the right to remain silent…"
DV10*	Redirects or refocuses conversation to matter at hand.	Pivots from a non-related topic or refocuses from a "back-and-forth",
DV11*	Argues.	Actively engages in a ***non-productive*** "back and forth" with subject.
DV12*	Uses foul language.	Use of the following words where the subject can hear them: Fuck, shit,
DV13	Warning of immediate repercussions (Arrest, RTR, etc.).	ex: “If you resist, I will [blank]…” or "If you don't comply, I'll have to make you
DV14	Warning of long-term repercussions.	ex: “Your mother will be unhappy…” "You may lose your job if you…"
DV15	Re-direction/Conversational Distraction	ex: “Did you watch the game yesterday?” Used to distract from
DV16	Tactical Stalling	Stalling or waiting until additional units arrive on scene. Used to prevent
DV17	Exhibiting Empathy (Relating/Understanding/Caring)	ex: "I'm a dad too, I know how this goes." or "I get it, you're frustrated,
DV18	Explanation	Explaining the situation, reasons, the "why", and the outcomes. Use of
DV19	Cognitive Intermission	Intentional break in the conversation to allow subject to calm.
DV20	Providing Voice	Giving the subject the opportunity to "vent", serving no official investigative
DV21	Offers Assistance/Help	Offers to assist the subject in any way. Ex: "Can I help you?" or "I'll help you
DV22	Promotes Teamwork	Use of teamwork language, such as "us" "we" "together", etc, in order to
DV23	Avoiding "no"	Any statement or language that avoids use of the word "no", such as "that's
DV24	Verbal Mirroring/Paraphrasing	Changing word use or language style to match that of the individual.
DV25	Communications Agreement	Enters into, or attempts to enter into an agreement with a citizen about how
DV26	Motivational Interviewing	Encouraging subject to strategize their own solution. "What do you think
DEPUTY (RE)ACTIONS		
DA01	Follows, or chases subject.	
DA05	Provides medical aid.	Includes checking for life signs.
DA06	Requests supervisor.	Any action (radio transmission, phone call, or word of mouth) that
DA07	Breathing Exercise	Performs, or attempts to perform a breathing exercise (deep breaths, box
DA08*	Does not respond or dismisses the subject’s question.	Does not respond, ignores, or responds in a vague, dismissive manner, or

DA09	Show of force (TASER shown).	
DA10	Show of force (Firearm shown).	
DA11	Creates physical space between themselves and the subject.	Creates tactical space, but maintains visual and verbal contact with subject.
DA12	Separation from Agitation	Separating the subject from the source of agitation, such as another
RESPONSE TO RESISTANCE (USE OF FORCE)		
RR01	Hands On	Grabbing, strong-arming, attempting to physically control subject.
RR02	Takedown	Falling, escorting, forcing subject to the ground.
RR03	TASER Deployed (Effective)	Threat posed by the subject is eliminated.
RR04	TASER Deployed (Ineffective)	Subject continues to resist after discharge of TASER.
RR05	TASER Re-Energized	Re-energizing already deployed probes, not an additional deployment.
RR06	Chemical Agent Deployed (OC, Pepper Ball)	
RR07	Strikes or Kicks	
RR08	Push or Shove	
RR09	Firearm discharged (effective)	Threat posed by the subject is eliminated.
RR10	Firearm discharged (ineffective/miss)	Subject continues to resist after discharge of firearm.
RR11	Weapon of opportunity	Deputy uses an object as a weapon.
RR12	Other reportable response to resistance.	*(Supervisor Approval Required.)*
RR13	Subject forced into handcuffs/restraints.	Includes hobble, hospital restraints, shackles, etc.
SUBJECT VERBALS		
SV01*	Changes tone, language, or demeanor.	Use only if other verbal codes are not appropriate.
SV02	Asks if they can leave, or if they're free to leave.	
SV04	Makes a verbal threat to do harm to a deputy or others.	
SV05	Makes a verbal threat to harm themselves.	
SV06	Speaks non-sense.	Language that is rambling, irrelevant, or other nonsense - possibly as result of
SV07	Expresses verbal willingness to comply,	Either conditionally or on a delayed

SV08	Expresses verbal refusal to comply with orders.	Says no, or otherwise indicates verbally that they will not comply with orders.
SV09	Subject asks for a supervisor.	
SV10	Cooperates with investigation, answers questions, responds, or makes statement.	
SV11	Verbally refuses to cooperate with investigation.	Refuses to make/write statement, answer questions, etc.
SV12	Argues.	Actively engages in a ***non-productive*** "back and forth" with officer.
SUBJECT (RE)ACTIONS		
SA01	Complies with instruction, order, or direction.	
SA02	Does not comply with instruction, order, or direction.	
SA03	Actively Resists (Braces, tenses, pulls away, clenches fists)	
SA04	Prepares to fight (takes off clothing, takes fighting posture).	
SA05	Awake, but unresponsive or ignoring deputy (mute, non-verbal).	
SA06	Flees from pursuing deputy.	Deputy should be actively chasing, ordering subject to stop, or otherwise
SA07	Walks/runs away from non-pursuing deputy.	Deputy makes no effort to stop the subject, or order the subject to stop.
SA08	Approaches deputy.	
SA10	Becomes (or is) armed.	Subject acquires a weapon, or has a weapon upon being contacted.
SA11	Becomes (or is) disarmed.	Armed subject becomes unarmed - does not include subjects who were
SITUATIONAL FACTORS		
SF01	Interaction moves indoors.	
SF02	Interaction moves outdoors.	
SF03	Interaction interrupted.	Add interruption to notes.
SF04	Subject and deputy separate.	No longer in verbal/visual range of each other.
SF05	Subject and deputy rejoin.	Coming back together after a separation. Immediately code
SF06	Additional deputies arrive.	
SF07	Subject is moved from one area of the incident to another area.	
SF08	Subject is placed in a patrol vehicle.	End of incident.

SF09	Subject is transported from incident location.	End of incident.
SF10	Subject is treated by medical staff/EMS.	
SF11	Other deputy speaks to subject.	Another deputy joins the conversation (they should be coded separately).
SF12	Video obstructed.	But audio still works. Make a note explaining how/why the video is
SF13	Video becomes unobstructed.	
SF14	Transition to a third party intermediary.	Another non-law enforcement officer begins conversing with the subject.
SF15	Incoherent Audio	Something is said in the video (other than irrelevant conversation), but it is
SF16	External Agitant	Causation Code for when a subject increases agitation or resistance
SF17	Subject Handcuffed	Subject placed into handcuffs with no force.
CLOSURE		
CL01	End of Interaction: Subject became calm and cooperative.	
CL02	End of Interaction: Subject became cooperative, but not calm.	
CL03	End of Interaction: Subject remained uncooperative, but no RTR was required.	
CL04	End of Interaction: Subject remained uncooperative, and an RTR was employed.	
CL05	End of Interaction: Interaction continued with other deputies or officers.	Including turning over to another agency (TPD, FHP, etc.).
CL06	End of Interaction: Video interrupted.	Camera turns off or falls off, or otherwise is no longer viewable.

CODE RIDER SECTION		
CODE	**VARIABLE**	**VARIABLE SPECIFIC**
F	Friendly Demeanor/Language	Friendly, familiar, personable.
C	Calm Demeanor/Language	Professional/polite.
A	Agitated Demeanor/Language	Aggravated, argumentative,
I	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language	Screaming, animated, loudly cursing, threatening.
E	Emotional	Crying, distraught, etc.
U*	Unprofessional Demeanor/Language (Deputy	Sarcastic, insulting, overtly and negatively unprofessional.
S*	Stern	Professional, but clear and sturn. Unfriendly.
N	Non-Applicable	Non-verbal or no applicable demeanor.

*Use for deputy only.

Appendix C: Average Counts of De-escalation Techniques Employed

Average counts of total and specific de-escalation techniques employed, disaggregated by successful and unsuccessful de-escalation as indicated by deputy use of force during interactions with maximum citizen resistance of 4 and 5, *N*=649

	Successful No Force Used (*N*=390)	Unsuccessful Force Used (*N*=259)
Variable	**Mean (SD)**	**Mean (SD)**
Total Techniques[a]	7.14 (7.37)	5.95 (6.51)
Verbal		
Warning of immediate repercussions[a]	.70 (1.57)	1.05 (1.59)
Warning of long-term repercussions	.13 (.43)	.09 (.36)
Redirection or conversational distraction	.28 (.75)	.27 (.71)
Tactical stalling	.24 (.83)	.37 (.98)
Exhibiting empathy[a]	.81 (1.42)	.58 (1.48)
Providing explanations	2.44 (3.43)	1.94 (2.81)
Cognitive intermission	.26 (.77)	.34 (.88)
Providing voice[a]	.98 (2.14)	.51 (1.44)
Offering assistance or help	.45 (.98)	.31 (.79)
Promoting teamwork	.05 (.23)	.06 (.37)
Avoiding the word “no”	.06 (.31)	.05 (.22)
Verbal mirroring or paraphrasing	.13 (.55)	.10 (.45)
Communications agreement[a]	.17 (.62)	.09 (.37)
Motivational interviewing	.04 (.22)	.02 (.21)
Physical		
Creating physical space[a]	.09 (.43)	.03 (.22)
Separating individuals from agitation[a]	.31 (.78)	.15 (.52)
Potentially Aggravating Deputy Behaviors		
Cursing[a]	.25 (.90)	.53 (1.96)
Arguing	.37 (.95)	.34 (1.03)

[a] Statistically significant differences ($p<.05$) between average counts between successfully and unsuccessfully de-escalated interactions

Appendix D: Subject Levels of Resistance

Citizen verbal and reaction codes by level of resistance	
Primary Codes	**Rider Code (If Applicable)**
Level 1: Limited Resistance	
Changes tone, language, or demeanor.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Asks if they can leave, or if they're free to leave.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Speaks non-sense.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Subject asks for a supervisor.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Cooperates with investigation, answers questions, responds, or makes statement.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Changes tone, language, or demeanor.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Asks if they can leave, or if they're free to leave.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Speaks non-sense.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Subject asks for a supervisor.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Cooperates with investigation, answers questions, responds, or makes statement.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Verbally refuses to cooperate with investigation.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Complies with instruction, order, or direction.	
Level 2: Moderate Resistance	
Changes tone, language, or demeanor.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Asks if they can leave, or if they're free to leave.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Speaks non-sense.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Subject asks for a supervisor.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Cooperates with investigation, answers questions, responds, or makes statement.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Expresses verbal willingness to comply, but does not.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Verbally refuses to cooperate with investigation.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Argues.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Changes tone, language, or demeanor.	Emotional
Asks if they can leave, or if they're free to leave.	Emotional
Speaks non-sense.	Emotional
Subject asks for a supervisor.	Emotional
Cooperates with investigation, answers questions, responds, or makes statement.	Emotional
Expresses verbal willingness to comply, but does not.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Argues.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Awake, but unresponsive or ignoring deputy (mute, non-verbal).	
Walks/runs away from non-pursuing deputy.	
Level 3: Significant Resistance	
Expresses verbal willingness to comply, but does not.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Verbally refuses to cooperate with investigation.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Argues.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Makes a verbal threat to do harm to a deputy or others.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Makes a verbal threat to harm themselves.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Expresses verbal refusal to comply with orders.	Calm Demeanor/Language
Makes a verbal threat to do harm to a deputy or others.	Emotional
Makes a verbal threat to harm themselves.	Emotional
Expresses verbal willingness to comply, but does not.	Emotional
Expresses verbal refusal to comply with orders.	Emotional
Verbally refuses to cooperate with investigation.	Emotional
Argues.	Emotional
Makes a verbal threat to do harm to a deputy or others.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Makes a verbal threat to harm themselves.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Expresses verbal refusal to comply with orders.	Friendly Demeanor/Language
Changes tone, language, or demeanor.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Asks if they can leave, or if they're free to leave.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Speaks non-sense.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Subject asks for a supervisor.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Cooperates with investigation, answers questions, responds, or makes statement.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Does not comply with instruction, order, or direction.	
Level 4: Response to Resistance Possible	
Makes a verbal threat to do harm to a deputy or others.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Makes a verbal threat to harm themselves.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Expresses verbal refusal to comply with orders.	Agitated Demeanor/Language
Makes a verbal threat to do harm to a deputy or others.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Makes a verbal threat to harm themselves.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Expresses verbal willingness to comply, but does not.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Expresses verbal refusal to comply with orders.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Verbally refuses to cooperate with investigation.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Argues.	Irate/Aggressive Demeanor/Language
Prepares to fight (takes off clothing, takes fighting posture).	
Becomes (or is) armed.	
Level 5: Response to Resistance Likely	
Actively Resists (Braces, tenses, pulls away, clenches fists)	
Flees from pursuing deputy.	
Aggressively Resists (Threatens LEO or Others)	

Appendix E: Logistic Regression Models Predicting Successful De-escalation

Logistic regression models predicting successful de-escalation of an interaction with specific de-escalation techniques and classifying any deputy use of force as an unsuccessful resolution, *N*=1,157

Variable	Model 1 Low Resist End O.R. [95% C.I.]	Model 2 Low Relative Start O.R. [95% C.I.]	Model 3 Low Relative Max O.R. [95% C.I.]
Verbal			
Warning of immediate repercussions	0.97 [0.82-1.15]	0.89 [0.76-1.03]	0.92 [0.81-1.06]
Warning of long-term repercussions	0.88 [0.62-1.27]	0.86 [0.58-1.27]	1.21 [0.8-1.84]
Redirection or conversational distraction	1.21 [0.96-1.53]†	1.17 [0.97-1.41]†	1.2 [0.96-1.5]
Tactical stalling	1.03 [0.85-1.24]	0.97 [0.81-1.15]	0.95 [0.79-1.15]
Exhibiting empathy	1.13 [1.01-1.26]*	1.1 [0.97-1.25]	1.16 [1-1.35]†
Providing explanations	1.11 [1.06-1.16]***	1.06 [1-1.11]*	1.1 [1.03-1.16]**
Cognitive intermission	0.85 [0.7-1.04]	0.95 [0.8-1.14]	0.88 [0.71-1.08]
Providing voice	1.06 [0.95-1.18]	1.04 [0.94-1.16]	1.07 [0.97-1.19]
Offering assistance or help	1.15 [1-1.31]*	1.19 [1.02-1.39]*	1.24 [1.04-1.48]*
Promoting teamwork	1.11 [0.65-1.89]	1.11 [0.54-2.25]	0.82 [0.45-1.49]
Avoiding the word “no”	0.96 [0.55-1.67]	0.87 [0.48-1.59]	1.09 [0.6-1.98]
Verbal mirroring or paraphrasing	0.99 [0.73-1.34]	0.94 [0.7-1.26]	1.08 [0.78-1.5]
Communications agreement	1.13 [0.87-1.49]	1.33 [0.97-1.83]†	1.29 [0.9-1.86]
Motivational interviewing	1.13 [0.66-1.93]	1.27 [0.69-2.34]	0.99 [0.56-1.74]
Physical			
Creating physical space	1.05 [0.68-1.62]	1.15 [0.77-1.7]	1.04 [0.69-1.57]
Separating individuals from agitation	1.11 [0.93-1.33]	1.23 [1.02-1.47]*	1.09 [0.91-1.32]

Abbreviation. O.R.=odds ratio; C.I.= confidence interval
†p<.10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)
Standard errors clustered by census block (*N*=140)
Models include all control measures displayed in Table 7

Logistic regression models predicting successful de-escalation of an interaction with total number of de-escalation techniques and classifying any deputy use of force as an unsuccessful resolution, *N*=1,157

Variables	Model 1 Low Resist End O.R. [95% C.I.]	Model 2 Low Relative Start O.R. [95% C.I.]	Model 3 Low Relative Max O.R. [95% C.I.]
Total De-escalation Techniques	1.08 [1.05-1.11]***	1.05 [1.03-1.08]***	1.08 [1.05-1.11]***
Cursing	1.04 [.96-1.13]	.96 [.89-1.05]	.89 [.81-.98]*
Arguing	.85 [.7-1.02]†	.84 [.72-.97]*	.99 [.84-1.17]
Citizen Mental Health	.6 [.42-.87]**	.53 [.37-.77]***	.54 [.36-.8]**
Citizen Chemical Impairment	.59 [.42-.84]**	.47 [.33-.66]***	.55 [.38-.79]***
Incident Type[a]	0 [0-0]	0 [0-0]	0 [0-0]
Civil Issue	1.74 [.46-6.52]	.95 [.25-3.64]	1.33 [.28-6.37]
Disturbance	2.21 [.73-6.67]	1.34 [.41-4.31]	.94 [.28-3.09]
Mental Health	1.49 [.44-5.07]	.75 [.22-2.58]	.5 [.15-1.7]
Misc. Service Call	1.86 [.52-6.72]	1.17 [.35-3.94]	.67 [.19-2.44]
Missing Person	1.02 [.1-9.96]	.24 [.02-2.84]	.4 [.05-3.17]
Proactive Patrol	2.31 [.64-8.33]	1 [.25-4.04]	.62 [.16-2.4]
Suspicious Incident	1.99 [.42-9.49]	2.07 [.38-11.16]	1.81 [.32-1.24]
Theft or Fraud	2.85 [.79-1.33]	1.81 [.5-6.54]	.88 [.2-3.88]
Traffic Incident	1.44 [.31-6.66]	.7 [.18-2.76]	.43 [.1-1.92]
Traffic Stop	4.18 [1.44-12.07]**	2.06 [.66-6.44]	1.52 [.36-6.43]
Warrant Arrest	2.55 [.72-9.03]	.92 [.25-3.39]	.98 [.27-3.59]
Other	.93 [.28-3.1]	.67 [.18-2.52]	.42 [.11-1.61]
Citizen Race[b]	0 [0-0]	0 [0-0]	0 [0-0]
White	.92 [.7-1.2]	1.03 [.8-1.34]	.96 [.73-1.25]
Hispanic	.77 [.29-2.03]	.78 [.29-2.14]	1.04 [.38-2.79]
Other	1.47 [.26-8.19]	1.16 [.32-4.2]	.42 [.07-2.52]
Male Citizen	1.2 [.9-1.61]	.97 [.72-1.31]	1.02 [.78-1.32]
Citizen Age[c]	0 [0-0]	0 [0-0]	0 [0-0]
Teen (13–17)	.52 [.13-2]	.63 [.21-1.94]	.71 [.23-2.24]
College Age (18–24)	1.05 [.27-4.05]	1.42 [.47-4.26]	1.54 [.52-4.57]
Young Adult (25–30)	.74 [.19-2.93]	1.2 [.37-3.86]	1.05 [.33-3.36]
Adult (31–40)	.92 [.27-3.13]	1.53 [.54-4.34]	1.87 [.69-5.07]
Adult (41–50)	.87 [.23-3.36]	1.49 [.52-4.27]	1.76 [.61-5.11]
Adult (51–60)	.98 [.3-3.17]	1.14 [.43-3.04]	1.52 [.54-4.3]
Senior (61+)	.8 [.21-3.11]	1.59 [.51-4.93]	1.6 [.46-5.62]
Number of Deputies	.73 [.57-.94]*	.7 [.56-.89]**	.64 [.51-.79]***
Deputy Race Black	.94 [.63-1.42]	1.19 [.75-1.9]	1.08 [.75-1.55]
Deputy Race White	1.26 [.79-2.02]	1.47 [.85-2.57]	1.65 [1.04-2.64]*
Deputy Race Hispanic	1.42 [.82-2.44]	1.51 [.86-2.66]	1.62 [.94-2.79]†
Deputy Race Other	.94 [.56-1.56]	1.14 [.7-1.85]	1.11 [.62-1.97]
Deputy Age	1.02 [1-1.03]*	1 [.98-1.02]	1 [.99-1.02]
Female Deputy Present	.85 [.63-1.15]	.8 [.59-1.08]	.92 [.67-1.28]
De-escalation Trained Deputy Present	.67 [.37-1.21]	.94 [.62-1.45]	1.68 [.94-3]†
Constant	.21 [.04-1.28]†	1.06 [.16-7.17]	1.51 [.27-8.55]

Abbreviation. O.R.=odds ratio; C.I.= confidence interval
†p<.10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)
Standard errors clustered by census block (*N*=140)
a Reference = Burglary or Home Invasion
b Reference = Black
c Reference = Child (≤12)

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RESEARCH, ANALYSIS, PLANNING, AND INNOVATION DIVISION