

INTERACTING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

(done the week before “Searches and Seizures”)

TAKEAWAYS

- Students will understand the risks that fear and anger present when people interact with law enforcement.
- Students will gain concrete tools about how to KEEP IT COOL and STAY SAFE when it comes to asserting their rights.

WELCOME

(Time Check: 1 minute)

Remind everyone what StreetLaw is, why you are there (to teach lessons about the law and legal rights), and what your names are. Remind them that in asking questions and making comments they should not refer to their own cases any way, but may ask questions based on hypothetical scenarios. Tell them what you will be covering today: interacting with law enforcement.

ACTIVITY 1: STATES OF MIND

(Time Check: 15-20 minutes)

Summary: We are going to read two anecdotes, one about a young man of color and the other about a police officer. We will then split into groups to discuss the stories.

Story 1: *Anthony is a sophomore in high school now, but when the lights go off at night he feels like he’s back in the fourth grade. When he was ten, the SWAT team busted in during the middle of the night to raid his house. Two masked men pointed their guns at him, told him to lie down on the floor, and proceeded to dig through everything: drawers, closets, even a loose floorboard. Anthony was living with his older brother at the time, a small-time dealer who kept a stash – usually a few rocks – hidden in the toilet tank. At least his brother could pay the bills. But when the police found the drugs, they arrested Anthony’s brother on the spot. He’s still in prison.*

Story 2: *Whenever Dylan eats at a restaurant he always asks for the corner table so he can sit with his back to the wall, looking out. Twenty years on the gang enforcement squad have taught him a few lessons, but one is never get caught with your back turned. He lost his partner in a shootout after a drug bust went bad ten years ago, so that’s one he won’t forget. Since then, his wife has begged him to take a desk job but Dylan refuses. He’s not built to be a pencil pusher. He’s a beat cop, through and through.*

Tell the class: Now pretend that Dylan stops Anthony and a few of his friends because he suspects they’re buying/selling drugs. It’s after dark and he saw some money change hands on a street corner known for a lot of dealing. Dylan puts one hand on his holstered weapon and shines a flashlight with the other. “What’s going on here, fellas?”

Breakout: We’re going to split into two groups now. The first group is going to discuss what Anthony is probably feeling, and why. The second group is going to discuss what Dylan is probably feeling, and why. Then we’ll come back and put your thoughts together as one group.

---Group Discussion---

Back together:

1. Thank the students for the participation in the group discussions
2. Ask for a volunteer from each group to summarize what their group came up with. Do your best to make sure the summaries are detailed and explain not only the WHAT but also the WHY of what Anthony and Dylan are feeling.
3. Ask all of Group 1 and take a couple answers: “What could Dylan do to make Anthony feel less frightened and keep him calm? What are some things he might do that could make it worse?”
 - a. Turn to Group 2 and ask if they have any other ideas
4. Ask all of Group 2 and take a couple answers: “What could Anthony do to make Dylan feel less frightened and keep him calm? What are some things he might do that could make it worse?”
 - a. Turn to Group 1 and ask if they have any other ideas
5. Ask BOTH groups: “Why do you think people in Anthony’s position or police officers do things that ESCALATE the situation rather than KEEP IT COOL? How can we help people make better decisions in tough situations like this?”

Ask the class if anyone knows what escalate means to make sure they understand

Closing: Thank the students for their willingness to put themselves in someone else’s shoes. Remind them that people who are SCARED of each other are really likely to ESCALATE the situation rather than KEEP IT COOL. Same with people who are ANGRY.

Tell them that, whenever you’re talking to somebody it’s important to consider what they might be thinking and feeling and why, especially when it comes to authority figures like law enforcement, teachers, parents or guardians.

Finally, close with a caveat that SOMETIMES POLICE BEHAVIOR IS UNEXPLAINABLE. Our goal today is to help us understand how best to handle the things that are under our control. That way, we can be as SAFE as possible, which is the most important thing.

TRANSITION: Tell the class that now we’re going to put some of what we’ve talked about into action to make sure we all have the tools that it takes to KEEP IT COOL.

ACTIVITY 2: COMMUNICATING WITH THE POLICE (Time Check: 10-15 minutes)

Summary for Teachers: We are going to run two scenarios to show the importance of being respectful when interacting with the police.

Tell the class: You are going to be the police and we are going to be a suspect. An individual matching our description beat someone up. You, as the police, are going to question the suspect.

Run the role-play:

1. Bad Suspect → Have the students question first a “Bad Suspect” (played by a teacher who should generally be rude and uncooperative—but don’t act out too much, because we want the class to focus on the good way to behave with cops and not get distracted).

2. Good Suspect → When that goes as far as it can, have them do it again with “Good Suspect”, who will politely tell officers (a) his or her name and (b) any other information that can be found on a drivers’ license (address, age). **DO NOT GIVE OUT ANY INFORMATION BEYOND THAT.** When pressed further, politely tell the officers that you don’t feel comfortable speaking with them and ask if you’re under arrest. If you are under arrest, ask for a lawyer. If you’re not, continue politely refusing to answer questions.

Tell the students: Good phrases to use include “I know you’re just doing your job, officer, but I really don’t feel comfortable answering any questions...” “I’m sorry, officer, I’d really prefer not to answer any questions right now....” etc. **KEEP COOL AND POLITE.**

If the officer tells you to **DO** something (“hands on the steering wheel,” “drop what’s in your hand,” “get out of the car”) **DO NOT REFUSE.** Refusing to comply with these types of instructions can be dangerous; plus cops almost always have the right to give them.

IF **HOWEVER**, the cop ignores my **POLITE, CALM** requests not to **ANSWER QUESTIONS** besides my name/age/etc or have something **SEARCHED** and gets angry or threatening, I should **NEVER** physically resist or attack a police officer, even if they are being unfair. My safety is most important, not to mention that is a serious crime on its own. If I’m in trouble, I can tell my lawyer what happened later.

3. The Run Away → Finally, have the student approach a teacher runs away as the student-cop approaches. Ask the students about whether it’s a good idea to **RUN AWAY** if I’m scared.

Make it very clear that running away is a really, really bad idea because:

- Running away can contribute reasonable suspicion and/or probable cause
- A cop might think they need to or have a right to use force to prevent my getting away

In short, running away is **ESCALATING** the situation and, short of getting aggressive, one of the most **DANGEROUS** ways to handle an interaction with law enforcement.

NOTE: The next lesson “Searches and Seizures” covers the law so you can tell the class you’ll be getting into specifics on what the cops can and can’t do next week

Discussion: Ask the class how they felt when they were the officers and you were being rude and uncooperative.

- Ask how they would have felt if you had reached into your pocket as if you were reaching for a weapon.
- Ask if they know how officers can respond if someone gets physical, THREATENS to get physical, or pulls a weapon.
→ The officer can always respond with greater force. If I punch the officer, he can hit me with a billy club. If I pull a knife, he can use his gun.
- Ask how they felt when you cooperated.
- Ask the class, “If you’re a police officer, what’s going to make sure you don’t escalate the situation by getting scared or angry? What’s likely to make you scared or angry?”

CONCLUSION **(Time Check: 1-2 minutes)**

Remind them the concept of ***“keeping cool”*** while interacting with the police.

- Keeping your cool, even when a situation heats up.
- Because nothing good happens as a situation heats up.
- The authorities/police are always one step above the other person
 - Figuratively: dealing with authorities/police can be tense and scary.
 - Literally: cops can always respond to an act of force with greater force.