Command & Character: Integrity and Accountability in 21st Century Policing

COMMAND & CHARACTER: INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN 21ST CENTURY POLICING

DR. MICHAEL MCHENRY

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CONTENTS

Introduction 1
Dr. Michael McHenry

Preface 4
Preface
Dr. Michael McHenry

Main Body

Building Trust through Community Policing 9
Dr. Michael McHenry

De-Escalation in Practice 26
Dr. Michael McHenry

Crisis Intervention and Collaborative Response 43
Dr. Michael McHenry

Frontline Leadership 61
Dr. Michael McHenry

Early Intervention Systems 76
Dr. Michael McHenry

Internal Affairs and Accountability 91
Dr. Michael McHenry

Building a Strong Team – Recruitment, Hiring, Promotion and Retention 109
Dr. Michael McHenry

Data-Driven Justice 124
Dr. Michael McHenry

Mental Health Across the Legal System 143
Dr. Michael McHenry

Appendix A - Professional Associations 159
Appendix B - Career Launch Toolkit 162
Appendix C - Justice-Related Programs in the U.S. 171

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Michael McHenry

Introduction

You have probably seen police videos online. Many are short clips with no context. Some show officers doing the right thing. Others show the worst moments. Either way, it is easy for the public to walk away with one message: “That is what policing is.” Real patrol work is different. It is constant decision-making, often under stress, with real people and real consequences. Most of the job is not dramatic. It is showing up, listening, solving small problems before they become big ones, and making choices that you can explain later with honesty and care.

This textbook is built to help you learn what matters most for patrol procedures and justice work: accountability, integrity, and ethical decision-making. The goal is not to train you to “look good on camera.” **The goal of this textbook is to prepare you to do the right thing, even when no one is watching.** That means understanding risk, following lawful procedures, using de-escalation early, and treating people with fairness even when they are upset, rude, intoxicated, or afraid. It also means knowing that “bad apples” do not appear out of nowhere. Systems, culture, training, supervision, and personal choices all play a role. Higher education should prepare you to see the whole picture and to become the kind of professional who raises the standard for everyone.

What This Textbook Will Help You Do

By the end of this book, you should be able to think like a professional in the justice system who can explain their actions. You will learn how to manage risk during everyday calls, traffic stops, and public contacts. You will practice making decisions that fit the law, policy, and community expectations. You will also learn to spot the common pressures that can lead to bad outcomes, such as rushing, assumptions, anger, overconfidence, and “us vs. them” thinking.

You will build skills that protect the public and protect you: communication that lowers tension, documentation that matches what happened, and accountability habits that keep small problems from becoming large ones. You will also learn why diversity and community policing matter in daily work, not as

slogans, but as practical tools. When people believe they will be treated fairly, they are more likely to cooperate, share information, and comply without force. When they do not, every call gets harder.

How to Use This Book

Each chapter follows the same layout so you always know what to expect. You will start with learning outcomes and an important list of terms. That vocabulary matters, because clear language supports clear thinking. As you read, you will see short narrator callouts that help you pause and reflect on common mistakes students make at first. You will also see "Watch Your Step" boxes that show a risk or pitfall and then the safer, better option.

You will also follow a running case study through a podcast-based scenario. You will not be asked to become an armchair critic. Instead, you will practice asking professional questions: What information was known at the time? What options were available? What should have been documented? How do early choices shape later outcomes? This is how higher education helps future professionals move beyond listening to lecture-based classrooms and into disciplined analysis.

At the end of each chapter, you will have access to "Choose Your Own (Patrol) Adventure" activities. These include skill labs you can do with your class, essay questions that push you past memorization, and practical exercises that ask you to produce realistic work products, such as short reports, decision justifications, or communication plans.

A Note About Limits and Professionalism

De-escalation is powerful, but it is not magic. Some situations stay dangerous even when you do everything right. Some people cannot or will not comply. Some calls involve mental illness, trauma, addiction, or extreme emotion. That is why professionalism matters. Professionalism is not being "nice." It is being steady, lawful, and fair under pressure. It is knowing your role, knowing your limits, and using time, distance, cover, teamwork, and communication to reduce risk whenever possible.

Accountability is part of professionalism. It includes self-control, honest reporting, and the willingness to accept correction. It also includes duty-to-act expectations, like stepping in when a colleague is about to make a harmful or illegal choice. Integrity is not just "not lying." It is telling the full truth, avoiding shortcuts, and refusing to "fix" a weak case with strong words. Your credibility is your career. Once it is damaged, the whole system pays the price.

If you remember one idea from this book, let it be this: **always do the right thing when no one is looking**.

When your actions line up with law, policy, and ethics, you can explain what you did without fear, excuses, or blame-shifting. That is how you protect the public, your agency, and your future.

Who This Book Is For

This book is written for undergraduate students preparing for careers across the justice system, including law enforcement, corrections, courts, community supervision, dispatch, victim services, and related roles. It assumes no prior experience. If you can read carefully, follow procedures, and stay open to feedback, you can succeed here. You do not need to have all the answers now. *You need to be willing to slow down, check assumptions, and practice professional decision-making.*

Welcome to the field.

PREFACE

Preface

Dr. Michael McHenry

Overview: Methodology and Approach

Welcome to *Command & Character: Integrity and Accountability in 21st Century Policing*, an open-access textbook built on a simple belief: college students deserve high-quality, current learning materials without a heavy financial burden. This book is designed to be academic, direct, and easy to use, with a strong focus on patrol procedures, accountability, integrity, and ethics within the United States justice system.

You have probably seen policing online through short clips and headlines. Some videos show officers doing the right thing under pressure. Others show mistakes that damage public trust. Those moments matter, but they rarely show the full context, the policy expectations, or the decision-making steps that should guide professional behavior. This textbook focuses on what higher education should emphasize: how to make lawful, ethical, and defensible decisions in real time, how to reduce harm through de-escalation, and how to document actions in a way that can be reviewed with confidence.

This resource is grounded in Washington State laws and Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC) norms while also connecting to national expectations and major professional guidance. It is written to support learning in person, online, or in hybrid courses, and it is designed to be accessible and ADA-compliant.

Textbook Objectives

This textbook takes a practical, student-centered approach to patrol procedures and professional decision-making. Each chapter is aligned to course learning outcomes and emphasizes risk management, the real complexities of policing, the impact of diversity on daily operations, and how community policing guidelines shape law enforcement organizations.

The guidance in this book is informed by best practices and public-facing materials from organizations such as:

- State of Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC)
- Washington State Office of the Attorney General (model policies)
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)
- Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)
- U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the COPS Office
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) public resources and data tools (as applicable)

Watch Your Step

Watch Your Step boxes show a common patrol pitfall and the safer, more professional option. These are placed where students most often get tripped up in real-world decision-making: communication under stress, lawful authority, use-of-force thresholds, duty to intervene, body-worn camera activation, search and seizure basics, and documentation that matches what happened. The goal is not to shame mistakes. The goal is to prevent them by making the “wrong turn” obvious before it happens.

Pro Tip

Pro Tip boxes are quick routines you can use immediately in scenarios, role plays, and class discussions. Each tip is a repeatable habit that supports safety and credibility, such as how to slow a situation down, how to position yourself to reduce risk, how to use clear verbal direction, how to request resources early, how to document key facts, and how to recognize when you need to step in to prevent harm. These tips are grounded in established best practices from major organizations and research-informed guidance.

Slow Down and Think boxes are short reflection prompts that train judgment and integrity. They ask you to pause, check assumptions, consider bias and perception, and think through how your choices affect safety, trust, and legitimacy. These prompts also connect ideas across chapters so you can apply what you learned earlier to new situations instead of treating each topic like a separate unit.

A Note to Our Readers on Accountability, Integrity, and Public Trust

Patrol work operates inside a justice system that is always being watched and evaluated. Community expectations change, laws change, and policies evolve. Public trust rises or falls based on daily choices made during routine contacts, not only during major incidents. This is why higher education matters. It should prepare future professionals to understand the power they hold, to use it carefully, and to explain their actions clearly.

This textbook does not pretend patrol work is simple or risk-free. Instead, it teaches you how to reduce harm, prevent escalation, and protect constitutional rights while still doing the job. Key sections help you think through issues such as:

- De-escalation and decision-making under stress
- How bias, perception, and communication shape outcomes
- Body-worn cameras, documentation, and transparency
- Misconduct prevention, supervision, and accountability systems

You will be asked to think like a professional: not "What can I get away with?" but "What is lawful, ethical, and defensible?" That mindset protects the public, protects agencies, and protects the credibility of the justice system as a whole.

How to Use This Book

Each chapter follows the same layout so you always know what to expect. You will begin with learning

outcomes and a list of key terms to give you a clear roadmap. As you read, you will see "Watch Your Step," "Pro Tip," and "Slow Down and Think" callouts that keep the focus on patrol procedures, accountability, and real-world decision-making.

At the end of each chapter, you will complete "Choose Your Own (Patrol) Adventure" activities. These include a case study analysis, skill labs you can practice in class, and essay questions under "Questions That Make You Think." The goal is to move beyond memorization and into practical application.

Textbook Goals

Many policing and criminal justice textbooks are expensive, difficult to update, or written in a way that does not match how students learn best. This textbook was created to remove common barriers such as high costs, uneven access to materials, and resources that are hard to use on phones or screen readers. As an Open Educational Resource (OER) licensed under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0), this book is free to use, share, adapt, and print.

This text is designed to work alongside an instructor package that can be remixed to fit your local policies, agency expectations, course outcomes, and teaching style. The goal is a complete, flexible teaching toolkit that supports learning in class, online, or in hybrid formats while staying easy to revise as laws and best practices evolve.

For inquiries about this textbook or suggestions for improvement, please contact the project lead, Dr. Michael McHenry, at mmchenry@whatcom.edu.

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BUILDING TRUST THROUGH COMMUNITY POLICING

Dr. Michael McHenry

Chapter 1: Building Trust through Community Policing

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe why community participation and trust are vital for crime control and public safety.
2. Identify the core components of community policing and explain how the SARA model and procedural justice support those components.
3. Explain how organizational transformation, strategic planning, and internal fairness strengthen community policing efforts.
4. Discuss the challenges and risks that law enforcement faces, including historical mistrust, diversity dynamics, and officer wellness.
5. Apply community policing principles to real-world scenarios and propose strategies for building partnerships and accountability.

Chapter Overview

Policing today depends on law enforcement and communities working together. Community policing is not just a set of programs; it is a way of thinking that values teamwork, openness, and respect. In this chapter, you will learn about the main ideas behind community policing, how agencies can change their practices to support

it, and why trust and legitimacy matter for public safety. You will also see how problem-solving, fair procedures, and planning can help officers and communities tackle the real causes of crime and disorder. Later chapters will look at specific tactics, legal rules, ways to ensure accountability, and how to handle high-risk situations.

1.1 Why Community Policing Matters

Community policing works best when law enforcement and the communities they serve build trust and work together as a core part of public safety. Modern policing holds that controlling crime and disorder needs the involvement of local residents and workers. Communities provide valuable information about crimes and social issues. Their informal networks help keep neighborhoods safe (COPS Office, 2020). However, building these partnerships often means overcoming years of separation, exclusion, and mistrust (COPS Office, 2020).

To build stronger relationships, focus on the principles of procedural justice: giving people a voice, acting with fairness, showing respect, and being trustworthy. When community members can share their views on public safety, see officers act fairly, and experience respectful, honest behavior, their trust in law enforcement grows. Accusations of racial bias and excessive force have damaged trust, and police leaders now face pressure to address not just crime, but also social issues like homelessness, mental health, and public health problems (COPS Office, 2020). One example of successful community policing is the Seattle Police Department's Micro-Community Policing Plans (MCPPs), in which officers and residents work together to identify local concerns and create safety plans tailored to each neighborhood. Programs like the MCPPs give people a voice, show fairness in setting priorities, and build respect and trust through ongoing conversations. These efforts have helped increase trust, encourage open dialogue, and develop practical solutions to crime and quality-of-life challenges.

Furthermore, when trust between the community and police is low, crime can increase because people may not share information, victims might not report crimes, and witnesses may hesitate to help. Research shows that officers from diverse backgrounds tend to use less force and make fewer stops and arrests than white officers. For example, Black officers make 29 percent fewer stops, 21 percent fewer arrests, and use 32 percent less force per shift than white officers (Ba et al., 2021). Having a diverse police force matters because officers who share backgrounds or experiences with the community may better understand different viewpoints, communicate more effectively, and calm tense situations. More cultural understanding and empathy can lead to more respectful interactions and greater community involvement. These findings suggest that increasing diversity can help reduce abusive policing and rebuild trust (Ba et al., 2021). They also show that community relationships are complex, and policing needs to involve many different approaches and people.

Discriminatory practices hurt both individuals and whole communities. In 2011, an investigation into the

Maricopa County Sheriff's Office found racial profiling: Latino drivers were four to nine times more likely to be stopped than non-Latino drivers in similar situations (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). Deputies sometimes acted after complaints about "dark-skinned" people or those speaking Spanish. These actions created a "wall of distrust" that made it harder for the agency to protect residents (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). Addressing past injustices is necessary for effective policing. Besides ethical reasons, discrimination is costly: many places have paid millions in lawsuits and settlements over biased policing. Studies show that these legal costs can strain city budgets and divert funds from community programs. Some ways to address these problems include bias training, using body cameras to promote transparency, collecting and reviewing stop-and-search data to spot discrimination, and establishing community oversight boards. Hiring more diverse officers and encouraging regular conversations between police and residents can also build accountability and trust. By making these changes, agencies can work to end discrimination, build better relationships, and save money by avoiding expensive lawsuits.

Law enforcement agencies operate beyond regular street patrols. In hospitals, for example, police and security officers can sometimes cause harm. A study of U.S. media reports found that hospital officers harmed people in five ways: shooting patients, using too much force, arresting patients, committing sexual assaults, and injuring staff or bystanders (Saadi & Ray, 2023). These cases show that community policing should include all places where law enforcement interacts with the public.

But what if hospitals and clinical spaces did not rely on law enforcement officers as first responders to crises? Increasingly, some institutions are piloting non-police crisis intervention teams made up of mental health professionals and social workers who are specially trained to de-escalate stressful situations without involving police. By imagining non-police crisis teams as the default in hospitals, we broaden the lens from incremental reforms to structural change, prompting us to reconsider the role of law enforcement in care environments.

To prevent harm in these non-traditional settings, agencies can implement specialized training on de-escalation, mental health awareness, and cultural sensitivity. Increased oversight, partnerships with hospital staff, and clear police intervention protocols can also reduce risks and build trust in these vulnerable populations.

No matter your role (whether you are a police chief, community advocate, or resident), you can take real steps to rebuild trust and improve community safety. Chiefs can invite community groups to regular meetings to discuss local concerns. Advocates can work with agencies to review and suggest changes to training and oversight. Residents can share their views at meetings or through surveys. Taking the first step together, like starting a joint community-police task force, can set the stage for ongoing teamwork and real progress. When everyone commits to shared action, community policing becomes a reality instead of just a goal.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Community policing is just a public relations campaign."

Expert Opinion: True community policing is a philosophy that requires long-term partnerships, transparency and shared problem solving. When done properly, it addresses root causes of crime and improves safety for everyone.

Slow Down and Think: Think about a time when you or someone you know felt mistrust toward law enforcement. *What factors contributed to that feeling? How could officers and community members work together to change those perceptions?*

1.2 Core Elements and Principles

Three interrelated components define community policing: problem solving, community partnerships and organizational transformation. Problem solving requires officers to go beyond answering calls for service. Agencies use the SARA model, which stands for Scan, Analyze, Respond and Assess, to identify recurring problems, examine their underlying causes, implement innovative responses and evaluate outcomes. Problems should be recurring and geographically defined to maximize the effect of limited resources. Community partnerships can be formal or informal and might involve social service providers, faith leaders, business owners, school officials and neighbors. Officers build trust by making a felt presence through foot patrols, youth events and daily conversations (COPS Office, 2020).

Central to effective partnerships is procedural justice, the idea that authorities should make decisions transparently, give people a voice, treat everyone with respect and act impartially. This framework operates as an internal-external learning loop: when officers model fairness and respect within the organization, they reinforce these same values in their interactions with the public, creating a reinforcing cycle of trust and legitimacy. In this sense, a police agency functions as a learning community, where inward practices of procedural justice shape and strengthen outward community relationships. Officers can demonstrate procedural justice in various ways, such as by clearly explaining the reasons for their actions during a traffic stop and listening carefully to a citizen's concerns before taking further steps. For instance, if an officer stops

a driver, they might explain why the stop occurred, allow the driver to explain their perspective, and remain courteous and professional throughout the interaction. When people believe they are treated fairly, they are more likely to see the police as legitimate and cooperate with law enforcement. Officers who model procedural justice in their own ranks by valuing employees' voices, treating colleagues fairly and fostering mutual respect are better prepared to practice it in the community (COPS Office, 2020).

The third component, organizational transformation, means aligning the agency's management, structure, personnel and information systems to support partnerships and proactive problem solving. Decentralization, civilianization and restructuring of units allow officers to work closely with residents instead of operating within rigid paramilitary hierarchies. Decentralization brings practical benefits by moving decision-making authority closer to the community. For example, rather than waiting for approval from a central office to organize neighborhood events or deploy officers for specific outreach efforts, frontline officers and supervisors in a decentralized structure can take action more quickly and respond to emerging concerns as they arise. In communities where approval for community events once took weeks due to multiple management layers, a flattened structure now allows officers to receive rapid authorization, making police-community initiatives more timely and effective. However, agencies commonly encounter barriers to transformation, such as resistance to change among staff, limited funding and resources, or conflicting priorities within the organization. These challenges can slow progress and require strong leadership, ongoing training and open communication to overcome. Transformation cannot be left to a special community-policing unit; it requires commitment from every employee (COPS Office, 2020).

Pro Tip

Use the SARA model to tackle recurring issues. Start by scanning data to identify the most common calls for service in a defined area. Analyze why those problems occur, respond with creative solutions that involve community partners and assess whether your actions make a difference. Remember that foot patrols reduce violence mainly in high-crime areas; tailor your tactics to neighborhood needs (COPS Office, 2020).

Research supports the value of these core elements. Studies show that community policing and problem solving can suppress crime and improve satisfaction. Face-to-face interactions and perceptions of fairness encourage cooperation. However, the same research cautions against one-size-fits-all tactics; targeted foot patrols reduce violent crime only in beats with unusually high violence. Agencies must analyze neighborhood

conditions before deploying resources. Many departments adopt community-policing language without making significant structural changes. Superficial adoption often relies on traditional enforcement rather than innovative problem solving, and evaluation tends to be shallow (COPS Office, 2020).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Our department already has a community policing unit, so we're covered."

Expert Opinion: Assigning a few officers to community outreach does not transform an organization. True change involves shifting the entire agency's mission, structure and daily practices toward partnership and problem solving.

Slow Down and Think: Consider a recurring problem in your neighborhood, such as vandalism near a park. *How would you apply each step of the SARA model to address it? Who in the community might you partner with? What metrics would you use to assess success?*

1.3 Transforming Police Organizations

The ability of a department to practise community policing depends on its internal environment. Community policing is a philosophy that promotes partnerships and problem-solving strategies to proactively address the causes of crime, reduce fear, and improve quality of life by strengthening relationships and trust between law enforcement and the community. Many law enforcement agencies follow rigid, rules-oriented structures that can conflict with a mission centered on listening and collaboration (COPS Office, 2020). Officers often enter the profession wanting to protect and serve, but the paramilitary culture and extraordinary powers they possess shape their perceptions of their roles (COPS Office, 2020). For example, in a paramilitary mindset, officers may focus on strict enforcement of rules, limited engagement with residents outside of official duties, and responding to situations in ways that emphasize authority and control. In contrast, a community-oriented mindset is reflected in behaviors such as initiating open dialogues with residents, seeking local input before taking action, and collaborating with community members to solve problems. To change this, agencies must reorient themselves.

Internal barriers include unclear mission statements, lack of accountability and punitive disciplinary processes. Some agencies address these by flattening hierarchies, improving communication and introducing early warning systems and education-based discipline (COPS Office, 2020). External factors also matter. Tactics like hotspot policing can widen divides when they ignore community priorities. Conversely, an integrated, comprehensive approach to community policing enhances actual and perceived safety and outperforms enforcement-only strategies. Departments willing to transform and collaborate with residents can have significant positive impacts (COPS Office, 2020).

Transformation requires planning. To begin, agencies can take practical first steps such as forming multidisciplinary planning committees that bring together officers as “problem-solvers,” civilian staff as “bridge-builders,” and community representatives as “community scouts.” By assigning these distinctive roles, agencies clarify each group’s unique contributions: problem-solvers focus on developing practical solutions, bridge-builders facilitate coordination and resource-sharing within the agency, and community scouts ensure the voices and needs of local residents are represented. Conducting thorough needs assessments and collecting input from both employees and local residents will help identify key priorities and challenges. A comprehensive strategic plan can then realign priorities around community policing, recognize that crime and disorder are symptoms of broader social issues, and outline partnerships with community members, nonprofits and other organizations to address underlying causes (COPS Office, 2020). The plan should include a clear vision, define roles for every member, establish milestones and metrics and adjust policies and procedures to shift from reactive enforcement to prevention and early intervention. Additionally, agencies can utilize social media platforms to communicate their vision, solicit input and keep residents informed (COPS Office, 2020).

Internal fairness is just as important as external fairness. Agencies should practise procedural justice internally by ensuring employees feel valued, their opinions are considered, they are treated fairly and mutual respect exists (COPS Office, 2020). When officers experience fairness at work, they are more likely to extend it to the public. Agencies must also prioritize employee wellness. Law enforcement personnel face enormous stress and trauma; wellness programs should go beyond self-care to include proactive interventions, healthy lifestyle promotion and early access to preventative services. Effective interventions include peer support teams, confidential counseling services, resilience and mental health training, access to chaplaincy programs, and regular wellness checks by trained professionals. Some agencies have implemented mindfulness-based stress reduction sessions and provide resources for sleep hygiene and nutrition. Research shows that police work is among the most stressful occupations, leading to sleep disorders, impaired judgment and mental health issues; shift work and unpredictable schedules amplify these effects (Ayorinde et al., 2025). Addressing stress and fatigue is not only compassionate; it supports better decision making and safer interactions (Ayorinde et al., 2025).

Pro Tip

When crafting a strategic plan for community policing, start by listening. Host open forums, survey residents and consult social service partners to understand community needs. Then align your agency's mission, policies and training with the principles of transparency, fairness and collaboration. Use social media to share progress and invite feedback; it builds trust and accountability (COPS Office, 2020).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "If crime rates drop, community trust will follow automatically."

Expert Opinion: Reducing crime is important, but it does not automatically build social cohesion. Strategies must address community concerns and empower residents; otherwise suppression tactics can deepen divides.

Slow Down and Think: Imagine you are a police chief asked to decentralize your agency and promote community policing. *What changes would you make to leadership, communications and*

Finally, organizations must mitigate risk in training and operations. Training accidents have led to serious injuries and deaths because agencies failed to identify and address risks (Connelly, 2010). Effective risk management means integrating safety protocols into training plans, conducting foresight and preparation and developing a culture where everyone looks out for hazards (Connelly, 2010). To put this into practice, leaders should take concrete actions such as conducting regular risk audits, using scenario-based training to prepare for potential incidents, and requiring thorough after-action reviews for all training events. Agencies can implement comprehensive safety checklists, ensure qualified supervision

during high-risk activities, and provide clear reporting channels for near-misses and concerns. Surveys of law enforcement executives highlight risks beyond physical safety, including finances, training quality, cultural competence, cyber exposure, officer wellness and supervision (Police Chief Magazine, 2024). Addressing these risks protects both personnel and the public and supports the broader goals of community policing.

training? How would you ensure officers buy into the new mission?

1.4 Building Trust, Engagement and Social Cohesion

Transforming an agency is only half the job; building trust requires ongoing engagement with the community. Training all personnel in community policing ensures that every employee, from patrol to detectives to support staff, views collaboration as part of their mission. Agencies should broaden their social networks into neighborhoods where they lack ties and demonstrate a sincere intention to listen and work together. At first, these efforts may meet suspicion or hostility, but persistence and modeling desired behaviors can break down barriers (COPS Office, 2020). To overcome initial resistance, agencies can proactively identify and partner with respected local leaders and community organizations to serve as bridges. Hosting regular listening sessions in accessible locations can create safe spaces for residents to voice concerns and see agency representatives in a genuine, non-enforcement role. Additionally, committing to follow up on community input and publicizing positive changes based on resident feedback helps demonstrate accountability and builds credibility over time.

Transparency strengthens relationships. Agencies should regularly share data, policies and outcomes with the public. Key transparency metrics include use-of-force incidents, outcomes of internal and external complaints, stop-and-search data, demographic information on enforcement actions, as well as trends in officer-involved shootings and disciplinary actions. Sharing these types of data allows leaders to prioritize efforts that have the greatest impact on public trust. Clear policies for proactive disclosure allow the community to understand departmental decisions and invite feedback. Open dialogue helps the agency tell its own story rather than leaving residents to speculate about its intentions (COPS Office, 2020).

Agencies can enhance engagement by creating advisory groups that include a broad cross-section of stakeholders, especially those who have historically been critical of police practices. These groups help draft strategic plans and bring diverse perspectives to the table. In addition to advisory boards, law enforcement should engage directly with residents to ensure guidance reflects a wide range of voices. Every contact is an opportunity to practise procedural justice; positive interactions, whether in person, by phone or online, build legitimacy and reduce fear. Agencies should measure procedural justice in community interactions and conduct regular surveys to evaluate service quality (COPS Office, 2020).

Building social cohesion is critical in neighborhoods with chronic crime and disorder. In areas with low trust and high violence, suppression tactics may deepen divides. Instead, agencies should collaborate with academic researchers and subject matter experts to measure residents' perceptions, levels of social interaction and willingness to cooperate. Law enforcement can act as a social agent and community broker, helping residents build networks and empowering them to exercise collective control. As a first step, agencies can initiate partnerships by convening interagency meetings that include local government departments, schools, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations. Identifying and reaching out to local champions or respected neighborhood leaders can help build trust and momentum for collaboration. Establishing a working group focused on social cohesion in targeted neighborhoods and setting shared goals ensures that all partners contribute toward common objectives. Identifying neighborhoods with persistent crime, then focusing interventions on smaller areas with low social control, can increase resident confidence. Partnerships with city agencies to improve infrastructure, recreational opportunities and employment also demonstrate that law enforcement cares about residents' well-being (COPS Office, 2020).

Guidance from Gokey and Shell (2016) emphasizes that police executives must build relationships of trust by attending neighborhood meetings, following through on commitments and expanding partnerships beyond their usual networks. Building trust is not a one-off event; it requires continuous engagement and responsiveness. The Office of Justice Programs (n.d.) likewise advises agencies to adopt comprehensive performance management systems that align strategic goals, measure progress and tie individual and organizational performance to community policing outcomes.

Measuring success requires new metrics. Agencies should adopt data sets and evaluation tools that capture perceptions, beliefs and partnership efficacy. Performance evaluations must ask whether every employee feels part of the mission, whether leadership values staff input and whether the agency invests in physical and psychological health. Progressive discipline and early intervention systems help identify problems before they become crises (COPS Office, 2020).

Pro Tip

Form an advisory group that includes voices you do not usually hear. Invite advocates, critics, youth leaders and representatives from diverse communities. Ask them to help develop strategies and review policies. Use short surveys after calls for service to measure how people felt about the interaction and use that feedback to improve training and performance evaluations.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "We know we're making progress when the crime rate drops."

Expert Opinion: Crime rates are important, but they don't tell the whole story. Successful community policing is measured by trust, fairness, engagement and the ability of residents to work together.

1.5 Ensuring Accountability and Equity

Slow Down and Think: If you were designing a survey to measure social cohesion, *what questions would you ask residents? How would you ensure that people who usually feel unheard have a voice?*

To build lasting trust, law enforcement must demonstrate accountability and equity. Federal investigations have uncovered patterns of unconstitutional policing and discriminatory practices. For example, the investigation of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office found that Latino drivers were stopped far more often than non-Latino drivers, that deputies used appearance-based indicators like dark skin or Spanish language as reasons for stops and that the agency lacked clear policies and oversight. Detention officers punished Latino inmates for not understanding English, refused to accept forms written in Spanish and retaliated against critics. These practices violated constitutional rights and created a general culture of bias (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). Similar investigations in cities such as Ferguson, Baltimore, and Chicago have revealed comparable patterns of unconstitutional practices and racial bias, illustrating that these issues are not isolated but reflect broader national trends.

Accountability also extends to nontraditional settings. In hospitals, security personnel and police officers have been reported to shoot or injure patients, use excessive force, make arrests and commit sexual assaults. Most victims were Black and had mental illness, and the reliance on police in health care settings may reflect structural racism. Hospitals widely employ armed security; most allow officers to carry handcuffs, batons, firearms and Tasers, yet there is little data on how this affects patient safety. Because this lack of standardized information makes it difficult to identify patterns or prevent harm, agencies and researchers could improve data collection by establishing standardized reporting requirements for all incidents involving hospital security

and law enforcement. Comprehensive logs should capture demographic details, nature of force used, outcomes, and context of each incident. Furthermore, by partnering with academic researchers to analyze these data across institutions, stakeholders can develop best practices grounded in real-world evidence. Therefore, implementing accountability measures, de-escalation training and removing firearms from hospital security is more likely to reduce harm, as these steps would be guided by solid data and informed analysis (Saadi & Ray, 2023).

Diversity policies offer another path toward equity. Studies show that officers of color and women make significantly fewer stops and use less force than white male officers. These patterns support the argument that diversifying police departments can reduce abusive policing (Ba et al., 2021). However, diversity alone is not a panacea; officers are multidimensional human beings, and effective reforms require attention to training, supervision and culture (Ba et al., 2021). Targeted reforms such as implicit bias training, scenario-based de-escalation exercises, and the introduction of early intervention systems for supervisors have shown promise in reducing harmful patterns. For instance, some agencies have implemented regular coaching sessions, real-time feedback during patrol, and mandatory crisis intervention training modules with positive results. Together, these measures complement diversity initiatives by promoting fairer and more accountable policing practices.

Risk management must be central to accountability. Training accidents highlight how inadequate planning and complacency can lead to tragedy (Connelly, 2010). Agencies must integrate proactive risk assessment into all training and operations, identify potential hazards and take steps to mitigate them (Connelly, 2010). Surveys of law enforcement leaders reveal risks beyond physical safety, including financial pressures, cultural competence gaps, cyber threats, officer wellness and supervision challenges (Police Chief Magazine, 2024). Addressing these risks protects both officers and the public and ensures that community policing goals are achievable.

Finally, officer wellness is a cornerstone of equitable policing. Policing is one of the most stressful occupations, and long hours, trauma and shift work can lead to sleep disorders, impaired judgment, substance abuse and mental health problems. Proactive wellness programs, early intervention and supportive supervision help officers maintain empathy and professionalism. When officers feel supported and healthy, they are more likely to practise procedural justice and build trust (Ayorinde et al., 2025).

Pro Tip

Wellness isn’t optional. Encourage officers to take advantage of peer-support programs, counseling

and healthy lifestyle resources. Supervisors should routinely check on their team's well-being and model self-care. A healthy workforce is better prepared to engage with empathy and to withstand the stresses of community policing.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Racial profiling and discrimination are things of the past."

Expert Opinion: Patterns of unconstitutional policing show that bias and profiling still occur. Acknowledging and addressing these issues is essential to building equitable policing.

Chapter Summary

Community policing recognizes that law enforcement cannot achieve public safety alone. Communities provide information, social cohesion and legitimacy, but decades of mistrust and bias must be confronted. Building trust requires more than public relations; it demands genuine partnerships, transparent decision making, fair treatment and a willingness to address historical harms (COPS Office, 2020). The core components of community policing (problem solving, partnerships and organizational transformation) work together. The **SARA model** helps officers understand the root causes of problems and evaluate solutions. Procedural justice fosters legitimacy by giving people a voice and treating them fairly. Organizational transformation aligns structures and personnel with the community mission. Research shows these approaches can suppress crime and improve satisfaction, but they must be tailored to neighborhood conditions and fully embraced by agencies (COPS Office, 2020).

Transforming an agency involves strategic planning, internal fairness and risk management. Early

warning systems, progressive discipline and wellness programs support officer well-being and encourage empathy. Agencies must measure success through trust, engagement and partnership, not just crime statistics. Building social cohesion requires empowering residents, improving infrastructure and collaborating with other agencies (COPS Office, 2020).

Accountability and equity are essential. Cases like the Maricopa County investigation remind us that unconstitutional policing harms communities and undermines legitimacy (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). Diversity can reduce abusive policing (Ba et al., 2021), but only when combined with training, supervision and cultural change. Risk management protects officers and the public (Connelly, 2010; Police Chief Magazine, 2024), and wellness programs ensure that those tasked with protecting the community are themselves supported (Ayorinde et al., 2025).

In short, community policing is about creating a shared vision for safety, rooted in trust, fairness and partnership. When agencies and communities work together, everyone benefits.

End of Chapter Activities

Case Study Analysis: The Collaborative Neighborhood Project

You are part of a pretrial review team in a mid-sized city that recently adopted a community-policing strategy. The neighborhood in question has seen increasing calls for service related to noise complaints, petty theft and youth loitering. Residents report mistrust of officers due to past experiences with aggressive patrols. The agency collected data on calls, held several listening sessions and launched foot patrols, but tensions remain.

Write a short case position statement answering these questions in plain language:

1. Which action taken by the police demonstrates the strongest alignment with community policing principles (for example, data analysis, listening sessions, foot patrols) and why?
2. Which action needs improvement (for example, lack of follow-up with youth, insufficient diversity among officers, limited coordination with social services) and why?
3. What one step, taken before trial or the next phase, would most reduce error or mistrust (for example,

forming an advisory group, conducting a social cohesion survey, reassigning officers to smaller beats)?

Next, explain how you would speak about the residents' rights with respect, including the right to be heard, fairness in enforcement and the ability to question the actions of officers in community meetings.

Choose Your Own (Patrol) Adventure

Skills Lab 1: Mapping Neighborhood Concerns

Working in teams, students select a local neighborhood (or fictional block) and gather information about recurring issues by reviewing call logs, speaking with residents (role-played by classmates) and observing the environment. Using the SARA model, each team scans for patterns, analyzes root causes and proposes responses that involve community partners. After presenting their plan, teams discuss how to assess success beyond crime rates, such as by measuring trust or engagement.

Skills Lab 2: Partner Dialogues

Students role-play conversations between officers and various community stakeholders, such as youth leaders, business owners, faith leaders and social workers. Each conversation focuses on listening, explaining decisions transparently and inviting feedback. Students practice using procedural justice language and note how different communication styles influence trust. Afterward, the class reflects on the importance of tailoring messages to diverse audiences.

Skills Lab 3: Internal Change Simulation

This lab simulates an agency meeting where officers, supervisors and civilian staff redesign a policy to incorporate community policing principles. Participants debate decentralizing a unit, adopting a new data dashboard or revising the disciplinary process. The class writes a short action plan that includes steps for implementation, risk management, wellness considerations and ways to measure progress.

Skills Lab 4: Bias Awareness Exercise

Students individually review brief scenarios that provide limited information about individuals (e.g., "Three teenagers in hoodies are standing outside a store"). They write down their initial reactions, then discuss how context, language and stereotypes influence perceptions. A facilitator introduces data on diversity in policing and guides a discussion on how officers can mitigate implicit bias through training and supervision.

Skills Lab 5: Wellness Plan Workshop

In small groups, students design a wellness program for a hypothetical agency. They identify stressors officers face, propose components (peer support, counseling, healthy sleep schedules, mental health training), and explain how the program supports community policing goals. Groups then role-play presenting their wellness plan to agency leadership, emphasizing the connection between officer wellness and public trust.

Questions That Change How You Think

1. Explain why trust and legitimacy are as important as crime rates when evaluating police performance. How do they influence residents' willingness to cooperate with law enforcement?
2. Describe how the SARA model differs from traditional reactive policing. Provide an example of how you would use SARA to address a recurring problem.
3. Discuss the relationship between organizational transformation and procedural justice. Why must internal fairness come before external legitimacy?
4. Identify one potential risk that could arise during officer training and explain how proactive risk management could prevent it.
5. Give two reasons why diversity in police departments may reduce abusive policing and two reasons why diversity alone is not sufficient.
6. How can law enforcement agencies measure social cohesion? Describe one metric you would use and why it matters.
7. Imagine a hospital considering whether to employ armed police officers. What factors should leaders consider to balance security and harm reduction?
8. Explain how a comprehensive strategic plan can address both crime reduction and underlying social issues. Include at least three stakeholders who should be involved in drafting the plan.
9. Discuss how officer wellness affects community policing outcomes. What steps can agencies take to support wellness, and how might those steps improve interactions with the public?
10. If you were tasked with creating a performance evaluation system for a community-oriented agency, what measures would you include to ensure that every employee sees their role in the mission and feels valued?

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This chapter was developed from publicly available research reports and guidance documents. It is intended as a teaching resource and does not constitute legal advice or official policy. Readers should consult local laws and agency policies for specific guidance.

DE-ESCALATION IN PRACTICE

Dr. Michael McHenry

Chapter 2: De-Escalation in Practice

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain what de-escalation means and why valuing human life and objective reasonableness are core principles in use-of-force policies.
2. Describe the legal duties to de-escalate, intervene and provide aid, and identify when less-lethal and deadly force may be used under law.
3. Identify and apply de-escalation tools and techniques such as the Critical Decision-Making Model, crisis recognition, time and distance, and active listening.
4. Evaluate the benefits and limitations of de-escalation training and understand the importance of ongoing practice and supervisor support.
5. Discuss the challenges and controversies surrounding de-escalation, including concerns about officer safety, gaps in research and the shift from warrior to guardian mindsets.

Chapter Overview

De-escalation is a foundational concept in modern policing. At its heart, it reflects a commitment to preserving life and resolving conflicts peacefully. This chapter introduces the legal and ethical frameworks that guide officers' decisions about when and how to use force, with emphasis on valuing human life and employing objective reasonableness. It explains duties to de-escalate, intervene and provide aid, and details policies that restrict deadly force and encourage less-lethal options. You will learn practical tools and techniques from

the Critical Decision-Making Model and crisis recognition skills to time, distance and active listening that help officers manage tense encounters without resorting to force. De-escalation does not require officers to sacrifice their own safety. For example, officers can safely resolve a standoff with an armed subject by using time, communication, and cover. Use of de-escalation strategies not only protect themselves and bystanders but also prevents injury to the subject. The chapter also examines the effectiveness of de-escalation training, including encouraging results from some programs and serious gaps in the research. Finally, it discusses the controversies surrounding de-escalation, including concerns about officer safety and the ongoing shift from warrior to guardian mindsets. Building on Chapter 1's emphasis on community partnerships and procedural justice, this chapter shows how calming conflict through de-escalation enhances trust, accountability and safety for everyone.

2.1 Defining De-Escalation and Use of Force

Modern use-of-force policies begin with a simple idea: the sanctity of human life. The National Consensus Policy on Use of Force states that agencies value and preserve human life and that officers shall use only the force that is objectively reasonable, given the facts and circumstances (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). Objective reasonableness means asking what a reasonable officer would do in the same situation. For example, consider an officer who responds to a call involving a person holding a baseball bat and acting agitated on a sidewalk. Instead of immediately using force, the officer keeps a safe distance, speaks calmly, and assesses whether the person poses an imminent threat to others. If the person sets down the bat and starts complying with the officer's instructions, continued force would not be justified. If a person is complying or no longer resisting, officers must discontinue force and provide or arrange medical aid for individuals with visible injuries (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020).

What is de-escalation? Both the Consensus Policy and Washington law define de-escalation as taking steps—through actions, verbal or non-verbal communication—to calm situations, manage potential threats, and create the time and space needed to safely resolve incidents (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020; State of Washington, 2021). Tactics include giving clear instructions, slowing down interactions, creating distance, designating a single communicator, and calling on available crisis intervention resources (State of Washington, 2021).

When selecting a specific tactic, officers make decisions based on factors such as the person's behavior, level of threat, presence of weapons, available backup, and the individual's characteristics or needs. The officer first assesses the situation, then chooses tactics that have the best chance of reducing risk to all parties while ensuring safety. For example, if a subject appears upset but is communicating, the officer may try calming speech and clear instructions. If the subject is holding a weapon but not actively aggressive, creating distance and waiting

for additional resources may be the preferred approach. These tactics are part of a larger toolkit that includes less-lethal alternatives such as verbal warnings, conducted energy weapons, pepper spray and impact batons (State of Washington, 2021).

Use-of-force laws set boundaries. As outlined by the State of Washington (2021), officers in Washington may use force only to protect against a criminal offense, effect an arrest, prevent escape or perform community caretaking functions. The law also states that deadly force is allowed only when necessary to protect against an immediate threat of serious physical injury or death. According to state requirements, reasonable care means officers must use all available de-escalation tactics before resorting to physical force, apply the least amount of force necessary, and consider individual characteristics such as pregnancy, age, cognitive impairment, disabilities, substance use, suicidality, language barriers, and the presence of children. The State of Washington (2021) also emphasizes that failing to follow these legal requirements can result in significant consequences for officers, including internal discipline, suspension, loss of certification, civil liability, or even criminal charges in cases of willful or reckless misconduct. These measures help ensure officers are held accountable for their actions and maintain public trust.

De-escalation is about choices. Officers must ask whether there is a reasonably effective alternative to force and whether the level of force is proportional to the threat (State of Washington Office of the Attorney General, 2022). Officer training programs focus on these decision-making processes, teaching officers to evaluate situations carefully and apply de-escalation tactics to reduce the likelihood of harm. Through scenario-based training and regular instruction, officers develop the skills needed to recognize, assess, and respond to challenging encounters. When force is no longer needed, it must stop (State of Washington Office of the Attorney General, 2022). Building on procedural justice principles introduced in Chapter 1, de-escalation ensures that interactions remain fair, transparent and respectful. In the following pages, we examine how officers practice these choices in real time.

Pro Tip

Know your agency's definitions and policies. De-escalation is not a loose concept; it involves specific actions like clear instructions, creating distance and using available crisis resources (State of Washington, 2021). Understanding these tools and when to apply them helps you stay within the law and protects lives.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "De-escalation means officers can never use force."

Expert Opinion: De-escalation aims to reduce the need for force, but if a person poses an immediate threat, officers may use less-lethal or deadly force when legally justified.

2.2 Duties, Policies and Proportionality

Slow Down and Think: Think of a time when someone calmed you down with words or actions. *How did they change your mindset? Which of those techniques align with the definition of de-escalation described here?*

Good policies turn principles into clear duties. National and state guidelines require officers to use de-escalation techniques whenever possible and give people time to comply before taking further action (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). Officers may use less-lethal force if de-escalation does not work or is not appropriate, but only to protect themselves or others from harm, restrain someone resisting, or bring a situation under control (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). Deadly force is only allowed when there is an immediate threat of death or serious injury, and chokeholds are banned unless deadly force is permitted (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). For example, if someone is holding a weapon and threatening bystanders after refusing to cooperate, an officer may need to use less-lethal force to prevent harm. If a suspect fires a gun at officers or civilians, deadly force is justified to stop the threat. Using real-life examples helps officers see how these policies work in practice. Following these rules is also important for building trust with the community and protecting civil rights. Not following them can lead to legal problems, loss of public trust, and negative outcomes for both individuals and the agency, as noted in the 21st Century Policing Report.

Duty to intervene and render aid. Officers must step in if they see another officer using too much force or doing something wrong. They are required to report what they see and are protected from retaliation for doing so (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020; State of Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission, 2021). To help officers build these skills, it helps to look at examples that move from less risky to more serious situations:

1. First, picture an officer noticing a coworker using harsh language or being rude to someone. In this situation, intervening usually means having a private talk or giving a gentle reminder about department standards, and documenting the incident if necessary.
2. In a more serious case, an officer sees a coworker use unnecessary physical force, like pushing someone who is already cooperating. Here, the officer should act quickly by asking the colleague to stop, telling a supervisor, and writing a detailed report as soon as possible. If needed, include evidence such as body camera footage or witness statements.
3. In the most serious situations, an officer might see excessive force that causes visible injury or could cause harm. The officer should step in right away if it is safe, alert supervisors directly, and make sure the person gets medical help quickly. Officers must write a detailed report about what happened. If they worry about retaliation for reporting, they should tell their supervisor or internal affairs and keep a record of any concerning actions. Many departments offer protections and an appeals process for these cases. Officers must also provide or arrange medical aid for anyone with visible injuries or who complains of pain after a use of force incident (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020).

Arranging these examples from simple to complex helps officers learn when and how to step in as they gain experience. These responsibilities support accountability and keep both officers and the community safe.

Proportionality and necessary force. The Washington model policy says that force must be both necessary and proportional. Officers should keep checking if force is still needed and stop using it when it is not (State of Washington Office of the Attorney General, 2022). In changing situations, officers can decide if force is needed by looking at whether the threat is still there, if the person's behavior has changed, or if safer options are available. For example, if a situation calms down or someone starts to cooperate, officers should reduce or stop using force. Officers must also think about individual factors like pregnancy, age, vulnerability, or disabilities, and only use the amount of force that no other reasonable option would achieve (State of Washington Office of the Attorney General, 2022). When dealing with people who are young, pregnant, elderly, or show signs of disability or vulnerability, officers should quickly reassess the need and type of force. They should also consider other options and whether extra care or support is needed before acting. Visual reminders at the scene, such as wristbands or profile notes, can help highlight these important factors, as seen in recent PERF training. Taking these factors into account shows a commitment to fairness and respects the different needs of the public.

Pro Tip

Before using force, ask yourself: "Is there a reasonable alternative? Does the level of force match the threat?" Considering individual characteristics and providing clear instructions can prevent unnecessary escalation (State of Washington Office of the Attorney General, 2022).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Intervening against a fellow officer is disloyal."

Expert Opinion: Intervention is a professional duty, not betrayal. Policies require officers to stop excessive force and report wrongdoing (State of Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission, 2021). It protects everyone and builds trust.

2.3 Tools and Techniques for De-Escalation

Slow Down and Think:
Imagine you witness a fellow officer using excessive force on a vulnerable person. *What is your responsibility under policy, and how might your actions influence community trust?*

Effective de-escalation requires more than a calm voice. It relies on structured decision making, crisis recognition, communication and patience. The Critical Decision-Making Model (CDM) guides officers through five steps: collect information, assess the situation and risks, consider legal authority and policy, identify options and determine the best course of action, and act, review and reassess (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). The model is circular, meaning officers can move back and forth between steps as new information emerges (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). Using the CDM encourages officers to gather as much information as possible, ask questions and develop options rather than rushing into force (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). While the process helps manage high-risk situations, it also provides an opportunity to build trust and positive relationships in the community. Emphasizing these opportunities helps

shift the focus from merely avoiding liability to actively strengthening public trust through thoughtful engagement.

For example, an officer responding to a report of a person acting erratically in a public park might start by collecting information from witnesses and observing the individual's behavior. Assessing the situation, the officer notes that the person appears confused and ignores instructions but does not threaten others. The officer considers legal authority and department policy, then identifies options such as calling for backup or involving a crisis intervention team. By choosing to engage calmly and keep a safe distance, the officer gives the person time and space to respond, and continues to reassess as new information emerges. This approach, guided by the CDM, allows for a safer and more thoughtful resolution.

Recognizing crisis and using CIT. ICAT training reminds officers that only a small percentage of calls involve individuals in crisis, but these situations carry high risk (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). Crisis can stem from mental illness, substance use, developmental disabilities, traumatic events or physical conditions. Officers may encounter common crisis behaviors such as confusion, incoherence, extreme agitation, difficulty communicating, emotional distress, or appearing withdrawn or unresponsive. Observable signs may include talking to oneself, rapid speech, disorganized thoughts, emotional outbursts, or seeming unaware of surroundings. For example, an individual with a developmental disability or traumatic brain injury may show repetitive movements, struggle to understand verbal commands or appear highly sensitive to loud noises. Including these possibilities broadens the mental checklist for officers and reinforces the idea that crisis is not always related to mental illness. Identifying these signs helps officers know when to use crisis intervention team strategies. Officers should not automatically treat non-compliance as a threat; instead, they should slow down, seek help from crisis intervention teams and recognize that behavior might reflect a medical or psychological condition (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016).

Communication and active listening. Tactical communication techniques help officers build rapport and gain voluntary compliance. ICAT teaches the "80-20" rule: listen 80 percent of the time and speak 20 percent. Officers should maintain calm body language, avoid distractions and make eye contact. Open-ended questions, summaries of the person's statements and strategic use of silence encourage dialogue (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). For example, an officer responding to a distressed individual might use the 80-20 rule in this way:

> **Officer:** "I can see you're upset. Can you tell me what's going on today?" (listening)
>
> **Subject:** "No one ever listens to me. I just want to be left alone."
>
> **Officer:** "It sounds like you're having a really tough time. I'm here to help if you want to talk about it." (listening again)
>
> **Subject:** "I lost my job and now everything is falling apart."

Officer: "That must feel overwhelming. Take your time—I'm here to listen." (offers supportive silence)

Subject: "Thank you. I didn't think anyone cared."

This exchange demonstrates how officers can prioritize listening, use brief responses, and give the other person space to express themselves, making the interaction safer and more productive.

To improve team effectiveness, officers should designate one primary communicator, often determined by who has the best rapport or relevant experience with the subject. The rest of the team can support by monitoring safety, offering information, and managing resources, but should avoid speaking over each other to prevent confusion. Supportive tone and language matter (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). In crisis situations, officers should avoid "hot button" topics, find personal "hooks" to engage subjects and manage their own stress responses (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016).

Time, distance and options. De-escalation uses time and distance to slow down incidents and create space for solutions. The National Institute of Justice notes that ICAT training emphasizes using time and distance to allow officers to assess the situation and safely resolve incidents (National Institute of Justice, 2022). Tactics include repositioning, placing barriers and requesting additional resources (State of Washington Office of the Attorney General, 2022). Creating space also means giving subjects time to process instructions, calm down and make better choices. However, there are limits to de-escalation. In some circumstances, such as when someone poses an immediate threat to themselves or others, officers may need to act quickly to protect safety. It is important for officers to balance efforts to de-escalate with their responsibility to intervene when necessary in line with legal authority and department policy.

Table 2.1: Practical De-Escalation Response Guide for Field Encounters

Observed Behavior or Situation	Recommended Officer Response	Purpose of the Response
Individual is pacing, speaking rapidly, and visibly distressed but not armed.	Maintain distance, use a calm and steady voice, and allow the individual time to speak without interruption.	Reduces perceived threat, lowers emotional intensity, and increases the likelihood of voluntary cooperation.
Subject is noncompliant and appears confused, disoriented, or unresponsive.	Slow the pace of the encounter, avoid escalating commands, and consider requesting a crisis intervention team.	Prevents unnecessary force, allows time for assessment, and brings specialized resources to complex situations.
Person threatens self-harm but does not threaten others.	Prioritize verbal engagement, maintain safe positioning, and call for backup and mental health resources.	Protects life while minimizing confrontation and ensures additional support for a vulnerable individual.
Multiple officers present and subject appears increasingly agitated.	Designate one primary communicator; other officers monitor safety and provide information quietly.	Reduces sensory overload, prevents mixed messages, and creates a clearer, more controlled interaction.
Subject appears withdrawn, avoids eye contact, and does not respond to instructions.	Use supportive silence, avoid physical contact, and provide physical and psychological space.	Allows processing time, reduces perceived pressure, and respects potential trauma or neurodivergent responses.

Pro Tip

Use the 80-20 rule: listen more than you speak. Maintain calm body language, use open-ended questions and summarise what you hear. Clear communication reduces anxiety and encourages cooperation (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Non-compliance equals threat."

Expert Opinion: People who do not follow commands may be experiencing crisis, mental illness, substance use or disability (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). Slowing down, gathering information and engaging CIT resources can resolve the situation without force.

2.4 Training, Outcomes and Implementation

Slow Down and Think: *List three questions you might ask to understand why someone is not complying. How could time and distance help you gather that information safely?*

Many agencies now mandate de-escalation training. The National Consensus Policy requires all officers to complete de-escalation, scenario-based exercises, and legal updates (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). The Washington model policy also emphasizes training in de-escalation, crisis identification, communication, and continuous assessment (State of Washington Office of the Attorney General, 2022). Duty to intervene policies instruct officers on when and how to intervene (State of Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission, 2021). After completing the de-escalation modules, a typical patrol shift may begin with a calm verbal approach and maintaining a distance. This shift transforms routine stops into opportunities to apply these skills. Officers who do not finish the required training can be removed from patrol until they comply.

Research suggests that de-escalation training may have positive effects. For instance, a National Institute of Justice report on the Integrating Communications, Assessment and Tactics (ICAT) program found that after training, officer use-of-force incidents and civilian injuries dropped by more than 25%, while officer injuries fell by 36% (National Institute of Justice, 2022). The program teaches officers to use time and distance, slow down, consider their options, and listen actively (National Institute of Justice, 2022). These results likely come from key behaviors taught in ICAT training. Officers learn to step back to create space during tense situations, to give calm, clear verbal directions, and to pause to assess a person's emotional state before acting. By keeping distance, using structured communication, and waiting for more information, officers can resolve situations with less risk of injury to themselves and civilians. For example, in a heated moment, an officer might step back, ask open-ended questions, and try to build rapport to prevent escalation. However, the report also points out that if supervisors do not reinforce de-escalation principles, the benefits of training can fade over time (National Institute of Justice, 2022). Ongoing support from supervisors and regular practice are needed to keep improvements going.

A systematic review of de-escalation training evaluations across professions found that although trainings produced slight-to-moderate improvements in individuals and organizations, the quality of most studies was poor, and conclusions about effectiveness remain uncertain (Engel et al., 2020). Critics worry that de-escalation instructs officers to slow down and consider more options, which they fear may increase risk (Engel et al., 2020). For example, some argue that if officers hesitate or spend extra time trying to de-escalate a rapidly deteriorating situation, they could miss cues or lose the opportunity to protect themselves or others. In high-threat situations, this delay might allow a suspect to act aggressively or reach for a weapon before officers can respond, potentially putting both officers and civilians in greater danger. Despite widespread promotion of de-escalation training after high-profile incidents, there is limited scientific knowledge about its development, delivery, and impact (Engel et al., 2020).

To address these uncertainties, experts recommend stronger evaluations, better data collection on police use of force, and ongoing teamwork between researchers and police agencies (Engel et al., 2020). For instance, a department could work with a university to run a randomized controlled trial comparing officers who receive enhanced de-escalation training with those who receive standard training, tracking use-of-force incidents and community complaints over time. Collaboration could also include regular workshops where researchers, officers, and community members review training and adjust it to fit local needs. Training should go along with early warning systems, performance management, and risk management strategies, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Departments should plan, carry out, and review training with input from officers, supervisors, and community members. For example, agencies could set up regular feedback sessions after training to identify areas for improvement and ensure feedback from field personnel shapes future updates.

Pro Tip

Training is only the beginning. Practise de-escalation skills in realistic scenarios, seek feedback and encourage supervisors to model and reinforce these techniques. Without reinforcement, skills fade and officers revert to old habits (National Institute of Justice, 2022).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Once officers go through de-escalation training, the problem is solved."

Expert Opinion: Training alone is not enough. Evidence shows that supervisor support and ongoing practice are necessary to maintain improvements, and many evaluations are of low quality (Engel et al., 2020; National Institute of Justice, 2022).

2.5 Challenges, Controversies and the Path Forward

Slow Down and Think: *Why do you think it is important to evaluate de-escalation training? What questions would you ask to determine whether a training program is effective?*

Calls for de-escalation frequently clash with the deeply ingrained 'split-second' policing culture. Although de-escalation is widely promoted, it remains controversial. Critics argue that asking officers to slow down and consider multiple options conflicts with traditional training focused on quick, decisive action and may endanger officers (Engel et al., 2020). Others worry that de-escalation may be used as a public relations tool rather than a substantive change. There is limited evidence about how, when and under what circumstances officers use force, and data collection remains inadequate (Engel et al., 2020).

Another challenge is balancing safety and compassion. Officers fear that de-escalation could increase hesitation, while communities want assurance that officers will use restraint. The shift from a "warrior" to a "guardian" mindset encourages officers to see themselves as protectors and problem solvers rather than soldiers, but changing culture takes time (Engel et al., 2020). De-escalation policies must be paired with robust accountability systems and transparent reporting. Practical accountability relies on a combination of tools like body-worn cameras, civilian oversight, and prompt investigations of force incidents. These measures help create transparent processes and reinforce the expectation that officers act responsibly. When officers intervene to stop excessive force, they model accountability and build legitimacy (State of Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission, 2021).

Research gaps call for action. Scholars recommend rigorous experiments, better data and careful evaluation of training programs (Engel et al., 2020). Agencies should collect detailed use-of-force data, share it publicly and invite independent evaluation. One important next step for researchers is to design studies that examine the real-world effects of de-escalation training. For example, students could investigate the question: Does participation in a specific de-escalation program reduce the frequency or severity of use-of-force incidents?

To answer this, they could use methods such as randomized controlled trials or compare outcomes before and after implementing a training program in a particular agency. Encouraging this kind of research not only fills current gaps but also promotes a more evidence-based approach to policy making. When evidence-based practices lead to measurable outcomes—such as fewer use-of-force incidents, improved public trust scores, and lower rates of complaints—agencies demonstrate clear progress that directly benefits the community and reinforces police legitimacy. De-escalation is not a panacea; it is one part of a broader strategy that includes community partnerships, procedural justice and risk management. In Chapter 1 you learned that community policing builds trust through fairness and collaboration. In this chapter, you see that de-escalation is a practical manifestation of those values. When officers slow down, listen and use time and distance, they protect lives and strengthen community trust.

Pro Tip

Adopt a guardian mindset. See yourself as a protector and problem solver who uses communication, time and options before force. This mindset aligns with procedural justice and builds long-term trust (Engel et al., 2020).

Watch Your Step

General Public: “De-escalation is just a feel-good slogan.”

Expert Opinion: De-escalation is grounded in policy and training. It requires officers to use specific techniques and make decisions based on law and ethics (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020; State of Washington Office of the Attorney General, 2022).

Chapter Summary

De-escalation is a vital component of modern policing. It reflects a commitment to preserving life and exercising objective reasonableness in the use of force (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). The law defines when and how officers may use force and directs them to employ de-escalation tactics and less-lethal options whenever possible (State of Washington, 2021). Duties to intervene, render aid and consider individual characteristics reinforce accountability and fairness (State of Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission, 2021; State of Washington Office of the Attorney General, 2022). Practical tools like the Critical Decision-Making Model, crisis recognition and tactical communications provide officers with a structured approach to managing tense encounters (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). Time and distance are key strategies for slowing events and creating space for resolution (National Institute of Justice, 2022). Training programs such as ICAT show promising reductions in use-of-force incidents and injuries, but evaluation research remains limited and requires ongoing support from supervisors and independent researchers (National Institute of Justice, 2022; Engel et al., 2020). De-escalation is not without controversy. Critics question its safety and effectiveness, and data collection on police use of force remains inadequate (Engel et al., 2020). The shift from warrior to guardian mindsets and the demand for more rigorous research reflect an evolving field. Ultimately, de-escalation is part of a broader philosophy of procedural justice and community policing. When officers treat people with dignity, listen, slow down and use proportional force, they reinforce trust and safety for everyone.

End of Chapter Activities

Case Study Analysis: The Failed Traffic Stop

In this scenario, officers stop a vehicle for a minor traffic violation. The driver is agitated, has a toddler in the back seat and speaks limited English. One officer repeatedly commands the driver to exit the vehicle while another officer notices a car seat and tries to calm the driver. The driver refuses to exit and starts recording the encounter. Tension rises as backup units arrive.

Write a short case position statement that answers the following questions:

1. Which actions by the officers demonstrate proper de-escalation techniques (for example, noticing the

toddler, using clear instructions, waiting for translation services)? Explain why these actions align with policy.

2. Which actions could undermine de-escalation (for example, shouting commands, ignoring language barriers, drawing weapons prematurely)? How could the officers have used time and distance differently?
3. What one step, taken before this encounter, could have reduced risk (such as training in language access, equipping vehicles with translation apps or practicing the CDM)?

Next, describe how you would talk to the driver after the situation resolves, ensuring respect and fairness. Discuss the driver's rights, the reason for the stop and any steps the agency will take to review the incident.

Choose Your Own (Patrol) Adventure

Skills Lab 1: Decision-Making Drill

Your instructor will present a series of brief scenarios involving possible threats, mental health crises and bystander interference. For each scenario, your team will use the Critical Decision-Making Model to decide whether to act, reposition, call for assistance or disengage. Discuss how information gathering, assessment and policy guide your choices. Focus on using time and distance to create options. Write down one insight you gained about managing uncertainty.

Skills Lab 2: Crisis Communication Role Play

Working in pairs, students role-play interactions with individuals experiencing mental health or substance-use crises. One student plays the officer using active listening, open-ended questions and calm body language; the other plays the person in crisis. Swap roles and discuss which communication techniques felt natural and which were challenging. Identify at least two "hooks" you used to build rapport.

Skills Lab 3: Supervisor Reinforcement Workshop

In small groups, students develop a plan for supervisor reinforcement of de-escalation practices. Consider daily briefings, after-action reviews and coaching. Discuss how supervisors can model guardian behavior, correct aggressive tactics and encourage officers to slow down. Present your plan and explain how it addresses training decay (National Institute of Justice, 2022).

Skills Lab 4: Data and Reflection

Using mock use-of-force data, students identify patterns in when, where and against whom force is used.

Discuss whether de-escalation tactics could have been employed and identify gaps in information that would help evaluate decisions. Suggest ways agencies can collect better data and involve community members in reviewing it (Engel et al., 2020).

Skills Lab 5: Ethical Dilemmas and Duty to Intervene

Students read short vignettes where an officer witnesses misconduct or excessive force. Discuss the duty to intervene and report, the potential consequences of failing to act and strategies for intervening safely. Reflect on how fulfilling this duty builds legitimacy and how to support colleagues who intervene (State of Washington Criminal Justice Training Commission, 2021).

Questions That Change How You Think

1. Describe the core principles of de-escalation and explain how they reflect the sanctity of human life and objective reasonableness.
2. Explain the difference between necessary and proportional force. How does the Washington model policy instruct officers to determine whether force is necessary?
3. Identify three de-escalation tactics described in this chapter. In what types of situations might each tactic be most effective?
4. Discuss why time and distance are important in de-escalation. Provide an example of how an officer could use these elements to avoid using force.
5. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of current de-escalation training. Why is supervisor support essential, and what happens when it is lacking?
6. Critics argue that de-escalation training may put officers at risk. Do you agree or disagree? Use evidence from the chapter to support your position.
7. How does the duty to intervene reinforce accountability and trust within both the police department and the community?
8. Explain how de-escalation connects to the "guardian" mindset discussed in Chapter 1. How can officers shift from a warrior mentality to a guardian mentality?
9. Identify one gap in research on de-escalation training and suggest how future studies could address it.
10. Imagine you are designing a de-escalation training program. What elements would you include to ensure it is effective, and how would you measure its success?

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This chapter is drawn from publicly available policies, training guides and research reports. It is intended for educational use and does not constitute legal advice or official policy. Always consult your agency's policies and local laws.

CRISIS INTERVENTION AND COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE

Dr. Michael McHenry

Chapter 3: Crisis Intervention and Collaborative Response

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define crisis intervention and explain why collaborative partnerships among law enforcement, behavioral health professionals and community stakeholders are essential for effective crisis response.
2. Describe the core elements of the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) model, including its 40-hour training, community collaboration and focus on diversion to treatment.
3. Evaluate research on CIT effectiveness, including reductions in injuries, improvements in officer attitudes and challenges such as limited evidence on arrest and injury outcomes.
4. Apply communication strategies like active listening and accommodation to real-world crisis scenarios and understand the role of the Critical Decision-Making Model in guiding responses.
5. Discuss how mindset and organizational culture, including the danger imperative and guardian approach, influence crisis interventions and identify ways to promote officer wellness and self-efficacy.

Chapter Overview

In 2023, a significant number of people experiencing a mental health crisis were fatally shot by police (Dong et al., 2025). Across the country, a misunderstanding during a mental health emergency can result in unnecessary arrests, injuries, or even tragedy. When someone in distress asks for help in public, the way authorities respond can change the course of their life.

Crisis intervention is a team-based and compassionate way to help people who are clearly in distress, such as yelling in public, acting confused, or feeling overwhelmed. Instead of just arresting or detaining someone, crisis intervention connects people in urgent need to services like mental health counseling or addiction treatment. By focusing on what is happening right then, such as someone who has stopped taking medication or is struggling with strong emotions, crisis intervention tries to solve problems before they get worse. This chapter introduces the history and main parts of the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) model, which many see as the best approach for police responding to mental health crises.

Here is an example of how CIT programs can help: Officers are sent to an apartment after a neighbor hears loud shouting and signs of distress. When they arrive, they find a man who is upset and confused. Using their CIT training, the officers stay calm, use de-escalation skills, and ask open-ended questions to understand what he needs. They find out he has stopped taking his medication and is having a mental health crisis. Instead of arresting him, the officers work with a local crisis team and connect him to a mobile behavioral health unit. He is taken safely to a treatment center, avoiding force or criminal charges.

You will learn how CIT programs grew out of partnerships between law enforcement and behavioral health providers and how a 40-hour training equips officers with knowledge, communication skills, and de-escalation strategies. The chapter also examines the effectiveness of CIT programs, highlighting promising outcomes like reduced injuries and improved officer attitudes, along with challenges such as limited evidence that CIT reduces arrests. Building on the de-escalation tools introduced in Chapter 2, this chapter explores communication techniques rooted in Communication Accommodation Theory and the Critical Decision-Making Model. For example, Communication Accommodation Theory can be put into practice when officers use open body posture, maintain an even and calm tone of voice, and mirror the language style or pace of the individual in crisis. Officers might say things like, “I am here to listen and help you,” or “Can you tell me more about what you’re feeling right now?” Adjusting body language by lowering hands or kneeling to make eye contact can further convey empathy and reduce the sense of threat. These concrete actions help translate theory into steps that any officer can follow in the field. Finally, this chapter considers how cultural frames like the danger imperative shape officers’ responses and why shifting toward a guardian mindset and promoting self-efficacy and wellness are essential for successful crisis interventions (Todd et al., 2025).

3.1 Understanding Crisis Intervention and CIT

In 1988, a police shooting involving a person with mental illness in Memphis led city leaders, police, and mental health professionals to seek better crisis response solutions. This resulted in the first Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program, pairing trained officers with mental health providers to direct people to treatment instead of jail. The CIT model, now widespread, is defined by specialized officer training, strong community partnerships, and alternatives to arrest that connect people to services (Maryland Office of the Public Defender, 2025).

On the street, officers often face split-second decisions in unpredictable and tense situations. For example, when dispatched to a scene where a person is shouting and acting erratically, an officer may struggle to determine whether the individual is experiencing a mental health crisis, under the influence of drugs, or poses a safety threat. With limited time to assess the situation and a lack of immediate access to mental health resources, some officers feel pressure to make an arrest simply to restore order or follow ambiguous department policies. However, this type of dilemma underscores the need for the CIT program's specialized training, which equips officers to navigate these gray areas, recognize signs of behavioral health issues, and confidently divert individuals to appropriate services rather than defaulting to punitive measures.

The CIT approach relies on teamwork between groups. During a behavioral health crisis, 911 dispatchers spot mental health calls and send them to CIT-trained officers. If more help is needed, officers can call mobile crisis teams. These teams bring mental health expertise and connect people to services. Once calm, people may go to emergency rooms or treatment centers instead of jail to get the care they need. The 40-hour training covers de-escalation, mental health, substance use, communication, suicide prevention, and local resources. Officers volunteer for this training, often those eager to help people in crisis (Rogers, McNiel & Binder, 2019).

The term crisis intervention describes a range of strategies used to stabilize chaotic situations, like when someone is hyperventilating and pacing in a parking lot, shouting at passersby, or sitting silently on a curb with their head in their hands. Law enforcement often encounters people who are overwhelmed, frightened, or unable to cope, and officers must quickly decide how to respond in a way that prioritizes safety and care. For example, consider a situation where police are called to assist a man acting erratically on a city sidewalk. Rather than immediately resorting to arrest, specially trained officers use de-escalation techniques, communicate calmly, and involve a mental health professional to assess the man's needs. As a result, the man is safely transported to a behavioral health facility for treatment, rather than being jailed or left without support. Recognizing that police alone cannot resolve these situations, communities developed the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) model, a collaborative effort among law enforcement, emergency responders, behavioral health professionals, and community stakeholders. The CIT model is designed to improve responses to behavioral health crises, enhance officer and individual safety, reduce unnecessary incarceration, and ensure individuals receive care rather than punishment (Maryland Office of the Public Defender, 2025). CIT programs align with

the Sequential Intercept Model, which identifies points where people can be diverted from the criminal justice system into treatment or support services (Maryland Office of the Public Defender, 2025).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "CIT is just another training class for police."

Expert Opinion: CIT is a system of partnerships between law enforcement, mental health providers and communities. It includes training, policy changes and coordinated diversion to care and not just a classroom program (Maryland Office of the Public Defender, 2025).

The goals of CIT programs are broad but interconnected: reduce harm during crisis encounters, protect officers and the public, divert individuals away from jail, and connect people to appropriate services. CIT programs emphasize that crisis calls are not primarily criminal incidents; they are public health emergencies requiring a calm, informed and compassionate response. When implemented effectively, CIT programs foster trust between law enforcement and communities by demonstrating a commitment to addressing behavioral health needs rather than criminalizing them.

Slow Down and Think: *Have you or someone you know ever experienced a behavioral health crisis? If so, how did responders handle it? What actions would you hope officers would take to ensure safety and care in future encounters?*

3.2 CIT Training and Core Elements

The main feature of the CIT program is its 40-hour training, which is often called the "gold standard" for police crisis response (Crisanti et al., 2022). This course covers topics like mental health diagnoses, substance use disorders, de-escalation tactics, and communication skills (Crisanti et al., 2022). Participants learn to spot symptoms of mental illness, understand how trauma and substance use affect people, and tell the difference between criminal behavior and signs of illness. The training is led by mental health professionals, law enforcement trainers, and people who have lived with mental illness, offering a range of perspectives (Rogers et al., 2019). Dispatchers are also trained to recognize mental health calls and send the right resources (Rogers et al., 2019). Studies show that places using CIT programs often have fewer use-of-force incidents, fewer arrests

of people with mental illness, and more referrals to mental health services. These results suggest the training can improve both officer responses and community safety. (Compton et al., 2014)

Stand-alone training, however, may not be enough. Participants often describe a “fade” in skills without ongoing practice and support (Rogers et al., 2019). In actual crisis encounters, officers must frequently rely on their own discretion at several key points: determining whether a behavior constitutes a mental health crisis or criminal conduct, deciding whether to call for specialized mental health resources, and weighing options for transport, referral, or possible arrest. These decisions are shaped not just by training but by agency policy, availability of local treatment resources and the broader community support system. For example, if mental health drop-off centers or mobile crisis teams are not readily accessible, officers may face added pressure to resolve the situation independently, often within the constraints of existing policies. In some locations, policies provide clear guidance and partnership opportunities with community providers, while in others, ambiguous guidelines and limited resources leave officers to navigate these choices alone. Mapping these discretionary points highlights structural barriers that cannot always be addressed by training alone and may contribute to uneven outcomes for people in crisis (Rogers et al., 2019).

To address skill retention and provide ongoing support, some agencies, such as the Albuquerque Police Department, developed ongoing education like the CIT ECHO program. This initiative provides weekly videoconference sessions covering topics such as CIT policing, available resources, psychiatric diagnosis, de-escalation, communication skills, officer self-care and substance use (Crisanti et al., 2022). Officers who participate in these sessions report increased knowledge, comfort and positive attitudes toward crisis response (Crisanti et al., 2022). However, ongoing training programs like CIT ECHO remain relatively uncommon nationwide and are not yet standard practice (Crisanti et al., 2022). Agencies often face challenges in sustaining such programs, including funding limitations, staffing constraints and difficulty integrating regular training sessions into officers’ schedules. (Mulvey & Reppucci, 1982) In addition, critics have noted that CIT adoption is uneven across jurisdictions, and recent studies have found mixed evidence regarding CIT’s impact on reducing racial disparities in police encounters. (Seo & Kruis, 2022) Research to date has focused mainly on officer attitudes and short-term outcomes, leaving important questions about long-term effectiveness and systemic equity still to be answered (Compton et al., 2022).

In one real-world case, CIT-trained officers responded to a report of a distraught individual in a public park who was threatening self-harm. Applying de-escalation and active listening techniques from their training, one officer calmly established rapport while others ensured the scene remained safe. Building on these communication skills, the decision-making model then guided the officers as they gathered information about the individual’s mental health background, considered their options, and ultimately persuaded the person to accept voluntary transport to a mental health facility without any use of force. This scenario illustrates how the combination of communication skills and structured decision-making can lead to safer resolutions for both officers and individuals in crisis.

Pro Tip

Crisis intervention skills require continual practice. After completing CIT training, seek out refresher sessions or join programs like *CIT ECHO* to keep your knowledge sharp. Participating in ongoing case discussions with mental health professionals and peers can reinforce communication techniques and remind you of community resources (Crisanti et al., 2022).

The 40-hour course uses role plays and scenarios to teach active listening, empathy, and de-escalation. Trainees learn how to build rapport, use calm body language, and have one officer speak when several responders are present. These methods follow the Communication Accommodation Theory, which says that adjusting your communication style to be respectful and flexible helps build trust and reduce conflict (Hill & Dlugolenski, 2025). CIT training also covers the Critical Decision-Making Model, a five-step process that helps officers gather information, assess risks, consider legal and policy issues, look at their options, and act while always reassessing the situation (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). At its core, the model stresses proportionality and the value of human life.

Watch Your Step

General Public: “Once officers have taken the class, they’re ready for any crisis.”

Expert Opinion: Skills decay without practice. Agencies must provide ongoing training and supervision to reinforce crisis intervention techniques; otherwise, officers may revert to force-based responses (Crisanti et al., 2022).

3.3 Outcomes and Ongoing Challenges

Slow Down and Think: *If you were designing a 40-hour CIT course, what topics would you prioritize? How would you ensure that officers retain and apply what they learn months or years later?*

Research suggests that CIT programs can produce meaningful benefits, though results vary across contexts. One of the most compelling findings comes from Memphis, where officers participating in CIT reported an approximately 80 percent reduction in injuries during mental health crisis calls (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.). However, it is important to clarify that such findings are based on observational studies and program evaluations, which can demonstrate correlation but do not establish causation. Because these study designs lack random assignment, it is difficult to rule out other factors that might influence outcomes, and stronger research designs would be needed to confirm true causal effects. This context is important to keep in mind when interpreting reported benefits. NAMI's analysis also indicates that CIT programs reduce arrests and increase referrals to mental health services (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.). Additionally, CIT can reduce the time officers spend on mental health calls and save resources for communities by diverting individuals away from jail (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.).

CIT training improves officer attitudes and knowledge about mental illness and substance use. Participants often cite personal stories shared by people with lived experience as one of the most valuable components of the training (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.). For example, a patrol officer in a recent program recounted how, after completing CIT training, she encountered a distressed individual threatening self-harm. Drawing on lessons from a service user's testimony during training, the officer approached the person with empathy and patience, which helped de-escalate the situation safely and connect them to care. Such stories illustrate how direct exposure to real experiences fosters understanding and can translate into more compassionate policing on the ground (Forney et al., 2025). Training also reduces stigmatizing attitudes; one study found that road patrol officers showed greater reductions in stigma than dispatch or corrections staff (Nick et al., 2022). This difference may be explained by the nature of road patrol work, which typically involves more direct and frequent contact with individuals in crisis situations. This exposure could make the training content feel more relevant or applicable to their daily responsibilities, helping to challenge and change pre-existing attitudes (Nick et al., 2022). The same study reported that awareness of community resources and increased self-efficacy contributed to more compassionate responses (Nick et al., 2022).

At the same time, evidence that CIT reduces arrests or use of force remains mixed. A review of CIT research found little empirical support that programs consistently reduce arrests or injuries, though they do increase officer satisfaction and self-perceived reductions in force (Rogers et al., 2019). Moreover, many communities

implement CIT programs differently, and fidelity to the Memphis model varies. Some agencies lack coordination with mental health providers or fail to provide appropriate diversion options, limiting program effectiveness (Odes et al., 2024). In light of these challenges, alternative mental health crisis response models have gained attention. Programs such as co-responder models, which pair law enforcement officers with mental health professionals, and civilian-led teams like CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) in Eugene, Oregon, aim to provide specialized support and reduce law enforcement involvement in nonviolent crisis situations. To sharpen policy choices, it can be helpful to consider the core features of each approach side by side: CIT primarily equips all officers with de-escalation and crisis response skills; co-responder models deploy police alongside mental health clinicians for certain calls; and CAHOOTS-type teams send civilian mental health professionals as primary responders to nonviolent crises. While CIT is best suited for broad departmental adoption, co-responder and CAHOOTS models leverage specialized expertise or civilian response and may more directly reduce law enforcement involvement (Carroll & El-Sabawi, 2021). Concisely comparing these alternatives highlights the range of strategies communities are considering to improve outcomes for individuals in crisis. Understanding these limitations helps agencies refine CIT practices and set realistic expectations.

Pro Tip

When evaluating crisis intervention programs, look beyond arrest statistics. Measure success by tracking reductions in injuries, increases in referrals to treatment, improvements in officer attitudes, and satisfaction among people with lived experience. Engage community partners in designing metrics so they reflect what matters most to those affected (Rogers et al., 2019; Nick et al., 2022).

Watch Your Step

General Public: “CIT programs solve all problems related to mental health calls.”

Expert Opinion: CIT improves many outcomes but is not a cure-all. Some studies find limited

evidence that CIT reduces arrests or injuries, and program fidelity varies widely. Continuous evaluation and refinement are necessary (Rogers et al., 2019).

3.4 Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Slow Down and Think:
Imagine you are tasked with measuring the impact of a crisis intervention program in your community. What data would you collect, and who would you consult to ensure your evaluation captures both quantitative outcomes and lived experiences?

Patrol officers can improve outcomes during crisis calls by using clear and flexible communication. This section shares practical techniques to build trust and resolve high-stress situations safely, even if you do not have a mental health background.

Good communication is key to handling crisis situations well. The Communication Accommodation Theory says that listening carefully, using respectful language, and adjusting your tone and body language help build trust (Hill & Dlugolenski, 2025). On the other hand, being dismissive, impatient, or using an authoritarian tone can make things worse and damage trust (Hill & Dlugolenski, 2025). CIT training teaches officers to use active listening and empathy during crisis calls. Officers practice making eye contact, summarizing what the person says, asking open-ended questions, and using silence when needed. They also learn to have one officer talk while others focus on safety (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). Officers who use these skills have shown real improvements. For example, studies show that CIT programs can reduce use-of-force incidents during crisis calls by 25% (Compton et al., 2011). In a typical crisis call with someone threatening self-harm, an officer who listens patiently, speaks gently, and asks open-ended questions can help the person feel understood. This approach can calm the situation and lead to a safe outcome, like the person agreeing to get help. But if the officer interrupts, gives commands, or is impatient, the person may feel threatened or misunderstood, which can make things worse. These examples show how flexible, empathetic communication can change the outcome of a crisis call.

However, the ability to use adaptive communication relies on the officer's physiological state. When officers are under significant stress, it becomes harder to listen effectively, speak calmly, or remain empathetic. Managing one's own stress is therefore a foundational step that enables the use of accommodating communication, as physiological calm directly supports patient, respectful verbal interactions. Effective stress-control techniques

are mutually reinforcing with skilled communication: when officers are calm, they can communicate more adaptively, and using these communication strategies can further reduce stress for all parties involved.

Besides good communication, officers also need to manage their own stress. The idea that policing is always very dangerous can make officers focus too much on risk and act in ways that hurt de-escalation efforts (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021). However, research shows that policing is safer than many people think. Knowing this helps officers slow down and use a guardian mindset, which puts everyone's safety first. Officers can use simple stress-control techniques, like tactical breathing—taking slow, deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth—to calm down. Quick mental check-ins, such as noticing how you feel or remembering your main goals, help you stay focused. Counting to five before speaking or naming things you see can also help you stay grounded. Research suggests that when officers acquire communication skills that help them build rapport and avoid repetitive commands (behaviors that reflect an orientation toward resolving situations cooperatively) they demonstrate more patient and need-responsive communication, even though these improved interpersonal behaviors alone may not directly translate to reductions in use of force (McLean et al., 2026).

Pro Tip

When communicating with someone in crisis, use the 80/20 rule: listen 80 percent of the time and speak only 20 percent. Reflect what the person says in your own words, avoid interrupting, and stay aware of your body language. Designate a single communicator to avoid confusion and conflict (Hill & Dlugolenski, 2025; Police Executive Research Forum, 2016).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Raising your voice or giving orders will make people comply faster."

Expert Opinion: Commands delivered impatiently or loudly often increase anxiety and resistance.

Accommodating communication—listening, summarizing and showing respect—builds trust and reduces tension (Hill & Dlugolenski, 2025).

3.5 Mindset, Culture and Officer Wellness

Slow Down and Think: *How does your agency reinforce the danger narrative? What steps could leadership take to promote a guardian mindset and support officer wellness during crisis responses?*

Crisis intervention works best when officers focus on empathy and shared safety, which contrasts with a traditional warrior mindset. The warrior approach assumes police work is always extremely dangerous, while the guardian approach emphasizes thoughtful response and respect. Popular culture often amplifies the sense of constant threat, but the facts tell a different story. Recent statistics reveal that line-of-duty deaths have dropped a lot in the past decade, and serious injuries on the job are less common than many think (News, 2026). Sierra-Arévalo (2021) also found that when officers overestimate danger (a feature of the warrior mindset), they may rush in, use force, and skip de-escalation. Knowing that policing is safer than many stories suggest helps officers slow down, think through their options, and treat people in crisis with respect. Officers can put this guardian mindset into practice by pausing before acting, avoiding assumptions, and using de-escalation phrases like "I want to make sure everyone stays safe" or "How can I help you right now?" A simple checklist at the scene can help officers remember these steps and connect research to daily work.

These steps can be remembered using a simple checklist at the scene.

1. The first is Pause: Take a moment before getting involved.
2. Next is Assess: Look closely and gather information about the situation and the people involved.
3. The final step is Dignify: Treat everyone with respect and state your goal to keep everyone safe.

By practicing these three pause-assess-dignify steps, officers can build empathy, patience, and a sense of shared safety during real situations.

Programs like CIT also highlight the importance of responders taking care of their own well-being (Bowers et al., 2025). Many officers feel high stress when helping people in crisis. Crisanti et al. (2022) note that effective training includes self-care and peer support, as we need to manage our own mental health to support others well. Self-care can mean doing short mindfulness exercises or deep breathing after tough calls, setting limits on

work messages during off-hours, or reaching out for counseling when needed. Peer support can be as simple as checking in with trusted coworkers, joining debriefs after critical incidents, or using programs that offer private conversations. Nick et al. (2022) found that when we build confidence in handling crises, we are less likely to stigmatize mental illness and more likely to communicate in helpful ways. Agencies can support this by offering regular training, mentorship, and supportive supervision.

Pro Tip

Cultivate a guardian mindset by reminding yourself that your goal is to ensure everyone's safety. Practise mindfulness and stress-management techniques before and after calls. Debrief with peers and supervisors to process difficult encounters and reinforce positive communication strategies (Crisanti et al., 2022; Sierra-Arévalo, 2021).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Policing is so dangerous that officers must always act as if their lives are at risk."

Expert Opinion: Policing can be risky, but exaggerating danger encourages risk-focused behaviors that undermine crisis interventions. Embracing a guardian mindset leads to safer outcomes for everyone (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021).

Chapter Summary

Effective crisis intervention depends on partnerships, training and cultural change. CIT programs

bring together law enforcement, behavioral health providers, emergency responders and community stakeholders to provide an alternative to arrest for individuals experiencing mental health crises. These programs originated in Memphis and combine 40-hour training, community collaboration and structured diversion to treatment (Maryland Office of the Public Defender, 2025). CIT training covers mental illness, co-occurring disorders, communication skills and de-escalation. Ongoing programs like *CIT ECHO* reinforce skills through weekly discussions and provide officer self-care resources (Crisanti et al., 2022). Officers learn to use the Critical Decision-Making Model, employ active listening and accommodate communication, and practise designating a single contact person when multiple responders are present (Hill & Dlugolenski, 2025; Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). These skills are essential to building trust and maintaining safety. Evidence shows that CIT programs can reduce officer injuries, decrease arrests, increase referrals to treatment and improve officer attitudes, though findings vary by program and context (National Alliance on Mental Illness, n.d.; Rogers et al., 2019). Training reduces stigma and enhances self-efficacy, especially among road patrol officers (Nick et al., 2022). However, research highlights the need for ongoing evaluation, adherence to core program elements and recognition that CIT alone cannot solve all problems related to behavioral health crises. Moving forward, agencies must foster a guardian mindset that counters the danger imperative and emphasizes empathy, communication and shared safety (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021). Officer wellness and continuous learning are critical for sustaining effective crisis intervention. By integrating these practices, law enforcement can respond more humanely and effectively to people in crisis, strengthening trust and reducing harm.

End of Chapter Activities

Case Study Analysis: Crisis in the Alleyway

Your patrol unit receives a call about a man yelling and pacing in a narrow alleyway behind a grocery store. When you arrive, you see a disheveled individual shouting at unseen people and holding a broken bottle. The store manager is frightened and wants the man removed. You suspect the man is experiencing a mental health crisis. Using the principles from this chapter, draft a short position statement answering these questions: 1. Which aspects of the CIT model would you apply first (e.g., communication, diversion, collaboration) and

why? 2. What community partners or resources (e.g., mobile crisis team, peer support specialist) would you involve, and how would you ensure their safety? 3. How would you adapt your approach if the man refused to put down the broken bottle? What de-escalation or diversion strategies would you try before considering force? Next, write a brief statement explaining how you would describe the individual's rights and needs to the store manager to promote empathy and cooperation.

Choose Your Own (Crisis) Adventure

Skills Lab 1: Crisis Scenario Role Play

In small groups, students role-play a crisis call based on the case study above. One student acts as the primary officer, another as the subject in crisis, and others as backup officers or behavioral health partners. The primary officer practises using the Critical Decision-Making Model: gathering information, assessing risks, considering legal authority and options, and acting while continuously reassessing. After the role play, the group discusses what communication techniques succeeded, where difficulties arose, and how diversion could have been improved.

Skills Lab 2: Mapping the Sequential Intercept Model

Students work together to map the Sequential Intercept Model for their local community or a hypothetical town. They identify intercept points (e.g., law enforcement, initial detention, courts) and brainstorm how crisis intervention services could divert individuals at each point. Teams propose partnerships with mental health agencies, peer support groups and crisis respite centers, and discuss barriers to implementation.

Skills Lab 3: Communication Accommodation Practice

Using prompts, students practise adjusting their communication styles to build rapport with people from different backgrounds. Scenarios include a teenager experiencing a panic attack, an elderly person with dementia who is lost, and a person with substance use disorder who is angry about losing their job. Students focus on active listening, calm tone, open-ended questions and summarizing statements. After each scenario, peers provide feedback on how well the communicator accommodated the other person's needs.

Skills Lab 4: Guardian Mindset Reflection

Students individually reflect on the "danger imperative" and identify situations in which they felt compelled to rush or focus on worst-case scenarios. In small groups, they discuss how this mindset might undermine crisis intervention. They then brainstorm ways to cultivate a guardian mindset, such as practicing mindfulness,

using time and distance, and engaging in peer support. Groups share ideas for changing organizational culture to encourage a guardian approach.

Skills Lab 5: Wellness and Self-Efficacy Plan

Students develop a personal wellness plan addressing stress management, peer support and continuing education. They identify strategies to build self-efficacy in crisis situations, such as participating in scenario training, seeking mentorship and learning about local mental health resources. Students share their plans and discuss how agencies can support officer wellness and continuous learning.

Questions That Change How You Think

1. Why is crisis intervention considered a public health approach rather than a strictly law enforcement function? Explain how collaboration with community partners supports better outcomes.
2. Describe the three core elements of the CIT model. How do training, community collaboration and diversion work together to prevent unnecessary incarceration?
3. What are some limitations of CIT programs according to existing research? How can agencies address these limitations while maintaining commitment to crisis intervention?
4. How does Communication Accommodation Theory inform the way officers should speak with individuals in crisis? Provide examples of both accommodating and non-accommodating communication.
5. Discuss the "danger imperative" in policing. How might this cultural frame conflict with a guardian mindset, and what steps can agencies take to shift the narrative?
6. Explain how self-efficacy and knowledge of community resources can reduce stigma and improve crisis responses.
7. Consider the role of lived experience stories in CIT training. Why are these stories powerful, and how can they influence officer attitudes and empathy?
8. Imagine your community lacks a CIT program but wants to develop one. What steps would you take to build partnerships, secure funding and ensure that the program follows the Memphis model?
9. How can agencies support continuous learning and skill retention after the initial 40-hour CIT course? Provide specific examples of programs or practices.
10. What does a guardian mindset mean to you personally? How would adopting this mindset influence your decisions during a crisis call?

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This chapter was created using publicly available reports, research articles and practitioner guidance. It is intended for educational purposes and does not constitute legal advice or official policy. Readers should consult local laws and policies for specific guidance on crisis intervention.

FRONTLINE LEADERSHIP

Dr. Michael McHenry

Chapter 4: Frontline Leadership

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain why first-line supervisors play a critical role in guiding officers through today's complex policing environment.
2. Identify the knowledge, skills and qualities that effective supervisors use to support their subordinates and communities.
3. Describe different supervisory styles and evaluate how each influences officer behaviour and community outcomes.
4. Outline best practices for supporting, training and empowering first-line supervisors, including wellness and accountability measures.
5. Assess how supervisors can promote procedural justice and trust both within the agency and with the public.

Chapter Overview

Picture a busy afternoon patrol. An officer is called to a park where a man is shouting at people and seems confused. The officer, who is still new, feels unsure about what to do. Her supervisor arrives, talks calmly with the man, encourages the officer to listen, and keeps bystanders safe. Once the situation is under control and the man is connected with a mental health team, the supervisor meets with the officer to talk about what went well, what could be better, and how to handle similar situations next time.

Modern policing is about more than just enforcing laws. Earlier chapters covered community policing, de-escalation, and crisis intervention—methods that ask officers to listen, communicate, and solve problems with empathy. First-line supervisors connect these ideas to everyday work. They help officers handle tough issues like homelessness, mental health crises, and new technology, all while putting leadership's goals into practice. This chapter looks at what front-line supervisors do, what makes them effective, and how they influence their teams. You'll see how different supervisory styles affect officer behavior, how agencies can support supervisors, and why fairness inside the agency helps build trust outside it. By the end, you'll see how strong first-line leadership can make the guardian approach a reality.

4.1 Supervisors at the Front Line

First-line supervisors work in a time when police work is more complicated than ever. They deal with gang issues, internet crimes, homelessness, and mental illness, often all at once, and are expected to be "everything to everybody" (COPS Office, 2020). In this role, they look out for both their officers and the community, guiding their teams through risky situations while staying professional and caring.

To succeed, supervisors need broad knowledge, technical skills and interpersonal abilities. They must reduce crime, build trust and legitimacy, and help their officers develop these qualities (COPS Office, 2020). Because they are responsible for communicating expectations and providing feedback, they bridge the gap between leadership and line officers. Yet heavy workloads and large spans of control mean supervisors cannot observe every officer directly (COPS Office, 2020). This limited oversight can add to supervisors' stress and lead to fatigue or burnout, particularly when they are expected to consistently manage both operational challenges and personnel development. Agencies should recognize the wellness impact of capacity constraints and intentionally pair oversight strategies with self-care plans and wellness support for supervisors themselves. By acknowledging these pressures and supporting supervisor well-being, agencies can promote sustainable leadership and maintain effective guidance for their teams. They must rely on communication, trust and clear expectations to ensure that policies are followed.

Supervisors can keep track of their teams and make sure everyone is accountable by focusing on three main actions: Check in, Rotate, and Review. Checking in involves regular team meetings, short one-on-one talks during shifts, and encouraging open conversations so officers feel safe sharing concerns or ideas. Rotating assignments lets officers try different roles and work with new partners, which helps supervisors see how they behave and get feedback from peers. Reviewing means looking at body camera footage and incident reports to understand what officers do when they aren't being watched directly. By using these three steps regularly, supervisors stay up to date on team dynamics, spot problems early, and create a culture where accountability and communication are expected.

First-line supervisors also put the chief's or sheriff's vision into action. When they support new efforts like community policing or crisis intervention, they encourage their teams to accept change. If they don't, new policies may not succeed (COPS Office, 2020). That's why supervisors need to understand agency goals and share them clearly with their teams.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Supervisors just do paperwork and discipline officers."

Expert Opinion: First-line supervisors are the bridge between agency leadership and patrol officers. When they fail to embrace organizational goals or do not communicate expectations clearly, even the best policy can fall apart.

4.2 Qualities of Effective Supervisors

Great supervisors are made through experience and training. The COPS Office lists many qualities that help first-line leaders serve their agencies and communities. These qualities can lead to better results in the field. For example, knowing the law, policies, and tactical skills helps officers follow the rules, which means fewer mistakes and less use of force. Strong leaders who motivate and guide their teams often see higher morale, faster response times, and fewer absences. When supervisors hold officers accountable and help them grow, they build a sense of responsibility, shown by fewer complaints from the public and more praise (COPS Office, 2020). Supervisors should know what is expected of officers and set a good example themselves.

Slow Down and Think: *If you were responsible for a squad of officers with a large span of control, how would you balance administrative duties with observing and supporting your team? What strategies would help you stay connected to their daily challenges?*

Openness and honesty are at the heart of trust. Supervisors should interact transparently with subordinates and community members, acknowledge mistakes and take responsibility when the agency is wrong. This honesty builds credibility and shows that supervisors are not infallible (COPS Office, 2020). When officers see their leaders admit errors, they are more likely to own their own mistakes and learn from them.

Good supervisors make careful decisions by collecting evidence, thinking about everyone involved, and considering problems before taking action. They avoid quick fixes and think about the results of their choices (COPS Office, 2020). To help officers, supervisors should use a simple step-by-step process for making decisions in the field (Figure 4.1).

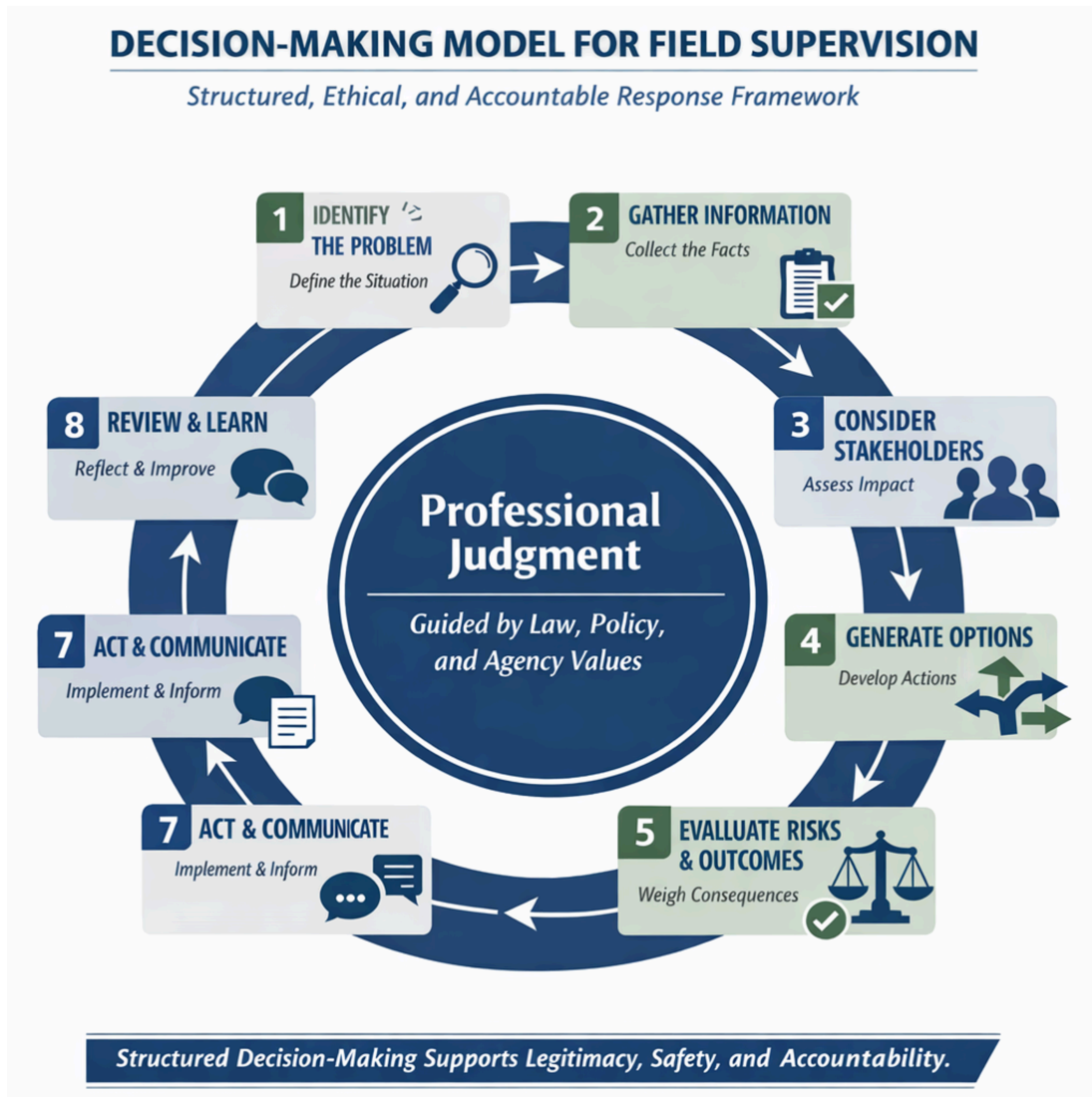

Figure 4.1: Decision-making Model for Field Supervision | Image by M. McHenry

Strategic thinking is also important. Supervisors set clear goals, balance fieldwork with paperwork, and

encourage their teams to take initiative. They focus on getting results and always look for ways to improve, not just on completing tasks (COPS Office, 2020).

Communication and listening are central. Giving internal and external stakeholders a voice is a core principle of procedural justice. Successful supervisors speak less and listen more, providing space for officers and community members to express concerns and ideas (COPS Office, 2020). For instance, during a community meeting, a supervisor might hear a resident express frustration about repeated traffic stops in their neighborhood. Instead of responding defensively, the supervisor pauses to truly listen, then acknowledges that some stops may be influenced by implicit biases that officers might not even realize they hold. By openly recognizing this possibility in front of both officers and community members, the supervisor models awareness and accountability, reinforcing a climate where everyone feels heard and respected. Respect for subordinates builds mutual trust; when supervisors treat employees with dignity, officers are more likely to treat the community fairly (COPS Office, 2020).

Cultural competency is important because police work serves many different communities. Supervisors need to be aware of their own biases and learn how to communicate well with people from all backgrounds (COPS Office, 2020). Training and real-world experience help build these skills. Working together, both inside the agency and with community partners, is just as important. Supervisors who show teamwork encourage officers to work well with residents and other groups (COPS Office, 2020). Being community-minded means understanding that building relationships and treating people fairly leads to trust over time (COPS Office, 2020).

Pro Tip

Build credibility by being honest about mistakes. When you admit an error and explain how you will fix it, you show officers and community members that integrity matters more than ego. This openness encourages subordinates to learn from their own missteps and improves trust.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "As long as officers follow orders, supervisors don't need to listen to them."

Expert Opinion: Effective supervisors listen actively, give officers a voice and respect their perspectives. Without listening, important details are missed and trust erodes.

Slow Down and Think:
Reflect on your own biases and cultural assumptions. How might these affect your decisions as a supervisor? What steps can you take to ensure you communicate effectively with people whose backgrounds differ from yours?

4.3 Supporting and Empowering Supervisors

Agencies have a responsibility to support first-line supervisors with training, resources and clear expectations. The International Association of Chiefs of Police offers a three-day First-Line Leadership (FLL) course that focuses on three elements—leader, follower and situation—and covers good and bad leadership behaviour, effective communication, human motivation, followership, emotional intelligence and building ethical organizations (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). By the end of the course, attendees learn strategies and tools to make decisions, inspire followers and achieve organizational goals.

Comprehensive training should cover Good training for supervisors should include both hard skills, like handling critical incidents and evaluating high-risk policies, and soft skills, like communication, leadership, and emotional intelligence. Supervisors need technical knowledge and people skills to lead well under pressure. Agencies can also offer job rotations and mentoring so supervisors get different experiences and learn from various leaders (COPS Office, 2020). Temporary roles in specialized or community positions help supervisors see new perspectives and can reduce burnout by breaking up routine. Research shows that these experiences make supervisors more resilient and better able to handle stress and change. Succession planning helps find and prepare future supervisors through step-by-step assignments and education. Supervisors in policy decisions and articulating clear expectations. When supervisors have a voice in developing policies—particularly those affecting crisis response, de-escalation and community policing— they are more likely to champion them (COPS Office, 2020). Executives should provide frequent feedback and consistent corrective actions, allow supervisors to exercise their individual strengths and avoid micromanaging as long as outcomes align with agency values (COPS Office, 2020).

Wellness support is vital. First-line supervisors should pay attention to the physical, social, educational and

mental health needs of their officers, watch for signs of stress, fatigue or trauma and know how to connect employees with resources and services (COPS Office, 2020). Typical wellness resources include Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), peer support groups, access to counselling or mental health professionals, confidential hotlines, fitness and nutrition programs, stress management workshops and chaplain or spiritual support services. Early intervention systems can flag patterns that indicate when coaching or referral is needed. Supervisors also need wellness support; encouraging peer support, counselling and healthy schedules helps them model resilience and empathy.

Fair and open promotion processes help build trust. The COPS Office suggests having clear job requirements, objective selection criteria, and input from both agency members and the community (COPS Office, 2020). This way, promotions are based on leadership skills, not just seniority, and show that the agency values fairness and diversity.

Pro Tip

Take care of your people and yourself. Learn the signs of burnout and trauma, and encourage officers to use wellness resources. Participate in early intervention systems and offer coaching when small issues emerge rather than waiting for bigger problems.

Watch Your Step

General Public: “Any seasoned officer can be promoted without extra training.”

Expert Opinion: Promoting on tenure alone ignores leadership qualities. Objective criteria, training and community input help ensure that new supervisors are prepared to lead fairly and effectively.

4.4 Supervisory Styles and Their Impact

Slow Down and Think: *Think about the difference between holding supervisors accountable and micromanaging them. How can agency leaders support supervisors' autonomy while still ensuring that policies are followed and mistakes are corrected?*

Researchers have identified four supervisory styles: traditional, innovative, supportive and active (COPS Office, 2020). Traditional supervisors focus on enforcing rules and procedures; innovative supervisors encourage new ideas and tactics; supportive supervisors prioritise officer welfare; and active supervisors lead by example and get involved in daily tasks. Studies of police departments in Indianapolis and St. Petersburg found that the active style has the greatest influence on patrol officer behaviour (Engel, 2003). In practice, supervisory styles are rarely rigid or isolated. Many supervisors blend elements from different approaches depending on the needs of their officers and the situation. For example, a supervisor might combine supportive and active behaviors by regularly riding along with officers to provide feedback while also checking in about their personal well-being and offering resources when stress is high. This hybrid approach allows supervisors to motivate and guide officers through shared experience while also attending to their welfare, demonstrating that effective supervision often requires flexibility and overlap between styles.

Officers who have active supervisors spend more time taking initiative, solving problems, and working with the community than those with other types of supervisors (COPS Office, 2020; Engel, 2003). Active supervisors show the behavior they want to see by riding with officers, reviewing reports, and giving feedback right away. This encourages officers to take action and focus on proactive policing and problem-solving.

However, active supervision has a downside: studies found that officers with active supervisors are twice as likely to use force against suspects (Engel, 2003). The same influence that inspires problem solving can also normalise aggressive tactics if the supervisor models them. To mitigate this risk, active supervisors must consciously model procedural justice, de-escalation and respect. For example, when an officer begins to escalate a tense encounter, a supervisor can step in and demonstrate calming techniques such as using a softer tone of voice, inviting the individual to step aside for a private conversation, or directly coaching the officer to pause and reassess the situation. A useful prompt for supervisors is: Picture an agitated suspect—what calming phrase could you model aloud for your officers in this moment? Practising real-time scenario hooks like this encourages supervisors to rehearse and internalise effective de-escalation language, making it easier to coach officers during stressful calls. By guiding officers to slow down, use open-ended questions, and focus on gaining voluntary cooperation, supervisors help redirect aggressive tendencies toward constructive, peaceful outcomes. They should emphasise communication and empathy and avoid glorifying unnecessary force.

Policing culture also shapes supervisory behaviour. Sociologist Michael Sierra-Arévalo argues that despite objective declines in officer fatalities, policing is still framed as increasingly dangerous; this "danger imperative" socialises officers into risk-focused behaviours, such as not wearing seatbelts to exit vehicles faster (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021). Supervisors must challenge this narrative and promote a guardian mindset, reminding officers that slowing down, communicating and using protective equipment protect both officers and the public. Encouraging a shift from warrior to guardian better aligns with community policing and crisis intervention principles.

Pro Tip

If you adopt an active supervisory style, lead by example in the behaviours you want to see. Model de-escalation, respectful communication and problem-solving. Avoid making aggressive tactics seem normal or desirable; what you do silently shapes what officers will do later.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Active supervisors should push officers to be more aggressive to get results."

Expert Opinion: Active supervision is about engagement and example, not aggression. Encouraging problem solving and de-escalation produces better outcomes than pressuring officers to use force.

4.5 Best Practices and Future Challenges

Law enforcement agencies have many ways to help first-line supervisors do well. Best practices include involving supervisors in policy decisions, setting clear expectations,

Slow Down and Think: *What supervisory style do you think*

would be most effective in your agency? How might your style influence officers' willingness to engage in community policing or use force? Consider the balance between productivity and restraint.

offering regular training in communication and leadership, providing job rotations, supporting ongoing education, planning for future leaders, giving frequent feedback, and including supervisors in discipline processes (COPS Office, 2020). These steps help supervisors take responsibility for their work and match their actions to the agency's values.

Accountability tools help supervisors and leaders track performance and fix problems early. Agencies can look at arrest and incident reports, performance reviews, and case notes. They can also use body camera footage and COMPSTAT meetings to spot patterns, and early intervention systems to find officers who might need help or coaching (COPS Office, 2020). Review panels, where leaders work together to look at misconduct and prevention, are another way to learn from mistakes and improve (COPS Office, 2020).

Internally, supervisors should foster procedural justice by giving voice, fairness and respect to subordinates. A procedurally just work environment increases the likelihood that officers will treat community members fairly, because they experience fairness themselves (COPS Office, 2020). Externally, supervisors must be community-minded and encourage officers to build relationships, listen and collaborate.

Special considerations apply in small agencies. Supervisors often juggle patrol duties, administration and community engagement. Promoting officers based solely on patrol performance can neglect leadership qualities; executives must identify potential leaders early and provide developmental opportunities (COPS Office, 2020). In all agencies, selecting new supervisors should be objective, transparent and inclusive to build legitimacy.

Looking forward, first-line supervisors will continue to face evolving challenges: rapid technological change, calls for greater accountability, rising awareness of mental health and substance use issues, and ongoing demands to balance public safety with civil liberties. Agencies must invest in continuing education and wellness resources, encourage creativity and adaptation and support supervisors who champion procedural justice and community engagement. To prepare for these ongoing changes, students and future supervisors should develop habits of lifelong learning by seeking out relevant workshops, conferences, and online courses. Building a strong professional network through departmental mentoring programs, professional associations, or peer support groups can help supervisors share strategies and stay informed about best practices. Regularly reflecting on field experiences, soliciting feedback from colleagues, and staying open to new ideas all help supervisors adapt with confidence. By proactively engaging in ongoing learning and relationship-building, students can position themselves to thrive amid the evolving demands of modern policing. As you look ahead to your own leadership journey, ask yourself: Which single habit will you adopt this week to model resilience

and balance for those you lead? Taking purposeful steps, even small ones, can set the foundation for lifelong growth and positive change.

Pro Tip

Use job rotations and succession planning to develop future leaders. Assign supervisors to different units, encourage them to shadow experienced mentors and create pathways for growth. These experiences broaden skills and prepare supervisors for future challenges.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Selecting supervisors based on popularity or seniority is fair and efficient."

Expert Opinion: Fairness requires objective criteria, training and broad input. Transparent selection processes build legitimacy and ensure supervisors have the qualities needed to lead.

Chapter Summary

First-line supervisors play a key role in modern policing. They handle tough issues like homelessness, mental illness, and new technology while turning leadership's goals into daily actions. Their job includes leading officers, coaching and mentoring, enforcing rules, solving problems, and connecting with the community. Supervisors who see themselves as guardians and value fairness help make community policing, de-escalation, and crisis intervention work in real life.

Effective supervisors model the behaviour they expect. They demonstrate proficiency in law, policy and tactical skills; practise honesty, critical thinking and strategic planning; listen actively; respect diversity; and collaborate internally and externally. They know that giving officers a voice and treating them with respect fosters a culture of fairness that extends to the community. Cultural competency and community-mindedness help supervisors understand those they serve and tailor responses appropriately.

Supporting supervisors means giving them training, mentoring, and resources. Agencies should invest in leadership programs, job rotations, planning for future leaders, and wellness support. Letting supervisors help shape policies, setting clear expectations, giving feedback, and not micromanaging helps them grow and lead well. Open promotion processes and early intervention systems also build accountability and trust.

Research shows that active supervision strongly affects officer behavior. It encourages problem solving and community work, but can be risky if supervisors show aggressive tactics. Supervisors need to balance being involved with being careful, and should lead by example in de-escalation and problem-solving. The idea that police work is always dangerous can make officers act unsafely, but supervisors can change this by promoting a guardian mindset that values safety, communication, and restraint.

In the future, first-line supervisors will stay central to police reform. Their impact on officer behavior, community trust, and change in the organization is huge. By following the ideas in this chapter and always learning and adapting, supervisors can guide their teams through challenges toward safer, fairer, and more effective policing.

End of Chapter Activities

Case Study Analysis: The Dual Role

You are the new first-line supervisor in a mid-sized department. One of your officers responds to a call involving a person experiencing a mental health crisis. The officer uses force quickly and the situation escalates. Body-worn camera footage shows that the officer did not attempt de-escalation and spoke in a dismissive tone. After the incident, community members express frustration and demand accountability. Meanwhile, the officer tells

you that the scene felt dangerous and there was no time to wait. You must conduct an internal review and plan next steps.

Write a short case position statement addressing these questions:

1. What did the officer do well, if anything, and what could they have done differently? Consider whether your supervision and training prepared them for this situation.
2. How will you balance accountability for the officer's actions with support for their development and well-being? What resources (training, coaching, wellness) would you recommend?
3. What actions will you take to rebuild trust with the community? How will you involve officers, community members and leadership in the response?

Next, write a brief statement explaining how you would communicate with the person in crisis if you were on scene. How would procedural justice and de-escalation principles shape your approach?

Choose Your Own (Patrol) Adventure

Skills Lab 1: Observation and Feedback

Teams watch role-play scenarios where an officer interacts with a community member. Each team assigns a supervisor who takes notes on the officer's communication, body language and adherence to policy. After the scenario, the supervisor provides feedback using respectful language, highlighting strengths and suggesting improvements. Classmates discuss how tone and specific feedback influence learning and morale.

Skills Lab 2: Decision-Making Under Pressure

Working in small groups, students are given a crisis scenario with multiple response options. Each group discusses the risks and benefits of each option using the critical decision-making model. A designated supervisor must decide which option to pursue and explain their reasoning to the group. The class reflects on how collecting information, considering policies and assessing risks lead to better decisions.

Skills Lab 3: Wellness and Early Intervention

Students design an early intervention system for a hypothetical department. They identify data points (complaints, use of force reports, sick leave), establish thresholds for review and outline steps supervisors should take when patterns emerge. Groups discuss how to balance confidentiality, support and accountability and how to encourage officers to embrace wellness resources without stigma.

Skills Lab 4: Succession Planning Workshop

In this lab, students develop a succession plan for first-line supervisors. They identify qualities needed, outline objective selection criteria and propose job rotations and mentoring opportunities to prepare future leaders. The class debates how to make the process transparent and inclusive and how to involve community members in leadership development.

Skills Lab 5: Cultural Competency Simulation

Students participate in a series of short role-plays where they interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g., a person with limited English proficiency, a transgender youth, an elder from a different faith tradition). After each interaction, supervisors and classmates discuss how communication styles, bias awareness and cultural understanding influence outcomes. Students brainstorm ways to improve their cultural competency and build trust across differences.

Questions That Change How You Think

1. Explain how first-line supervisors differ from higher-level managers and why their role is so influential in implementing community policing, de-escalation and crisis intervention.
2. Identify three qualities of effective supervisors and provide examples of how each quality improves officer performance and community trust.
3. Compare traditional, innovative, supportive and active supervisory styles. Which style do you think best supports problem solving and procedural justice? Justify your choice.
4. Discuss how openness and cultural competency help supervisors build credibility with both officers and community members. What actions demonstrate these qualities?
5. Describe how active supervision can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. How can supervisors mitigate the risks associated with increased officer use of force?
6. Outline a training and mentorship plan for new first-line supervisors. What topics should be covered, and how will you ensure continuous learning and support?
7. Explain why wellness support and early intervention systems are essential for supervisors and officers. How do these programs align with community policing and procedural justice?
8. Describe a fair and transparent promotion process for first-line supervisors. Why is input from community stakeholders important?
9. Discuss how the danger imperative can influence supervisory behavior. What steps can supervisors take to promote a guardian mindset?
10. Imagine you are a commander creating performance metrics for supervisors. Which indicators would

you include to capture success in both operations and relationships?

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EARLY INTERVENTION SYSTEMS

Dr. Michael McHenry

Chapter 5: Early Intervention Systems

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain why early intervention systems are critical for risk management and public trust in policing.
2. Identify common indicators and data sources that trigger flags in an early intervention system and describe the difference between threshold-based and data-driven models.
3. Describe best practices for designing, implementing and managing an early intervention program, including stakeholder engagement and supervisory roles.
4. Evaluate the benefits and challenges of machine-learning approaches to early intervention, and discuss the need for careful evaluation and oversight.
5. Assess how early intervention systems support officer wellness, equity and procedural justice, and connect these systems to previous topics such as community policing, de-escalation and first-line supervision.

Chapter Overview

Picture a supervisor facing a tough question: How can they notice when an officer is about to make a serious mistake before it happens, instead of after harm is done? This challenge sits at the center of modern policing. Both officers and communities stake a lot on outcomes. In Chapters 1 to 4, we explored community policing, de-escalation, crisis intervention, and the role of first-line supervisors. Each topic demonstrated the importance

of listening, communicating, and providing proactive support. Early intervention systems enable supervisors to spot behavioral patterns that may signal an officer needs help. These systems track complaints, use-of-force reports, sick days, and commendations to flag them for review before a serious incident occurs (COPS Office, 2020). Early intervention manages risk. It helps agencies allocate resources wisely, prevent harm, and build public trust (COPS Office, 2020). This chapter asks, "How can we step in before problems turn into crises?" We will explain why early intervention matters, how these systems work, and how departments can design programs that are fair, transparent, and effective. We will also examine new data-driven models that apply machine learning to predict risk (Data Science for Social Good, 2025). We will discuss challenges such as data quality, culture change, and fairness. By the end, you will see how early intervention supports officer wellness and aligns with the guardian mindset.

5.1 Why Early Intervention Matters

Law enforcement leaders have noticed that a small number of staff cause a large share of complaints and problems (COPS Office, 2020). Negative incidents, like unjustified force, racial profiling, or rude behavior, hurt people, lead to lawsuits, and damage community trust (Data Science for Social Good, 2025). An early intervention system provides a management tool that focuses on support rather than discipline. Instead, it tracks performance data and flags people who might need support (COPS Office, 2020). The aim is to identify early signs of risk and step in with coaching, training, or counseling before something serious happens (Stephens, 2011).

EIS programs reflect a shift from reactive discipline to proactive support. Unlike discipline processes, which address misconduct after it happens, early intervention programs emphasize prevention and wellness. They scan a wide array of indicators—complaints, disciplinary actions, use of force, sick days, failures to appear in court, firearm discharges, and preventable traffic collisions—to identify patterns requiring attention (COPS Office, 2020). When implemented well, these systems help supervisors monitor performance, encourage officers to self-correct, and bolster public confidence in the agency (COPS Office, 2020). Research on policing and misconduct suggests that intervening early can deter future misbehaviour (Pogarsky & Piquero, 2004) and disrupt negative social learning among peers (Chappell & Piquero, 2004). Accountability experts argue that early intervention answers the question "who polices the police?" by enabling supervisors to address issues before they harm the public (Grabiner, 2016; Walker, 2007).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Early intervention systems are just another way for supervisors to spy on officers."

Expert Opinion: The purpose of an EIS is not surveillance but support. By identifying patterns early and offering coaching and wellness resources, departments can help officers succeed and prevent harm (COPS Office, 2020).

Slow Down and Think: *Why might officers and union representatives fear an early intervention system? How could you address their concerns while still protecting the community?*

5.2 Data, Indicators and Thresholds

Traditional EIS programs rely on thresholds—specific numbers of events within a time period—to flag officers for review. For example, three use-of-force incidents in three months might trigger a supervisory meeting (COPS Office, 2020). Indicators commonly tracked include citizen complaints, disciplinary actions, use-of-force reports, sick leave, failures to appear in court, firearm discharges, preventable traffic collisions, and commendations (COPS Office, 2020). A robust system should monitor a broad set of performance metrics to provide a holistic view of behaviour, not just punitive indicators. Data should include positive metrics, such as awards or community compliments, so supervisors can recognize exemplary conduct (COPS Office, 2020).

Collecting quality data is essential. Inconsistent or inaccurate data entry can undermine the program—garbage in, garbage out (COPS Office, 2020). Supervisors must be diligent in recording incidents and accolades, and agencies should link the EIS to existing records management and dispatch systems to automate data collection where possible (COPS Office, 2020). Decisions about which indicators to track and what thresholds to set should involve a diverse group of stakeholders, including line officers, supervisors, community members, and labour representatives. Stakeholder involvement increases transparency and ensures the system reflects the agency's values and the community's priorities (COPS Office, 2020).

While thresholds provide a simple way to flag potential problems, they can be blunt tools. Short observation windows may flag proactive officers assigned to busy shifts while missing misconduct that emerges over longer periods (COPS Office, 2020). Flagging should be the beginning, not the end, of an inquiry. For example, suppose an officer receives three citizen complaints within a two-month period, triggering a threshold in

the early intervention system. The supervisor reviews the officer's recent assignments and notices that the officer worked overtime on high-stress calls during that period. The supervisor meets with the officer to discuss the context of these incidents and listens to the officer's perspective. After their conversation, the supervisor determines that additional training on managing high-volume calls could be helpful and schedules a follow-up check-in to support the officer's development. The supervisor documents these actions in the system to ensure accountability and ongoing support. Early intervention data should supplement, not replace, supervisor observations and professional judgment (COPS Office, 2020).

Pro Tip

When designing indicators for an EIS, include both positive and negative metrics. Tracking commendations, awards and community praise alongside complaints and use-of-force reports offers a balanced view of an officer's performance and helps supervisors reinforce good behaviour (COPS Office, 2020).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "If an officer hits the threshold, they must be guilty of misconduct."

Expert Opinion: Thresholds are signals, not verdicts. Supervisors need to investigate the context before drawing conclusions. Busy assignments, complex cases or extraordinary circumstances can produce flags without wrongdoing (COPS Office, 2020).

5.3 Implementation and Best Practices

Slow Down and Think:

Successful early intervention programs require clear policies, training, and a culture of support. Agencies need tools and

Consider the privacy implications of collecting extensive data on officers. What safeguards would you put in place to protect personal information and prevent misuse?

personnel to support the program, and they must communicate that the system is non-punitive (COPS Office, 2020). Unlike traditional internal affairs investigations, which focus on substantiating misconduct and often result in formal discipline, early intervention system follow-ups are focused on identifying the need for assistance and providing support to help officers succeed. For example, while an internal affairs response may lead to sanctions or written reprimands after rules are broken, an early intervention review is structured as a collaborative conversation to offer guidance, coaching, or resources before a problem escalates. Implementation should begin with a thorough assessment of existing data systems and support services. Agencies should conduct focus groups with officers at all ranks and with labor representatives to identify which behaviours warrant intervention and which types of support are available or needed (COPS Office, 2020). Listening builds buy-in and helps align the system with officers' realities.

Designing the program involves selecting indicators, setting thresholds or risk scores, and establishing follow-up procedures. Agencies can adopt one of three models: decentralized, centralized, or hybrid. In a decentralized model, line supervisors monitor data and respond directly to flags; in a centralized model, a dedicated unit collects and analyzes data and coordinates interventions; and in a hybrid model, both approaches are combined (COPS Office, 2020). The choice between these models depends on several factors, such as agency size, available personnel, and data management capacity. Smaller agencies with limited resources may benefit from a decentralized approach where supervisors are closely engaged with their teams. Larger departments with robust data infrastructure and specialized support staff are often better suited for centralized or hybrid models that can handle complex analysis and coordination.

Decision Structure Models in Law Enforcement Agencies

Comparative Overview of Decentralized, Centralized, and Hybrid Models

DECENTRALIZED	CENTRALIZED	HYBRID
Best for smaller agencies • Limited data systems • Close day-to-day supervision • Direct response by line supervisors	Best for larger agencies • Strong data management capacity • Need for standardized interventions • Dedicated oversight unit	Suitable for agencies seeking balance • Local supervisor engagement • Centralized analytical support • Shared responsibility model

Figure 5.1: Decision Structure Models for Departments of all Sizes | Image by M. McHenry

When an officer is flagged, supervisors should review the officer's recent work and document their actions. They should talk with the command staff if needed. Interventions can be as simple as a conversation or coaching. They can also be more formal, like training, counseling, or reassignment (COPS Office, 2020). The system should have clear steps for closing out notifications and checking on progress.

Being open and fair is essential. Agencies should clearly explain the EIS's goals, data, and processes to everyone. They should let officers view their own data and request corrections if needed (COPS Office, 2020). Early intervention works best when officers know it is there to help them, and when supervisors use the system in a positive way. For example, a supervisor might say, "This flag is simply an opportunity for us to check in and see if there is any way the department can support you—our goal here is to help, not to punish." Using clear scripts like this helps supervisors keep EIS talks supportive rather than confrontational. Ongoing training makes sure new staff and supervisors understand the system. Training should cover how to read the indicators and how to follow up with flagged officers (COPS Office, 2020). Agencies should also connect early intervention to officer wellness programs. Drops in performance may be signs of stress, trauma, or personal issues that need support, not punishment (COPS Office, 2020).

Special considerations apply to small agencies. They may lack resources for sophisticated data systems, but they can still establish an EIS by identifying key indicators and thresholds, forming a review committee to monitor subordinates, and documenting all interventions and audits to ensure fairness (COPS Office, 2020). Concrete

first steps for small agencies can include starting with a simple spreadsheet to track indicators, holding monthly meetings of the review committee to discuss flagged patterns, and using existing paper or electronic logs to document interventions. Agencies can also designate a staff member or supervisor to maintain records and follow up on flagged cases. As resources permit, these initial efforts can be expanded or computerized over time. In all agencies, leadership must communicate the program's purpose and involve first-line supervisors in its development. Clear messaging and participatory design reduce fears that the system will be used to collect unflattering personal information for discipline (COPS Office, 2020).

Pro Tip

Engage officers early. Hold focus groups or workshops with officers, supervisors and community members to identify which events should trigger support and what resources the agency can provide. Early participation builds trust and ensures the system addresses real needs (COPS Office, 2020).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Once the EIS is up and running, supervisors can stop paying attention to their officers."

Expert Opinion: The EIS is a tool, not a substitute for leadership. Supervisors must still observe, mentor and support their officers. Data informs decisions, but personal interaction remains essential (COPS Office, 2020).

5.4 Data-Driven Innovations and Research

Slow Down and Think: *How might a paramilitary culture resist early intervention systems, and what steps could leaders take to encourage adoption?*

Traditional systems that use set thresholds have limits. They may not predict which officers will have problems, and they cannot help decide who needs support most when resources are tight (Data Science for Social Good, 2025). To address this, data scientists and police agencies have created EIS models that use machine learning. These models combine data from human resources, internal affairs, dispatches, arrests, stops, training records, and open data to create a risk score that estimates how likely an officer is to be involved in a negative incident in the next few months (Data Science for Social Good, 2025). While "risk score" sounds technical, it really answers a simple question: "Who on my team might need extra help or support this month?" Instead of just looking at numbers, supervisors can use these insights to spot officers who may face more stress and could use more resources or guidance. By connecting data analysis to real questions, early intervention tools become more useful for people in the field.

Compared to systems that use set thresholds, data-driven EIS models can find more officers who are actually at risk and reduce the number of false alarms. For example, the Center for Data Science and Public Policy's EIS, first used in 2017, found 10–20 percent more at-risk officers and cut false positives by 50–60 percent (Data Science for Social Good, 2025). To make this clearer, if a department with 700 officers usually flagged 75 officers a year as at risk, a 10–20 percent improvement means 8 to 15 more truly at-risk officers would be found who might have been missed before. The system ranks all officers by risk, so departments can focus their resources where they are needed most and reward officers who show good behavior (Data Science for Social Good, 2025). The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department uses this model in a web tool that combines risk scores with officer history and collects supervisor feedback, helping the system improve over time (Data Science for Social Good, 2025).

Despite these promising results, machine-learning systems raise important concerns. They require high-quality, comprehensive data; biased or incomplete data can lead to unfair risk scores. Agencies must be transparent about the variables used, provide avenues for officers to review their data, and ensure that models do not perpetuate existing disparities. Specific ethical safeguards can address these challenges. For example, regular bias audits should be conducted to detect and correct patterns of unfair outcomes for any group. One practical way to operationalize this is to embed routine checkpoint questions into supervisory practice. For instance, supervisors can regularly ask, "Are particular groups over-represented among those flagged for intervention this quarter? If so, what factors might be contributing to this pattern?" By making bias reflection a routine step, agencies help ensure that equity remains central in everyday operations. Agencies should

also implement a clear appeals process that allows officers to question or challenge inaccurate or unfair risk assessments. In addition, independent oversight committees can review system design and outputs to promote accountability. Ongoing evaluation by independent researchers can help identify whether interventions reduce adverse incidents and whether the system inadvertently harms certain groups. Because research on early intervention remains limited and varied, more rigorous studies are needed to determine what works across different contexts (COPS Office, 2020).

Pro Tip

If your agency is considering a data-driven EIS, partner with data scientists, academics and community stakeholders. Collaborate on selecting variables, evaluating model accuracy and ensuring that risk scores are used to support officers, not punish them (Data Science for Social Good, 2025).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "A machine-learning model will remove bias from early intervention decisions."

Expert Opinion: Algorithms are only as fair as the data they use. Without careful oversight, data-driven systems can replicate or amplify existing biases. Transparency, evaluation and stakeholder input are vital (Data Science for Social Good, 2025).

Slow Down and Think: *What advantages and risks do you*

5.5 Challenges and Future Directions

Starting an early intervention program can be challenging. Some officers may think the system is just there to keep track of every small mistake for future discipline (COPS Office, 2020).

see in using predictive analytics to identify at-risk officers? How would you explain those trade-offs to officers and community members?

Instead of forcing a culture change from the top down, agencies should show that building a supportive culture is something everyone works on together. Leaders can bring officers into the process by asking for their ideas on how early intervention can help them do well. Open conversations and working together build trust and make officers feel like real partners in shaping a system that helps their growth and well-being. Since strict organizational structures can make change hard, involving first-line supervisors and experienced officers in planning and launching the program helps build trust (COPS Office, 2020). Strong leadership and clear, steady communication are key to creating a culture of teamwork and support.

Data quality is another challenge. When supervisors fail to enter data consistently, the system produces unreliable outputs. Agencies should invest in training and monitoring to ensure that data is complete, accurate, and timely (COPS Office, 2020). They should also allow officers to review their own data and request corrections, promoting fairness and transparency. Inconsistent data entry is just one part of a larger research gap: evaluations of EI programs are limited, and differences in metrics, time frames, and interventions make comparisons difficult (COPS Office, 2020). Scholars and practitioners call for more rigorous, multisite studies to understand how various EIS designs affect complaints, use of force, and officer wellness (COPS Office, 2020).

Early intervention should connect to officer safety and wellness. If an officer's performance drops, departments should step in to help the officer and make sure their actions do not put others at risk (COPS Office, 2020). Support can include mentoring, counseling, employee assistance programs, extra training, or temporary reassignment. Leaders should also remember that early intervention is not the same for everyone; agencies need to adjust their systems to fit local needs and keep improving them based on feedback and results (COPS Office, 2020). Groups like CALEA encourage agencies to use performance management systems like early intervention, showing that ongoing improvement is a key part of professional policing (Abner et al., 2023).

Finally, early intervention systems connect to other themes explored throughout this textbook. For example, in Chapter 1, we discussed how building community trust is fundamental to effective policing; early intervention directly supports this by allowing agencies to identify officers who may be struggling and address issues before they impact residents. In Chapter 2, we examined de-escalation, which requires emotional control and clear judgment; early intervention can reveal patterns of stress, fatigue, or personal challenges that may undermine these crucial skills. Chapter 3 highlighted the importance of crisis intervention, where early identification and support can prevent negative outcomes during high-pressure incidents. Chapter 4 emphasized the leadership role of first-line supervisors in setting standards and modeling positive behavior; these supervisors are pivotal

in the EIS process as they interpret risk scores, have candid conversations with officers, and provide necessary support. When early intervention is combined with concepts from earlier chapters—such as procedural justice and inclusive leadership—it becomes a powerful tool for building legitimacy and protecting both officers and community members.

Pro Tip

Link your early intervention system to officer wellness initiatives. If an officer's performance declines, consider whether stress, fatigue or trauma may be the cause. Offer support resources before resorting to corrective measures (COPS Office, 2020).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Once an officer is flagged, they should be punished or removed."

Expert Opinion: Flagging is an opportunity for support, not punishment. Supervisors should use interventions proportionate to the risk and focused on helping officers succeed (Stephens, 2011; COPS Office, 2020).

Chapter Summary

Early intervention systems are a proactive way to manage officer performance and risk. They started because it became clear that a small group of officers was linked to many complaints and harmful incidents, and that acting early could protect the public and help officers (COPS Office,

2020). By tracking many indicators (both good and bad), EIS programs show when officers may be moving away from what the agency expects and need guidance. Good programs depend on high-quality data, stakeholder involvement, clear steps, and a culture that sees flagging as an opportunity to help rather than punish. Research shows that early intervention can reduce complaints and use of force, but further rigorous studies are needed (COPS Office, 2020). New data-driven models look promising because they can predict risk better and help focus resources, but they must be used openly and fairly (Data Science for Social Good, 2025). Most importantly, early intervention should connect to officer wellness and procedural justice to build trust inside the agency and with the community.

End of Chapter Activities

Case Study Analysis: The Warning Lights

You are part of an internal review team in a mid-sized department implementing an early intervention system for the first time. After six months, the system flags Officer Perez for exceeding the threshold for use-of-force reports (three incidents in a 60-day period) and citizen complaints (two in the same period). Perez works a busy night shift in a high-crime area and recently received commendations for bravery. Your job is to decide what happens next.

Write a case position statement that addresses three questions in plain language:

1. What additional information should the supervisor gather before making decisions (for example, context of the incidents, officer workload, wellness concerns)?
2. What intervention would you recommend (for example, mentoring, training, counseling, assignment change) and why?
3. How will you communicate with Officer Perez to ensure the process is perceived as supportive and fair?

Next, write a second short statement that explains how the early intervention system supports risk

management and public trust. Include an explanation of how the process aligns with procedural justice principles (respect, voice, fairness).

Choose Your Own (EIS) Adventure

Skills Lab 1: Mapping Indicators

Working in groups, students list potential indicators an early intervention system could track. For each indicator, they discuss what behaviour it reflects, how it could be measured, and whether it might unfairly penalize certain officers or reward desired conduct. Teams then create a small dataset and practice setting thresholds or creating simple risk scores. The goal is to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various indicators.

Skills Lab 2: Focus Group Simulation

Students role-play an agency focus group. Assign roles for patrol officers, supervisors, union representatives and community members. Using a facilitator guide, discuss concerns about implementing an early intervention system, desired indicators and available support services. After the session, the class drafts key takeaways and strategies for building buy-in.

Skills Lab 3: Intervention Design Challenge

Given a case file with sample EIS flags and context (performance data, commendations, health notes), teams design an intervention plan. Each plan should include specific actions, timelines and follow-up steps. Students present their plans and discuss how interventions balance accountability with wellness and support.

Skills Lab 4: Evaluating Algorithmic Risk

Students review a simplified dataset and use a basic predictive model (e.g., logistic regression) to assign risk scores to officers. They compare the model's predictions with actual outcomes and discuss false positives and false negatives. The class debates how to interpret and use risk scores and what safeguards are necessary to ensure fairness.

Skills Lab 5: Policy Drafting Workshop

Participants draft a short policy outlining how their agency will implement an early intervention system. The policy should address data collection, privacy, thresholds, interventions, training, transparency and evaluation.

Groups share and critique policies, focusing on clarity, fairness and alignment with procedural justice principles.

Questions That Change How You Think

1. Why is early intervention considered a form of risk management? Discuss how it protects officers, agencies and communities.
2. Explain the difference between a threshold-based early intervention system and a data-driven, predictive system. What are the advantages and challenges of each?
3. Design a set of three indicators for a small agency's early intervention program. Justify why you chose them and how you would set thresholds.
4. How does engaging line officers and labour representatives in the design of an EIS improve the system's effectiveness and legitimacy?
5. What role do first-line supervisors play in interpreting and acting on early intervention data? How can they balance accountability and support?
6. Discuss potential privacy concerns raised by extensive data collection in an EIS. How would you address these concerns in policy and practice?
7. Consider a data-driven EIS that predicts an officer's risk of an adverse incident. How should the agency test and validate the model to ensure fairness and accuracy?
8. Identify two ways an EIS could inadvertently reinforce biases or disparities. Propose strategies to minimize these risks.
9. In what ways does linking early intervention to officer wellness change the conversation about accountability? Provide examples.
10. Imagine you are a police chief in a small rural department with limited resources. Outline a basic early intervention system you could implement and explain how you would evaluate its success.

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INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Dr. Michael McHenry

Chapter 6: Internal Affairs and Accountability

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the role of internal affairs in upholding integrity and building community trust.
2. Explain the key components of a fair, accessible and transparent complaint process, and why citizen engagement is vital.
3. Identify structural and operational best practices for establishing and managing internal affairs functions, including considerations for small agencies and independent oversight bodies.
4. Discuss how recruitment, ethics training, early intervention and cultural change support a professional standards environment.
5. Evaluate current challenges and innovations in internal affairs, including the use of technology, independent reviews and strategies for transparency and accountability.

Chapter Overview

Maria enters her local police station, anxious but determined to report an officer's disrespectful behavior during traffic stops. She fears her complaint will be ignored or that nothing will change. Instead, the process is simple: her complaint is recorded, and she receives updates within days. Weeks later, at a town hall, department leaders explain how her complaint was addressed, and she sees real changes. Maria's experience illustrates why

accessibility, fairness, thoroughness, and transparency matter: these are the four pillars in this chapter. Her story shows that every policy affects real people and gives institutions real opportunities to build or restore trust.

Earlier chapters covered how community policing, de-escalation, crisis intervention, and first-line supervision support a guardian style of policing. This chapter focuses on internal affairs and its critical role in upholding organizational standards from within. Specifically, it examines how internal affairs investigations maintain integrity, help regain community trust after misconduct, and fit within a broader system of recruitment, training, early intervention, and accountability (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Because one unethical act can damage the reputation of many officers (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009), the chapter highlights how internal affairs demonstrates to the community that problems will be addressed.

For example, after a public complaint about excessive force by a local police department, a thorough and transparent investigation was conducted, with investigators interviewing witnesses and reviewing body camera footage. The officer involved was held accountable, policies were updated, and community forums were organized as a result, leading to increased community confidence as demonstrated by later surveys. Such cases illustrate that strong internal investigations can restore legitimacy and demonstrate a genuine commitment to accountability. In this chapter, you will learn about fair and open complaint processes, building effective internal affairs units, emphasizing ethics and culture, and exploring innovations like independent oversight and body-worn cameras. Understanding these systems clarifies how internal accountability fosters citizen trust.

6.1 The Role of Internal Affairs in Building Trust

Public trust in law enforcement depends on the belief that misconduct will be addressed swiftly and fairly. When unethical behavior occurs, the internal affairs function serves as the primary means of reassuring the community that the agency will resolve the issue (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Experts believe that internal affairs should be viewed not as a separate activity but as part of an agency-wide professional standards effort encompassing hiring, training, and rewarding performance (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). The IACP's *Building Trust* guide emphasizes that internal affairs must be integrated into recruitment and ethics initiatives to build a continuum of trust and professionalism (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). This professional standards continuum refers to the connected stages of recruitment, training, early intervention, and accountability, showing how each step builds on the last to create a comprehensive culture of integrity.

Internal affairs units investigate allegations ranging from verbal abuse to corruption. They process complaints, determine whether allegations are administrative or criminal, conduct investigations, and recommend

dispositions. The International Association of Chiefs of Police's *Building Trust* guide highlights a few core components as important for effective internal affairs: ensuring complaint processes are accessible, fair, thorough, and transparent; encouraging citizen engagement and participatory oversight such as review boards; and providing clarity for both staff and the public about rights and procedures (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Through integrating these elements, departments signal that police responsiveness goes beyond outcomes to the quality of interactions with the community.

Research shows that public perceptions of legitimacy depend not only on outcomes, but also on procedural justice, meaning how people are treated during interactions (Italiano et al., 2021). Importantly, a distinction exists between fair outcomes and fair procedures: even when complainants do not receive their desired result, the process can still feel legitimate if each investigative step is communicated clearly and respectfully. When individuals understand why a decision was made and see that the procedures were followed fairly, they are more likely to accept an unfavorable outcome. Internal affairs investigations must therefore be conducted with respect, clarity, and impartiality. When the community sees that complaints are handled fairly, trust increases; when investigations seem biased or opaque, mistrust grows (Weitzer & Tuck, 2005).

Internal accountability also deters misconduct. Deterrence theory suggests that certainty of detection and sanction reduces the likelihood of rule violations (Pogarsky & Piquero, 2004). Social learning theory suggests that officers learn behaviours from coworkers and supervisors; effective investigations and discipline interrupt negative learning cycles (Chappell & Piquero, 2004). Independent analyses of police misconduct identify structural and individual factors that predict misconduct (Boateng et al., 2023). Internal affairs, coupled with early intervention and facilitative supervision, address both deterrence and social learning by identifying matters early and offering corrective action. Community groups and scholars ask, "Who polices the police?" (Grabiner, 2016). A solid internal affairs function, supported by independent oversight when needed, offers one answer.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Internal affairs only protects officers and covers up wrongdoing."

Expert Opinion: Effective internal affairs units investigate misconduct impartially and transparently. They are part of a professional standards continuum that includes recruitment, training, early intervention and external oversight (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009).

6.2 Complaint Processes and Citizen Engagement

Slow Down and Think:
Imagine a high-profile misconduct case in your community. What internal and external steps would help rebuild trust? Consider transparency, fairness and engagement with citizens.

A fair complaint process starts with accessibility. The IACP guide notes that the complaint process should not discourage, dishearten, or intimidate complainants (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Departments must accept complaints in multiple forms (in person, by telephone, online, and anonymously) and inform the public how to file them (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Anonymous complaints should be investigated with the same diligence as named reports. An accessible complaint process empowers marginalized communities to seek redress (Saadi & Ray, 2023). For example, a Spanish-speaking teenager who witnesses police misconduct can use an online portal available in several languages to submit a complaint from her mobile phone without fear of reprisal. Similarly, youth or individuals unfamiliar with formal complaint processes may find clear step-by-step digital instructions more approachable than usual in-person methods. By reducing practical and language barriers, agencies ensure that the opinions of those least likely to file complaints (including non-English speakers, undocumented residents, and young people) are heard and valued.

The IACP outlines four principles for an effective complaint process: it must be comprehensive (all complaints are investigated), accessible (information is widely available), equitable and thorough (unbiased investigations), and transparent (the process is understood by staff and the public) (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Departments should use brochures, multiple languages, web pages, and community meetings to inform citizens about their rights (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Complaint records should be tracked electronically, stored separately from personnel files, and kept secure to protect privacy (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Officers must be notified of complaints in writing and informed of their rights and responsibilities (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Citizen review boards can increase transparency by providing independent assessments of investigations.

As one community review board member from a mid-sized city explained, "Our role is to ensure the community voice is heard and that investigations are not just fair, but are seen as fair by everyone involved. When we ask tough questions or request more information, it strengthens the process and reassures people that accountability matters."

United Nations guidelines note that internal investigations may be subject to conflicts of interest, as officers are familiar with the system and may know the investigators; therefore, separate units or independent bodies help ensure unbiased outcomes (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). Independent complaints bodies must have the authority and capacity to conduct investigations autonomously; otherwise, their credibility suffers (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). In the United States, some agencies have formal civilian review boards, while others use auditors or monitors.

An example of transparency is the public release of an annual internal affairs report by a police department, sharing statistics on complaints, use-of-force incidents, and vehicle pursuits. Following the release of such a report, a significant increase in website visits was observed, indicating how public access to data can drive participation and promote meaningful oversight (Colombia Police Department, 2020). These types of reports allow communities to monitor trends and hold organizations accountable.

Pro Tip

Make your complaint process welcoming and inclusive. Provide multiple ways to file complaints, including anonymous options. Advertise the process through community meetings, social media and translated materials. Training every employee to accept and document complaints ensures fairness and builds trust (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Anonymous complaints aren't credible and shouldn't be investigated."

Expert Opinion: Anonymous reports may be the only safe option for some complainants. Investigating all allegations protects both officers and the public and signals that the department values accountability (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009).

Slow Down and Think: *What barriers might prevent people from filing complaints against the police? How could your agency reduce those barriers while respecting due process for officers?*

6.3 Building and Managing an Internal Affairs Function

To ensure credibility, the internal affairs function should be housed in a distinct Office of Professional Standards (OPS) (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). An OPS coordinates ethics training, mentoring, and internal investigations, strengthening a culture of integrity. Midsize and large agencies may staff a dedicated OPS, but small departments can partner regionally to share resources and uphold consistent expectations across agencies (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). When resources are limited, agencies might appoint an outside investigator or collaborate with neighbouring jurisdictions to avoid conflicts of interest (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). In all cases, investigators should be of a higher rank than the subject officer and from different units to minimize bias (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011).

Internal affairs units should establish written directives that delineate which types of complaints supervisors handle and which are referred to internal affairs (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Minor infractions, such as tardiness or rudeness, can often be addressed by the chain of command. Serious allegations, such as corruption, brutality, misuse of force, breach of civil rights, or criminal conduct, should be investigated by internal affairs or, when necessary, an independent body (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Investigators must track complaints electronically and securely store the records separate from personnel files (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Protecting confidentiality protects both complainants and officers; witness protection measures may be necessary when complainants face retaliation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011).

Small agencies commonly lack dedicated internal affairs staff. UN guidelines recommend creating independent complaints bodies with the authority and capacity to investigate autonomously (United Nations Office on

Drugs and Crime, 2011). Where this is not feasible, agencies should at least appoint investigators from outside the subject's chain of command and rotate investigators to prevent familiarity. Partnerships with county or state agencies can provide resources for forensic analysis, witness protection, and legal support.

Even with limited resources, small agencies can take practical, low-cost steps to strengthen internal accountability. For example, they can create a simple complaint log (paper or digital) to ensure every complaint is tracked and reviewed, visibly post clear instructions on how citizens can file complaints, and designate a small, rotating group of supervisors to review cases to promote impartiality. Small agencies might also establish informal agreements with neighboring departments to exchange reviewers for sensitive cases or to participate in regional training on ethics and investigations. Regardless of size, agencies must document all investigations and publish aggregate data to retain transparency (Columbia Police Department, 2020).

To gauge progress in the first year, small agencies can track practical metrics that make accountability visible. Three measurable outcomes include: (1) average time to close a complaint from date of filing to resolution, (2) percentage of complaints closed within a target timeframe (such as 60 or 90 days), and (3) rate of repeat complaints involving the same officer or similar conduct. Monitoring these outcomes helps agencies identify bottlenecks, demonstrate responsiveness, and show the community that steps toward improvement are real and measurable. By creating clear benchmarks and regularly reviewing these metrics, even small agencies can turn their accountability checklist into a living performance tool.

Table 6.1: Strengthening Internal Affairs in Small Agencies—First Steps That Build Capability

Table 6.1: Strengthening Internal Affairs in Small Agencies—First Steps That Build Capability

Concrete first step	How this strengthens a small department's capability	Problem(s) it helps solve
Create a basic, confidential complaint log (paper or digital) and record *all* complaints promptly.	Creates a consistent system for tracking issues over time, spotting repeat patterns, and ensuring follow-through even with limited staffing.	Lost or "informal" complaints, inconsistent handling, inability to show what was reviewed and resolved, and missed early warning signals.
Post clear, step-by-step instructions for filing a complaint in public spaces and on the agency website in multiple languages.	Standardizes intake, reduces staff confusion, and increases access so community members know how to raise concerns without barriers.	Claims that the agency "makes it hard to complain," inequitable access, fewer valid reports reaching supervisors, and avoidable conflict at the front desk.
Assign one or more supervisors (rotating when possible) from outside the involved officer's immediate line of command to review complaints for impartiality.	Adds separation and credibility, strengthens fairness, and reduces the risk of loyalty-based decision-making in close-knit teams.	Perceived "cover-ups," conflicts of interest, biased decisions, and weakened public trust in findings.
Develop informal partnerships with nearby agencies to share experienced investigators or trade reviewers for sensitive cases.	Expands expertise without hiring new staff, increases investigative quality, and provides neutral review when the agency is too small to separate roles.	"No capacity" to investigate complex cases, perceived bias in small departments, delays, and errors caused by limited experience.
Participate in regional or online training opportunities on ethics, investigations, and complaint handling.	Builds shared standards, improves supervisory confidence, and strengthens consistency across cases with practical skill refreshers.	Outdated practices, inconsistent investigations, weak documentation, and preventable misconduct driven by unclear expectations.
Store complaint records securely and separately from personnel files to protect privacy.	Protects confidentiality, reduces unauthorized access, and supports clean information management for supervisors and investigators.	Privacy breaches, retaliation concerns, compromised investigations, and legal exposure from poor records handling.
Report aggregate complaint and resolution data annually to leadership and, when possible, to the public.	Strengthens accountability, reinforces a learning culture, and supports leadership decisions about training, supervision, and policy improvement.	Rumors replacing facts, weak transparency, repeated problems that never get addressed system-wide, and loss of legitimacy after incidents.

By starting with these practical measures, even small and rural agencies can increase accountability, respond to community concerns, and make substantial progress toward professional standards.

Pro Tip

In small or resource-limited agencies, consider forming a regional Office of Professional Standards with neighbouring departments. Shared investigators can handle serious complaints, ensuring independent review and professional development for staff (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Letting officers investigate their own colleagues will never be fair."

Expert Opinion: Conflict of interest is a real concern. Agencies mitigate this by assigning investigators from different units or higher ranks and, when possible, using independent complaints bodies or regional OPS structures (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011).

6.4 Recruitment, Ethics and Cultural Change

Building a culture of integrity starts long before a complaint is filed. The IACP guide emphasizes recruitment and hiring practices that select service-oriented candidates with strong ethical character and resilience (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Personality traits such as emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness predict success in law enforcement (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Agencies should broaden recruitment outside of traditional sources and actively seek diverse candidates who

Slow Down and Think: *How would you protect witnesses in an internal affairs investigation? What measures could you implement to encourage reporting while ensuring fairness to the accused?*

reflect the communities they serve (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Rigorous background checks, including review of previous employment records, help prevent problematic officers from moving between agencies (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009).

Ethics and integrity training must be woven into every stage of an officer's career. The IACP recommends that training begin in the academy and continue regularly, addressing moral decision making, discretion, and procedural justice (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Leaders should model ethical behavior and create a culture that promotes openness, fairness, and high-quality service (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Early intervention systems complement training by flagging behavioural patterns and providing support before misconduct escalates (COPS Office, 2020). These active measures align with theories of deterrence and social learning, reinforcing positive norms (Pogarsky & Piquero, 2004; Chappell & Piquero, 2004).

Research on workplace deviance highlights the role of job insecurity, stress, and ethical climate (Soomro et al., 2019). A supportive work environment that values wellness and mental health can reduce stressors and deviance (Dhanani et al., 2022). Officers who adopt a guardian mindset, which emphasizes service and empathy, are less likely to view the public as adversaries (Sierra-Arévalo, 2021). Training should therefore include communication skills and cultural competency to help officers interact respectfully with diverse communities (Cassino & Rogers, 2016). Militant organizational cultures can worsen risk-taking and misconduct; conversely, an ethical culture fosters accountability and trust (Bieler, 2016).

Pro Tip

Integrate ethics and procedural justice into all training. Use scenarios that challenge officers to navigate moral dilemmas, recognize bias and practice fair decision making. Reinforce lessons through mentoring and ongoing discussions (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Misconduct happens because some officers are just bad apples."

Expert Opinion: Individual choices matter, but organizational culture, stress and social learning also influence behaviour. Hiring, training, supervision and early intervention help create an environment where misconduct is less likely (Soomro et al., 2019; Chappell & Piquero, 2004).

6.5 Challenges, Transparency and Future Directions

Slow Down and Think: *How can an agency balance tactical readiness with a guardian mindset? What role does leadership play in shaping culture?*

Implementing an effective internal affairs program faces several challenges. Resistance from officers and unions may stem from fears that the system is punitive or biased. One prominent area of contention is body-worn camera policy: while management may emphasize the value of cameras in promoting transparency and building public trust, unions frequently raise concerns about privacy, the potential for footage to be used unfairly in disciplinary actions, and questions around who controls access to the recordings. These unresolved debates about oversight, policy scope, and evidentiary standards continue to shape how body-camera programs are implemented. Agency leaders must communicate clearly that internal affairs and early intervention exist to support officers and protect the community (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Data quality and resource limitations can hinder investigations; inconsistent record-keeping produces unreliable results. Agencies should invest in training and technology to ensure accurate documentation and analysis (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009).

Technology is increasingly important for accountability. Body-worn cameras provide objective evidence that can corroborate or refute allegations of misconduct. Systematic reviews show that when body-worn cameras are activated consistently, use-of-force incidents and complaints often decline (Crow et al., 2017). However, research also highlights variation in activation rates and the need for clear policies and enforcement (Katz & Huff, 2023). Internal affairs units should champion body-worn camera policies that require activation during interactions and ensure that footage is accessible for investigations. Other technologies, such as digital complaint portals, allow for easier reporting and tracking.

Independent oversight is another vital component. The UNODC manual emphasises that independent complaints bodies should have the power and capacity to investigate autonomously (United Nations Office

on Drugs and Crime, 2011). High-profile cases such as the U.S. Department of Justice investigations of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (2011) and the Ferguson Police Department (2015) illustrate what happens when internal accountability fails. Consent decrees resulting from these investigations mandate reforms to complaint processes, investigations, training, and data collection. These examples show how external review can prompt agencies to adopt best practices.

Transparency builds trust. Agencies should publish annual internal affairs reports, which provides statistics on complaints, use-of-force incidents, and pursuits (Columbia Police Department, 2020). Sharing trends, outcomes, and reforms demonstrates accountability and invites public dialogue. Communication accommodation theory suggests that respectful, empathetic communication promotes trust (Italiano et al., 2021). Internal affairs investigators and spokespersons must therefore communicate findings clearly and compassionately. External research shows that communities expect fairness and clear explanations after critical incidents (Weitzer and Tuck, 2005).

Looking ahead, agencies should continue to evaluate and refine internal affairs processes. Research is mixed on the effectiveness of various oversight models; more rigorous, multisite studies are needed (IACP, 2009). Agencies should collaborate with academics and community stakeholders to assess complaint systems, early intervention programs, and independent oversight. Innovations such as predictive analytics may support early warning, but they must be implemented carefully to avoid reinforcing biases (Data Science for Social Good, 2025). Internal affairs works best when embedded in a broader culture of ethics, transparency, and partnership.

Pro Tip

Use technology wisely. Body-worn cameras, digital complaint portals and data analytics can enhance accountability, but policies must ensure consistent use, privacy protection and fair evaluation (Crow et al., 2017; Data Science for Social Good, 2025).

Watch Your Step

General Public: "More oversight will solve all misconduct problems."

Expert Opinion: Oversight is necessary but not sufficient. Accountability must be paired with robust training, early intervention, ethical leadership and community partnership (IACP, 2009; Abner et al., 2023).

Chapter Summary

Internal affairs units are the guardians within law enforcement agencies, tasked with investigating misconduct and upholding professional standards. Misconduct by even one officer can undermine public trust (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Effective internal affairs functions are part of a broader professional standards continuum that includes recruitment, training, early intervention, and ethical leadership (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). An accessible, comprehensive, fair, and transparent complaint process invites citizen participation and ensures that allegations are taken seriously (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2009). Establishing an Office of Professional Standards and, when needed, independent oversight bodies helps prevent conflicts of interest (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). Recruitment and ethics training build a culture of integrity, while early intervention systems provide proactive support. Challenges remain, including data quality, resistance to oversight, and the requirement for rigorous evaluation. However, innovations such as body-worn cameras and predictive analytics offer new tools. Above all, internal affairs must operate transparently and in partnership with the community, reinforcing the guardian mindset and ensuring that police protect and serve with honor and fairness.

End of Chapter Activities

Case Study Analysis: The Anonymous Complaint

Your agency receives an anonymous complaint alleging that Officer Kim repeatedly used profanity and racially insensitive language during a traffic stop. Body-worn camera footage is unavailable because the camera was not activated. Officer Kim's personnel file shows recent stress-related sick leave but no prior complaints. The complainant fears retaliation and refuses to reveal their identity.

Prepare a case position statement that answers these questions:

1. How should the complaint be received and processed under principles of accessibility and fairness? What additional information or evidence should be gathered?
2. What investigative steps should the internal affairs unit take, and who should conduct the investigation to minimize conflicts of interest? How can the agency protect the complainant's anonymity while respecting Officer Kim's rights?
3. What interventions or outcomes might result if the allegations are substantiated? Consider training, counseling, discipline and early intervention.

Write a second statement explaining how transparent communication with the public about the complaint process supports community trust. Describe how the absence of body-worn camera footage affects the investigation and what policies could prevent similar gaps.

Choose Your Own (Internal Affairs) Adventure

Skills Lab 1: Designing a Complaint Intake System

Working in teams, students design a complaint intake system for a fictitious agency. They decide how complaints can be filed (in person, by phone, online, anonymously), what information is collected, and how staff are trained to receive complaints. Each team presents its design and discusses how it addresses accessibility, fairness and transparency.

Skills Lab 2: Simulating a Citizen Review Board

Students role-play a meeting of a citizen review board reviewing a high-profile complaint. Roles include board members, internal affairs investigators, the accused officer's representative and community observers. After deliberation, the class reflects on the dynamics of citizen oversight and how it complements internal investigations.

Skills Lab 3: Independent Investigation Exercise

Students are given a scenario in which a small agency must investigate a serious allegation against a senior officer. They draft a plan that includes selecting investigators from another jurisdiction, protecting witnesses, notifying the officer and documenting findings. The class discusses challenges and strategies for maintaining impartiality.

Skills Lab 4: Culture Audit Workshop

In this lab, students conduct a mini culture audit of a law enforcement agency. They identify factors that influence ethical behaviour (recruitment practices, training, supervision, peer norms) and propose changes to promote a guardian mindset. Teams connect their recommendations to early intervention and internal affairs functions.

Skills Lab 5: Policy Analysis for Body-Worn Cameras

Students review sample body-worn camera policies and evaluate how activation requirements, data retention and access rules affect internal affairs investigations. They revise the policies to enhance transparency and accountability while protecting privacy.

Questions That Change How You Think

1. How do internal affairs investigations contribute to community trust? Provide examples of policies or practices that enhance or undermine trust.
2. Describe the four principles of an effective complaint process. Why is each principle essential for accountability?
3. Explain why the internal affairs function should be part of a broader professional standards continuum rather than a stand-alone unit.
4. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of civilian review boards. How can they complement internal investigations?
5. Identify two challenges to implementing an internal affairs program and propose strategies to overcome them.
6. How can recruitment and ethics training reduce the likelihood of misconduct? Describe specific practices an agency might adopt.
7. Evaluate the role of technology—such as body-worn cameras and predictive analytics—in internal affairs and accountability. What safeguards are needed?
8. Reflect on a real or hypothetical high-profile misconduct case. How would you design the investigation

to ensure fairness, protect complainants and communicate outcomes transparently?

9. Explain how stress, job insecurity and organizational culture contribute to workplace deviance among officers. How can internal affairs collaborate with wellness programs to address these issues?
10. Should internal affairs functions be completely independent of law enforcement agencies? Discuss the benefits and challenges of independence versus integration.

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This chapter was developed from publicly available research and guidance documents. It is intended for educational purposes and does not constitute legal advice or official policy. Readers should consult local laws and agency policies for specific guidance.

BUILDING A STRONG TEAM – RECRUITMENT, HIRING, PROMOTION AND RETENTION

Dr. Michael McHenry

Chapter 7: Building a Strong Team – Recruitment, Hiring, Promotion and Retention

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain why recruiting, hiring, promotion and retention are essential to the effectiveness and legitimacy of a law-enforcement agency.
2. Identify the causes of the current staffing crisis and describe strategies for recruiting a diverse and qualified workforce.
3. Discuss equitable hiring practices, including the use of validated assessments and the removal of unnecessary barriers.
4. Describe how agencies can improve retention and promotion through mentorship, fair processes and supportive work environments.
5. Evaluate innovative approaches—such as data-driven recruitment, behavioural insights and community partnerships—and explain how they can strengthen recruitment and retention outcomes.

Chapter Overview

Earlier chapters explored how internal accountability, early-warning systems, and first-line supervision help agencies manage risk and build trust. This chapter turns to the human side of policing: how agencies attract, select, promote, and retain the people who make the mission possible. Evidence shows that recruiting diverse, qualified personnel and providing clear pathways for promotion and retention improves community trust and performance (see Chapter 1 for diversity benefits and Chapter 4 for leadership). Yet policing faces a staffing crisis, fuelled by public mistrust, generational shifts, and outdated recruitment practices. Here you will learn why this crisis exists, what research tells us about hiring and retention, and how innovative approaches can build a strong, community-focused team.

7.1 Understanding the Staffing Crisis

Law-enforcement agencies cannot fulfil their mission without recruiting and retaining a capable, diverse, and committed workforce. Recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention are therefore foundational to effective policing and positive community relations (COPS Office, 2019). When agencies recruit talented people, mentor them, and promote based on merit, employees thrive, turnover costs decline, and community trust grows (COPS Office, 2019).

Despite their importance, policing has faced a recruitment and retention crisis for decades. Human resources professionals identify policing as the hardest government sector to staff; the percentage of experts reporting difficulty filling police positions rose from 15 percent in 2015 to 32 percent in 2019 (Schafer & Nelson, 2022). Media scrutiny following high-profile use-of-force incidents and calls for reform have eroded public trust and made policing a less attractive career (Schafer & Nelson, 2022). Fragmentation adds to the challenge: more than 12,000 municipal departments and 3,000 county agencies recruit separately, requiring applicants to complete similar tests multiple times and lengthening hiring timelines (Schafer & Nelson, 2022).

The way policing is portrayed also affects recruitment. Popular media and recruitment materials often emphasise toughness, force, and aggression, projecting a "warrior" image that misrepresents the daily work of policing, which mostly involves problem-solving, communication, and nonviolent conflict resolution (Schafer & Nelson, 2022). Traditional police culture reinforces this misconception by prioritising physicality, coercion, and authoritarian behaviour—traits that may deter applicants who are drawn to service and collaboration (Schafer & Nelson, 2022).

Fewer young people are choosing law-enforcement careers. Factors include strained relations between police and communities, lack of trust after high-profile incidents, limited awareness of career opportunities, intense

competition for applicants, and bureaucratic obstacles (COPS Office, 2019). These challenges illustrate the complexity of modern policing and underscore the need for agencies to rethink their recruitment and retention strategies.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Policing is all about toughness and fighting bad guys."

Expert Opinion: Most police work involves communication, conflict resolution and helping people. Emphasising only the warrior image deters candidates who excel at empathy, problem-solving and community engagement (Schafer & Nelson, 2022).

7.2 Recruiting a Diverse and Qualified Workforce

Slow Down and Think: *Why might younger workers be hesitant to apply for law-enforcement jobs? How could agencies communicate the service-oriented aspects of the job more effectively?*

Recruitment is the gateway to building a strong team. To be effective, recruiting must be proactive, inclusive, and data-driven. Agencies can no longer wait for applicants to show up; they need dedicated recruitment teams that engage communities, attend career fairs, and use modern outreach tools such as social media and user-friendly websites (Kasper, 2006). Research shows that departments prosper when they reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, including race, gender, language, life experience, and cultural background (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Diverse officers bring a wider range of skills—interpersonal communication, empathy, problem-solving, and cultural competence—that improve legitimacy and reduce excessive force (Wiseman, 2022).

Yet recruitment faces multiple barriers. Fragmentation means each department must market itself, but many lack resources for robust campaigns. Applicants become frustrated by having to repeat similar tests across multiple agencies, leading some to abandon the process (Schafer & Nelson, 2022). Media depictions and paramilitary messaging may discourage women and people of color from applying (Schafer & Nelson, 2022). Traditional selection practices—such as rigid physical requirements, cognitive tests, and residency rules—often

exclude underrepresented groups, while overemphasising backgrounds such as prior military service can limit the pool (COPS Office, 2019).

Innovative strategies can expand the candidate pool. Data analytics teams can analyse existing data to identify which recruitment strategies work and pinpoint attrition triggers. They can help agencies remove outdated requirements, such as unnecessary education or residency rules, that do not predict success (Wiseman, 2022). Boot camps, such as Baltimore's "Fit to Serve" program, help potential recruits improve their fitness and interact informally with officers, closing gender gaps in physical tests (Wiseman, 2022). Behavioural insights experiments, including text message nudges, personalised postcards, and messages that emphasise belonging, have increased application completion rates and attracted more diverse applicants (Wiseman, 2022).

Despite these innovations, cultural barriers often persist beneath the surface. Many recruitment materials continue to use "warrior" imagery or combative language, which can discourage applicants who value collaboration and service. To prompt reflection, consider this question: What language and images appear in your agency's recruitment brochures and videos? As a brief self-assessment, review two pieces of agency recruitment material and tally words or images that emphasize force, combat, or aggression. What message might this convey to potential applicants from different backgrounds? Inviting teams to audit their own materials can spark meaningful conversations around culture and inclusivity.

However, these innovative approaches are not without challenges. Implementing data analytics or new recruitment programs may require up-front investment in technology, skilled staff, and training. Smaller or under-resourced agencies may lack the capacity to collect and analyse sufficient data or to sustain targeted outreach over time. To address these limitations, small agencies can take practical, low-cost steps to strengthen their recruitment efforts. For example, they can partner with local colleges or community organizations to share outreach responsibilities and tap into new candidate pools. Cooperative agreements with neighboring agencies can allow for shared testing dates or joint advertising, reducing redundancy and costs. Leveraging free or low-cost online tools such as social media platforms, local job boards, or municipal websites enables broader communication without major expense. Small agencies can also seek technical assistance or grant funding from state police associations or national organizations to design and evaluate recruitment materials. Building relationships with trusted community leaders or advocacy groups helps tailor messages and reach underrepresented groups at little cost. There is a risk that solutions such as boot camps and behavioural experiments, while promising, may not fully address deeper cultural barriers or may benefit some applicant groups more than others. Agencies should also be mindful of privacy concerns when using applicant data and ensure transparency with prospective candidates. Recognizing these potential drawbacks allows for a more realistic understanding of what it takes to modernize recruitment and prepares agencies to anticipate and overcome implementation hurdles.

Targeted outreach is essential. Departments should consult community leaders to tailor recruitment messages and target underrepresented groups in policing (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2000). Recruitment teams

should visit athletic clubs, college campuses, community centers, and events where women and people of color gather; they should highlight female officers working alongside male peers and emphasise the variety of roles available in policing (Kasper, 2006). Proactive community engagement (such as explorer programs or police-led youth mentoring) builds trust and interest among young people (Estorcien, 2024). Agencies must also address negative perceptions by communicating their commitment to accountability, transparency, and community service.

Pro Tip

Use data to guide your recruitment. Create a small analytics team to evaluate which outreach strategies and messages yield diverse applicants. Analyse each step of the selection process to identify drop-off points and provide support—such as reminders, fitness coaching or tutoring—to help candidates continue.

Watch Your Step

General Public: “We only need to recruit people like us who already understand policing.”

Expert Opinion: Agencies must broaden their reach and consult community leaders. Recruiting only from familiar networks excludes talented people, especially women and people of color, and undermines trust (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2000).

7.3 Hiring Equitably and Modernizing the Selection Process

Slow Down and Think: *If you were responsible for recruiting*

After attracting applicants, agencies must select the right candidates in a fair and lawful manner. Federal law requires

in your city, what communities or groups would you target? How would you address concerns about safety and trust?

that selection tests be job-related and consistent with business necessity; tests with disparate impact must be validated and necessary for performance (COPS Office, 2019). Many agencies outsource assessments to third-party vendors to access validated tests, reduce overtime, and broaden the applicant pool (COPS Office, 2019). Outsourcing also enables continuous recruitment cycles rather than annual or biennial testing.

However, traditional selection practices can unintentionally screen out women and minorities. Physical and cognitive tests may emphasise brute strength or culturally biased knowledge; residency and citizenship requirements limit candidates; strict grooming or tattoo policies exclude those who do not conform to conventional appearance norms (COPS Office, 2019). Agencies should revisit these criteria and ensure they are truly necessary for job performance. Case-by-case assessments of prior drug use or credit history can prevent the automatic exclusion of qualified applicants (COPS Office, 2019). Examination of each step of the process can reveal bottlenecks; for example, Los Angeles discovered that many applicants dropped out when asked to write a personal statement and used text messages to encourage them to continue (Wiseman, 2022).

Assessments should measure qualities that predict success in modern policing: empathy, problem-solving, critical thinking, interpersonal communication, and cultural competence (Wiseman, 2022). Data teams can evaluate which requirements are associated with job performance and remove or modify those that are not. Agencies might adopt multiple pathways to entry, such as apprenticeship programs, lateral transfers, or part-time positions, to attract a wider range of candidates.

Pro Tip

Ensure your selection process reflects the job. Use validated assessments that measure interpersonal skills, ethics and critical thinking, and eliminate tests that have no proven link to job performance. Provide applicants with clear expectations and support, such as practice materials or coaching.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Physical fitness and a clean record are all that matter for police work."

Expert Opinion: Modern policing requires far more—empathy, communication skills, cultural awareness and problem-solving. Tests that overemphasise physical attributes or rigid background criteria can exclude candidates with the right skills (COPS Office, 2019; Wiseman, 2022).

7.4 Retention and Promotion: Supporting Careers and Building Leaders

Slow Down and Think:
Consider a selection criterion (such as a fitness test or credit check). How does it relate to the essential duties of policing? Could it unintentionally exclude qualified candidates?

Recruitment is only the first step; agencies must also retain employees and provide opportunities for advancement. Research on retention is limited, but common barriers include difficulty adjusting to agency culture, lack of transparency in promotion, insufficient mentorship, hostile environments, harassment, and policies that fail to accommodate family responsibilities (COPS Office, 2019). High turnover and understaffing drain agency capacity and increase costs; investing in retention pays dividends by preserving institutional knowledge and reducing hiring expenses (COPS Office, 2019).

Intrinsic motivation and fair treatment are central to retention. Officers are more likely to stay when they feel connected to the agency's mission, can pursue their interests and strengths, and have input into decisions (COPS Office, 2019). Supervisors play a key role in socializing and mentoring new officers; supportive supervision and procedural justice within the organization foster job satisfaction and reduce turnover (COPS Office, 2019). Programs like peer mentoring, leadership development, and succession planning prepare employees for promotion and ensure that diverse candidates have access to advancement opportunities (Estorcien, 2024).

Policies that support work–life balance also matter. Flexible schedules, parental leave, childcare support, and accommodations for family commitments help retain officers, particularly women and parents (COPS Office, 2019). Agencies should review grooming standards, equipment requirements, and other policies that

disproportionately burden certain groups. Transparent, merit-based promotion processes—and effective communication about how to prepare for advancement—reduce perceptions of bias and favoritism.

Retention efforts must also address workplace climate. Job insecurity, work stress, and unethical environments contribute to deviance and burnout (Soomro, Kundi & Kamran, 2019). Agencies that value wellness, provide mental health support, and address harassment and discrimination show employees that their well-being matters.

Pro Tip

Mentorship matters. Pair new officers with experienced mentors who model professionalism and empathy. Encourage mentors to check in regularly, provide constructive feedback and help mentees navigate promotion processes. A culture of mentorship supports retention and builds leadership from within.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Once officers are hired, they will automatically stay for a full career."

Expert Opinion: High turnover and burnout are real concerns. Without supportive supervision, transparent promotions, work–life balance and a positive culture, officers may leave, taking their experience and community relationships with them (COPS Office, 2019; Soomro et al., 2019).

Slow Down and Think: *What*

7.5 Diversity, Innovation and the Future of Hiring

Achieving a diverse and inclusive workforce is both a moral imperative and a strategic advantage. Recruiting officers who

reflect the communities they serve helps build trust and legitimacy (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Research shows that female officers and officers of color are less likely to use excessive force and more likely to engage in community-oriented policing (Wiseman, 2022). Expanding the pool of applicants means listening to diverse voices, adjusting candidate experiences, and promoting culturally competent messaging (Wiseman, 2022).

innovative recruiting or hiring idea could make policing more appealing to a broader range of people? How would you evaluate whether it works?

Innovation is key. Agencies should experiment with new entry points and career pathways, including apprenticeships, job-sharing, and part-time positions (Schafer & Nelson, 2022). They should test recruitment messages to see which resonate with different audiences, partner with behavioural scientists to design nudges that encourage applicants to persist, and collaborate with universities and community organizations to evaluate strategies (Wiseman, 2022). At the same time, agencies should preserve what works (such as college and military installation recruitment) and combine those practices with novel approaches.

Agencies must also become culturally competent organizations. Diversity should not be a superficial goal; rather, departments should recognise and respond to community diversity by ensuring representation at all levels and encouraging inclusive cultures (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2000). Hiring standards have evolved since the days when height and vision were key requirements; departments that continue to change outdated criteria and promote cultural competence will attract candidates from varied backgrounds (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2000). Transparent promotions and succession planning can prevent attrition among women and officers of color who might otherwise leave due to a lack of opportunity (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2000).

Looking forward, agencies should adopt data-informed, evidence-based practices and remain open to experimentation. Collaboration with researchers, civic technologists, and community organizations can help identify what works and why. Continuous evaluation and openness to adapt are critical to building a strong, resilient, and representative law-enforcement workforce.

Pro Tip

Partner with universities, behavioural scientists and community groups to test new recruitment

messages and hiring practices. Evaluate the results, adjust your strategies and share lessons learned with other agencies. Innovation thrives when agencies collaborate and learn from one another.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Diversity will solve all policing problems."

Expert Opinion: Diversity is critical but not sufficient. Agencies must also reform culture, training, supervision and accountability to support diverse officers and improve policing outcomes (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2000; Soomro et al., 2019).

Chapter Summary

Recruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining law-enforcement officers are fundamental to effective and legitimate policing. Agencies thrive when they attract diverse, qualified candidates, remove unnecessary barriers, provide mentorship and fair promotion, and support work–life balance. Yet policing faces a staffing crisis driven by public mistrust, fragmentation, outdated hiring practices and cultural barriers. Fragmented recruitment systems create inefficiencies and frustration, while media depictions and paramilitary culture deter applicants. Data-driven strategies, targeted outreach, behavioural insights and community partnerships offer promising ways to diversify the applicant pool and reduce attrition. Agencies must modernize selection processes to assess skills relevant to modern policing (i.e., empathy, problem-solving, communication and cultural competence) and ensure they are job-related and fair. Retention and promotion depend on intrinsic motivation, supportive supervision, transparent processes and work–life accommodations. Diversity in policing improves legitimacy and reduces excessive force, but it must be paired with cultural

change and accountability. Innovative, evidence-based approaches and collaborations with researchers and communities will help policing overcome its staffing crisis and build teams that reflect and serve their communities.

End of Chapter Activities

Case Study Analysis: The Recruitment Task Force

You are part of a task force in a medium-sized city facing a staffing crisis. Applications have dropped sharply, and existing officers are leaving for better-paying jobs in neighboring jurisdictions. Community leaders complain that the police force does not reflect the city's diversity. Your task force must design a recruitment and retention strategy that addresses these concerns.

1. Draft a short plan that answers these questions: Which recruitment messages and outreach methods would you prioritise to attract diverse candidates? How would you modify the selection process to remove unnecessary barriers? What policies or programs would you implement to improve retention and promotion?
2. Write a second statement explaining how you would involve community members in designing and evaluating your strategy. Consider how to build trust and measure progress.

Choose Your Own (Recruitment) Adventure

Skills Lab 1: Candidate Journey Mapping

Work in teams to map the journey of a typical recruit from first contact to final hiring. Identify at least three points where candidates often drop out and brainstorm ways to keep them engaged. Consider communication, support and process simplification. Present your map and suggestions to the class.

Skills Lab 2: Recruitment Message Hackathon

Using behavioural insights, design recruitment messages tailored to different audiences (e.g., women, bilingual applicants, technology professionals). Test your messages by sharing them with peers and collecting feedback. Discuss which messages resonate and why.

Skills Lab 3: Selection Process Redesign

Role-play a hiring committee reviewing selection criteria. Identify which tests or requirements may not be job-related or may unfairly exclude candidates. Propose alternative assessments that measure empathy, problem-solving and communication. Develop a new selection plan and explain how you would validate it.

Skills Lab 4: Retention Brainstorm

In small groups, brainstorm retention strategies that address work–life balance, mentorship, wellness and fair promotion. Create a brief retention plan and highlight how each element supports employees' intrinsic motivation and professional growth. Discuss how you would measure the plan's effectiveness.

Skills Lab 5: Diversity Recruitment Forum

Host a mock forum with community leaders, officers and recruitment staff. Each participant presents one idea for recruiting and retaining people from underrepresented groups. After the forum, develop a combined strategy that incorporates multiple perspectives and addresses potential challenges.

Questions That Change How You Think

1. Why is it important for police agencies to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve? Describe at least two benefits and one potential challenge.
2. What factors contribute to the current recruitment and retention crisis? How do media portrayals and agency culture influence applicant interest?
3. Explain how data analytics can improve recruitment and retention. Provide an example of a data-driven approach and discuss its potential impact.
4. Discuss the pros and cons of outsourcing hiring assessments to third-party vendors. How can agencies ensure that outsourced tests are fair and job-related?
5. In what ways might traditional selection criteria (such as strict fitness standards or residency requirements) exclude qualified candidates? How should agencies decide which criteria to keep or modify?

6. Describe how mentorship and internal procedural justice contribute to officer retention and promotion. What roles do supervisors play in this process?
7. Consider a department with high turnover among women and officers of color. What strategies could the agency implement to address this issue and create a more inclusive culture?
8. How might work–life balance policies and flexible scheduling help retain officers? Provide at least two specific examples.
9. Imagine you are designing a new recruitment campaign. How would you incorporate behavioural insights to encourage more applicants to complete the process?
10. Evaluate the statement: "Diversity alone is not enough to improve policing." Support your answer with examples from the chapter.

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Note: All references are freely available at the time of publication. Some web pages may change over time.

This chapter was developed from public research reports, academic literature and guidance documents. It is intended as an educational resource and does not constitute legal advice or official policy. Readers should consult local laws and agency policies for specific guidance.

DATA-DRIVEN JUSTICE

Dr. Michael McHenry

Chapter 8: Data-Driven Justice

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe how data-driven decision making is used across the justice system, from pre-trial release to corrections and reentry.
2. Explain the purpose and limitations of risk assessment instruments and how they influence decisions about supervision, sentencing and treatment.
3. Discuss the benefits and challenges of using big data, predictive analytics and integrated dashboards in policing, courts and corrections.
4. Identify the components of early intervention systems and describe how machine-learning tools can improve accuracy while preserving fairness.
5. Evaluate ethical considerations, including algorithmic bias, privacy, transparency and the need for human judgement, when implementing data-driven tools.

Chapter Overview

Data and analytics have become central to modern justice. Courts, probation offices, corrections departments, prosecutors, and police agencies increasingly rely on quantitative tools to guide decisions about custody, supervision, and services. Risk assessment instruments, predictive algorithms, data dashboards, and early intervention systems promise greater consistency, efficiency, and accountability. Yet these tools also raise concerns about fairness, transparency, and privacy. Building on earlier chapters on early intervention and

internal affairs, this chapter explores how data-driven practices are reshaping the justice system, the benefits they offer, and the ethical safeguards needed. You will learn how to interpret risk scores, evaluate predictive tools, and balance efficiency with respect for individual rights.

8.1 Understanding Data-Driven Justice

Agencies across the criminal-legal system use data to inform decisions about who to arrest, detain, supervise, and release. This practice, often called data-driven decision making, involves collecting information, applying analytics, and tailoring responses to individual risk and needs. For example, pre-trial services offices use actuarial risk assessment instruments to estimate the likelihood that a person will fail to appear or commit a new offence if released. These scores help judges decide whether to impose bail, set conditions, or release someone without supervision. Corrections departments apply similar tools to classify individuals into custody levels and determine programming, while probation and parole officers use risk scores to set supervision intensity and allocate services. The goal is to synthesise information, allocate limited resources effectively, and increase consistency in decision-making (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2023).

Risk assessment tools are usually actuarial rather than clinical; they produce quantitative scores based on factors such as age, criminal history, employment, and substance use. Higher risk scores lead to more intensive supervision or treatment, whereas lower scores suggest that minimal intervention may be sufficient. Researchers note that over-supervising low-risk individuals can harm them by exposing them to more serious offenders and unnecessary restrictions, so agencies should use risk scores to tailor and not amplify supervision (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2023). These tools can improve efficiency by focusing intensive supervision on those who need it most and reducing unnecessary detention.

Actuarial tools also increase consistency across cases and have been shown to be more accurate than unaided human judgment in predicting reoffending (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2023). However, numbers are not destiny. Risk scores are estimates that should inform, not dictate, decisions. Human judgment remains vital for interpreting scores, considering individual circumstances, and adjusting conditions accordingly. For example, a pretrial services officer may receive a high-risk score recommendation against release, but after reviewing the case, learns the defendant has a stable job, strong community ties, and a verified address. Taking these individual factors into account, the officer may recommend supervised release rather than detention. Similarly, a judge might be presented with a high-risk score suggesting incarceration, but after hearing from the defendant's family and learning about their efforts toward rehabilitation, the judge chooses probation instead. This kind of balanced discretion reassures that data supports professional judgement without removing human agency. In other words, data should support (not replace) professional judgement and procedural fairness.

Pro Tip

Use risk scores as a guide, not a verdict. Match supervision and services to an individual's risk level and needs. Over-supervising low-risk people can increase violations and undermine rehabilitation; under-supervising high-risk individuals may endanger public safety.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Risk scores tell you exactly who will reoffend."

Expert Opinion: Risk scores are statistical estimates. They help identify patterns, but they are not crystal balls. Decision makers should consider the score alongside personal history, context and professional judgement.

Slow Down and Think: *If you were deciding whether to release someone on bail, how would you use a risk score? What other factors would you consider to ensure the decision is fair?*

8.2 Risk Assessment Instruments: Promise and Peril

Risk assessment instruments (RAIs) are designed to predict future behaviour based on historical data. In the pre-trial context, RAIs calculate the probability of failure to appear or reoffending and recommend conditions such as electronic monitoring or community supervision (Sullivan & Jackson, 2023). In sentencing, they inform decisions about probation, incarceration, and treatment. Although RAIs can reduce detention and improve consistency, they are not without controversy. One simple two-factor tool reduced detention by 30 percent without increasing misconduct (Kleinberg et al., 2018).

Advocates argue that RAIs outperform intuitive human judgment and help allocate resources fairly. Critics raise concerns about individualization, transparency, and bias. Because RAIs are trained on historical data, they may replicate past disparities. For example, if Black individuals were disproportionately arrested for certain offences, a model trained on convictions may assign higher risk scores to Black defendants even when the underlying behaviour is similar (Berk et al., 2018). Proprietary tools may be opaque; courts and defendants may not know how scores are generated, and companies may claim trade secret protections. In the 2016 case *State v. Loomis*, the Wisconsin Supreme Court allowed use of the COMPAS tool but warned that judges should not rely exclusively on the algorithm and should disclose that the tool was proprietary and generalizes across groups (Corbett-Davies & Goel, 2018).

It is helpful to think of risk assessment tools like weather forecasts: they synthesize many sources of information to offer informed predictions, yet they can never guarantee what will happen in a specific case. Just as a forecast might tell you there is a high chance of rain but you still check the sky and bring an umbrella, RAIs provide useful guidance but should always be weighed alongside human judgment and contextual factors. This analogy emphasizes why discretion and individualized review remain essential, even as quantitative tools support decision-making.

To use RAIs responsibly, agencies must ensure that tools are validated on local populations, regularly audited for fairness, and accompanied by clear guidance. Transparency about factors, weights, and limitations is essential. RAIs should also include protective factors (such as employment or stable housing) to avoid over-penalizing individuals for circumstances beyond their control.

Table 8.1: Benefits and Concerns of Risk Assessment Instruments

Area	**Benefits**	**Concerns**	**Example Question for Reflection**
Pre-trial release	Consistent decisions; reduced unnecessary detention; efficient resource use	Potential bias; lack of transparency; limited individualization	How would you explain a risk score to someone facing detention, and what additional information would you provide?
Sentencing and supervision	Tailored supervision and treatment; resource prioritization	Risk of over-supervising low-risk individuals; misapplication by courts	What safeguards should be in place to ensure that risk scores do not override human judgement?
Information sharing	Predictive consistency; improved planning across agencies	Privacy concerns; data may be repurposed beyond original intent	When is it appropriate to share risk scores with other agencies, and what privacy protections are needed?

Pro Tip

If your agency adopts a risk assessment tool, involve community stakeholders and independent researchers in the validation process. Share information about the factors used and invite feedback on fairness. Regularly audit outcomes to identify disparities and adjust policies as needed.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Algorithms are objective and free of bias."

Expert Opinion: Algorithms learn from historical data and can replicate or magnify existing inequalities. Transparency, auditing and community oversight are necessary to ensure fairness.

Slow Down and Think: *Imagine you are part of a committee choosing a risk assessment tool. What questions would you ask about the tool's training data, validation and potential biases?*

8.3 Big Data and Predictive Analytics

The digital age has produced vast amounts of information. Data from phones, sensors, social media, and government records accumulate rapidly and can be merged across institutions. This phenomenon, often called big data, is characterised by three "Vs": volume (massive amounts of information), velocity (rapid collection and processing), and variety (diverse sources and formats). Because the data are digital, records can be combined across agencies and analysed using advanced techniques such as predictive algorithms and network analysis (Brayne, 2018).

Law enforcement and other justice actors use big data for two broad purposes: directed surveillance, which focuses on individuals or locations under suspicion, and dragnet surveillance, which involves collecting data on large populations without individualized suspicion (Brayne, 2018). Directed applications include connecting open warrants, analysing call logs, mapping gunshot detections, and correlating license-plate reader data with criminal activity. Dragnet applications might involve scanning public social-media posts, collecting location

data from mobile devices, or analysing transportation patterns. While these tools can help identify patterns and allocate resources, they raise questions about privacy, due process, and the scope of policing.

Big data has also facilitated predictive analytics. Agencies have moved from digitizing records in the 1970s to creating computerized systems like CompStat in the 1990s and adopting predictive algorithms such as Operation LASER and PredPol in the 2010s (Thomson Reuters, 2023). Predictive policing uses data from crime reports, demographics, geographic patterns, open-source intelligence and sensors (e.g., gunshot detectors, CCTV) to forecast where and when crimes may occur. Analysts collaborate with officers to identify hot spots and networks, enabling targeted deployment of resources (Thomson Reuters, 2023). However, a continuing challenge is the risk of feedback-loop bias, where heavy reliance on police-generated arrest data can reinforce over-policing in certain communities. For example, the use of PredPol in a major metropolitan police department illustrated this concern: as officers were repeatedly sent to the same neighborhoods flagged as high risk based on earlier arrests, this led to even more stops and arrests in those areas, further magnifying their risk scores and entrenching cycles of heightened enforcement. To mitigate this bias and break the cycle, agencies can incorporate alternative data sources, such as community victimization surveys, which capture incidents and perceptions that may not be reflected in official crime reports. Including these broader perspectives helps ensure that predictive models reflect a more accurate picture of public safety needs and counteract the amplification of historic biases.

The promise of big data and predictive analytics is multifaceted. Predictive models can prevent crime by identifying high-risk locations, enhance investigations by revealing links between cases, and optimize scheduling and budgeting. Sharing crime data with communities can promote trust and co-production of safety (Thomson Reuters, 2023). Yet there are major challenges. Algorithms may amplify racial disparities if they rely on biased arrest data. Feedback loops occur when increased police presence in certain neighbourhoods leads to more recorded incidents, reinforcing the appearance of high risk (Thomson Reuters, 2023). Data-driven systems are only as good as the data that feeds them; inaccurate or incomplete records can mislead analysts. Privacy concerns arise when agencies collect and merge data beyond their original purpose, a phenomenon known as function creep (Brayne, 2018). Moreover, the adoption of big data may be driven as much by institutional pressure to appear modern and accountable as by demonstrated benefits (Brayne, 2018).

To address these challenges, agencies can implement several safeguards and best practices. Regularly auditing algorithms and data processes helps identify and correct sources of bias or error. Transparency about how predictive systems work, what data are used, and how decisions are made fosters both community trust and organizational accountability. Community involvement or oversight boards can provide meaningful input on how tools are deployed and evaluated. Privacy protections, such as limiting access to sensitive data and establishing clear protocols for data sharing, help prevent misuse and function creep. By combining technical safeguards with open communication and ongoing review, agencies can more responsibly harness big data in the service of justice.

To address these challenges, agencies can implement several mitigation strategies. To reduce bias, periodic audits and reviews should be conducted to examine algorithmic decisions for potential disparities and to retrain models using more representative or balanced datasets. Transparency about which data is used and how predictions are generated can foster public oversight. To counteract feedback loops, agencies can use independent benchmarks rather than relying solely on police-generated data and rotate enforcement efforts to prevent reinforcing cycles of surveillance. Protecting privacy requires strict protocols for data access, limited data sharing, and clear policies that define the scope and purpose of data use. Engaging community stakeholders in the design and evaluation of data-driven tools can help ensure that technology serves fairness, accountability, and ethical standards.

Table 8.2: Advantages and Challenges of Big Data and Predictive Analytics

Dimension	**Advantages**	**Challenges**
Crime prevention	Identifies hot spots and trends; allocates resources efficiently; helps prevent crime through proactive deployment	Feedback loops may reinforce disparities; predictive maps can stigmatize neighbourhoods
Investigations	Reveals networks and patterns; integrates evidence across cases; speeds up analysis	Relies on data quality; privacy concerns when merging records; risk of overreliance on algorithmic suggestions
Resource allocation	Guides staffing and budgeting; identifies underutilized services; improves efficiency	Requires technical expertise; may divert resources from community needs; potential function creep
Transparency and community engagement	Sharing data builds trust; encourages co-production of safety; supports accountability	Sensitive data must be protected; risk of misinterpretation; not all communities have equal access to data tools

Pro Tip

When using predictive analytics, validate models with local data and involve analysts, officers and community members in interpreting the results. Combine data insights with community knowledge to avoid creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "More data automatically means better policing."

Expert Opinion: Data without context can mislead. Data must be accurate, relevant and used ethically. Human judgement, transparency and community engagement remain essential.

8.4 Integrated Data Dashboards and Decision Support

Slow Down and Think: *If your agency used predictive maps that showed higher crime risk in your neighbourhood, how would that affect your sense of fairness? What steps should the agency take to communicate and validate its methods?*

Another form of data-driven practice involves creating data dashboards, which are digital platforms that integrate information from multiple agencies and present it visually. Counties and municipalities have developed dashboards that pull data from police departments, courts, jails, behavioural health agencies, child-welfare services, and other sources. For example, Allegheny County's Data Warehouse merges information from 29 sources to help officials understand who is entering and leaving the jail, which services they receive, and how to tailor interventions (Urban Institute, 2020). San Francisco developed similar dashboards to monitor reentry programs and system-level trends, enabling leaders to track jail populations, estimate resource needs, and identify changes in detention patterns (Urban Institute, 2020).

Dashboards simplify complex data, provide real-time information, and offer user-friendly visualizations. Program managers can track participation in diversion programs, probation officers can see whether a person has recently accessed mental-health or substance-use services, and courts can monitor case backlogs. Importantly, integrated dashboards have yielded concrete cross-agency results that underscore their value. For example, consider if jurisdictions reported measurable reductions in average jail stay length when implementing dashboards that flag individuals eligible for diversion or pretrial release. By making these eligibility criteria visible to judges, treatment providers, and jail staff across agencies, dashboards have helped coordinate faster decisions and transitions, directly cutting detention times and associated costs. Such clear and shared metrics give skeptics convincing evidence of the real-world payoff of cross-agency data investments,

while motivating other jurisdictions to consider replication. System-level dashboards also help identify racial disparities and measure progress on reform efforts. Creating such dashboards requires cross-agency collaboration, data-sharing agreements, and leadership support. Challenges include ensuring data quality, protecting sensitive information, and training staff to correctly interpret visualizations.

Pro Tip

Build partnerships early when developing a dashboard. Involve representatives from each agency, agree on data definitions and privacy protocols, and pilot the dashboard with a small group to identify technical or usability issues before scaling up.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "A dashboard will automatically fix our system."

Expert Opinion: Dashboards are tools, not solutions. They require accurate data, thoughtful analysis and collaboration. Poor data entry or interpretation can mislead decision makers and harm the people the system serves.

Slow Down and Think: *If you were building a dashboard that combined police, court and health data, what privacy safeguards would you include?*

8.5 Early Intervention Systems and Machine-Learning Tools

Data are not only used to make decisions about defendants; they are also used to monitor the behaviour and well-being of justice employees. Early intervention systems (EIS) track indicators such as complaints, use-of-force incidents, disciplinary actions, sick leave, missed court appearances, and traffic collisions to identify officers or correctional staff who

may need support (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2019). When a person exceeds preset thresholds, supervisors review their record, discuss concerns, and provide assistance such as coaching, training, or wellness resources. EISs are proactive and supportive; their goal is to help employees correct behaviour before serious misconduct occurs and to protect communities from harm.

How would you ensure all stakeholders understand the data visualizations?

To be effective, EISs require clear policies, training and consistent data entry. Agencies must communicate that the system is non-punitive and work with labour representatives and front-line staff to build trust (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2019). When an employee is flagged by the system, it initiates a confidential conversation focused on support, coaching and professional growth, not discipline. This reassurance can help pre-empt resistance by making it clear that EIS flags are a tool for prevention and development. Supervisors need training to interpret flags and follow up appropriately; the system should complement, not replace, first-hand observation and mentoring. Data quality is critical; inconsistent or incorrect entries undermine accuracy and credibility.

Traditional EISs use threshold-based systems that flag employees when they exceed predetermined incident counts. While useful, these thresholds can generate false positives or miss more complex patterns. Newer machine-learning early intervention systems combine information from personnel files, internal affairs records, dispatch logs, arrest and stop data, and open data sources to produce risk scores (Data Science for Social Good, 2016). These systems can identify officers at greatest risk of adverse incidents (including shootings, excessive force or racial profiling) and can prioritise interventions accordingly. Pilot evaluations suggest that machine-learning models identify 10–20 percent more high-risk officers and reduce false positives by 50–60 percent compared with threshold-based systems (Data Science for Social Good, 2016). They can also evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and be customized to predict different outcomes (e.g., injuries, complaints, commendations).

Nevertheless, machine-learning EIS presents ethical questions. Because they draw from many data sources, they may capture sensitive information that employees did not expect to be used for risk scoring. Algorithms may learn patterns associated with certain demographics or assignments and inadvertently flag people because of biases in the data. Transparency about data sources, factors, and outcomes is essential. Agencies must ensure that flagged employees receive support rather than punishment and that the system does not become a disciplinary shortcut.

Pro Tip

Treat early intervention as part of a supportive culture. Explain to staff that being flagged is not a punishment but an opportunity to receive coaching, training or wellness services. Provide confidential mental-health resources and involve peer mentors.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Early intervention systems are just another way to spy on employees."

Expert Opinion: EISs aim to support staff and prevent harm. They track patterns to identify when someone might need help. The goal is to intervene early, not to punish or discipline.

Slow Down and Think: *If you were flagged by an early intervention system, what type of support would you want? How can agencies ensure that interventions are fair and confidential?*

8.6 Ethics and Fairness in Data-Driven Justice

Data can illuminate patterns, but it can also obscure human stories. Throughout this chapter, the theme of balance has emerged: between data and judgement, efficiency and fairness, innovation and ethics. As you progress through the justice system, remember that numbers can guide but not dictate decisions. Data can help us see patterns and allocate resources, but fairness, dignity and accountability require human judgement. The challenge (and opportunity) is to harness data responsibly to create safer and more just communities.

Table 8.3: Ethical Principles for Data-Driven Tools in Criminal Justice Agencies

Table 8.3: Ethical Principles for Data-Driven Tools in Criminal Justice Agencies

Principle	Core Actions	How This Strengthens Agency Capability	Problem(s) It Helps Prevent or Solve
Transparency and Accountability	Explain how tools function, what data they use, and how decisions are generated. Invite oversight from independent experts, courts, and community representatives.	Builds legitimacy, strengthens defensibility in court, and enhances leadership oversight by ensuring systems can be explained and justified.	Black-box decision-making, legal challenges, erosion of public trust, and unchecked technical errors.
Fairness and Equity	Audit algorithms and outcomes for racial, gender, and socioeconomic disparities. Adjust models to mitigate bias. Include protective and contextual variables to avoid penalizing poverty or trauma.	Improves decision accuracy, strengthens ethical integrity, and aligns practices with constitutional and civil rights standards.	Disparate impact, structural bias amplification, discriminatory outcomes, and long-term legitimacy damage.
Privacy and Consent	Safeguard personal data. Limit reuse. Establish clear policies on data sharing and retention. Obtain consent when feasible and comply with legal protections.	Reduces legal exposure, strengthens compliance with statutory requirements, and protects sensitive information from misuse.	Data breaches, mission creep, unauthorized surveillance expansion, and privacy-rights violations.
Human Judgement and Training	Use data as a support tool rather than a replacement for professional judgement. Train practitioners to interpret results critically and incorporate qualitative and cultural knowledge.	Preserves professional discretion, improves decision nuance, and reduces overreliance on automated outputs.	Blind reliance on algorithmic outputs, deskilling of practitioners, and loss of contextual sensitivity.
Community Engagement	Collaborate with affected communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of tools. Incorporate lived experience and local expertise.	Strengthens public legitimacy, improves contextual accuracy of models, and increases adoption and compliance.	Community resistance, policy failure due to misalignment with lived realities, and decreased institutional trust.

Pro Tip

Establish an ethics committee or advisory board to oversee data-driven initiatives. Include practitioners, data scientists, legal experts and community representatives. Regularly review tools, policies and outcomes to ensure they align with ethical standards.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "If an algorithm says so, we have to follow it."

Expert Opinion: Algorithms are tools, not arbiters. People must interpret and oversee them, correct errors and ensure that decisions remain grounded in law and ethics.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored how data and analytics are reshaping justice across pre-trial services, courts, probation, parole, corrections, and law enforcement. Data-based decision-making relies on actuarial tools to estimate risk and tailor supervision. Risk assessment instruments can enhance consistency and efficiency, but must be transparent, validated, and audited to avoid replicating historical inequalities. Big data and predictive analytics enable agencies to identify patterns, forecast crime, and allocate resources, yet they pose challenges, including algorithmic bias, feedback loops, privacy risks, and the risk of function creep. Integrated data dashboards bring together information from multiple agencies, helping leaders monitor populations and programs; successful dashboards

require collaboration, data quality, and training. Early intervention systems help supervisors identify employees in need of support, and machine-learning versions improve accuracy by analysing diverse data. Across all these innovations, ethical principles (transparency, fairness, privacy, human judgement, and community engagement) must guide implementation. When used responsibly, data can complement human wisdom and build more fair and effective justice systems.

End of Chapter Activities

Case Study Analysis: The Risk Dashboard Dilemma

Your county has launched a data dashboard that integrates police, court, jail and behavioral health data. The dashboard shows that people from certain neighbourhoods have higher risk scores and more frequent jail bookings. Community members are concerned that the dashboard reinforces stereotypes and leads to heavier policing in those areas. As part of a review team, write a short case position statement answering the following:

1. What benefits does the dashboard offer for decision makers? How can it help allocate services and support individuals in the justice system?
2. What harms might result if officials rely on the dashboard without considering bias or community impact?
3. What one step would you recommend to address community concerns and improve the dashboard's fairness and transparency?

Next, outline how you would engage community members in ongoing dashboard development and governance, ensuring that their voices shape data use and policy.

Choose Your Own (Data-Driven) Adventure

Skills Lab 1: Building a Simple Risk Assessment

Working in pairs, students will create a simple risk assessment using hypothetical data. Identify three risk factors (e.g., prior convictions, employment status, substance use) and assign weights based on research. Apply your tool to five fictional cases and discuss whether the results match your intuitive judgement. Reflect on the strengths and limitations of your tool and how it might be improved.

Skills Lab 2: Dashboard Design and Presentation

Students will sketch a data dashboard for a probation department that tracks program participation, risk scores and service utilization. Consider what data sources you would integrate, how you would display information and what filters users need. Present your design to the class and explain how you addressed privacy, usability and equity.

Skills Lab 3: Algorithm Audit

Divide into small groups and examine a sample predictive policing algorithm (provided by the instructor). Identify potential sources of bias in the data and model. Propose methods to test for disparate impact and suggest ways to mitigate bias, such as adding protective factors or capping predictions in high-disparity areas.

Skills Lab 4: EIS Role Play

Set up a mock early intervention review meeting. One student plays a supervisor reviewing a flagged employee's record; another plays the employee; and a third acts as a peer support specialist. Discuss the indicators that triggered the flag, explore underlying causes and develop a supportive plan. Debrief on how to communicate the system's intent and protect confidentiality.

Skills Lab 5: Ethics Committee Simulation

Simulate an ethics committee meeting reviewing a proposal to implement machine-learning tools in parole decision making. Assign roles (data scientist, parole officer, civil rights advocate, community member, psychologist) and debate the proposal. Consider legal requirements, fairness, privacy and the rights of individuals on parole. Draft recommendations and present them to class.

Questions That Change How You Think

1. Why is data-driven decision making becoming more common in the justice system, and how does it differ from traditional methods based solely on professional judgement?
2. Explain how risk assessment instruments can improve fairness and efficiency. What limitations must policymakers address to prevent misuse?

3. Describe the characteristics of big data and how predictive analytics have evolved in law enforcement. How do these tools influence resource allocation?
4. Discuss the ethical challenges associated with predictive policing, including algorithmic bias and feedback loops. How can agencies mitigate these risks?
5. Imagine you are designing a dashboard that integrates data from multiple justice agencies. What factors should you consider when deciding which data to include and how to present it?
6. Explain the difference between threshold-based and machine-learning early intervention systems. What advantages and risks does each approach present?
7. How can agencies ensure that early intervention systems remain supportive rather than punitive? What role should supervisors and peer mentors play?
8. In your view, what is the most important ethical principle to guide data-driven justice, and why? Provide an example of how this principle might be applied in practice.
9. What strategies can justice agencies use to involve community members in the design and oversight of data-driven tools?
10. As data collection and analytics expand, how can justice professionals maintain trust and protect individual rights while leveraging data to improve outcomes?

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MENTAL HEALTH ACROSS THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Dr. Michael McHenry

Chapter 9: Mental Health Across the Legal System

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the prevalence and nature of mental-health challenges among law enforcement, correctional staff, court officers, attorneys, probation and parole officers and judges.
2. Identify the primary occupational stressors and cultural factors that contribute to mental-health issues across justice professions.
3. Explain key intervention models, including Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) programs, mental-health courts and specialized probation, and assess their effectiveness.
4. Discuss strategies for building trauma-informed, supportive workplaces that destigmatize help-seeking and promote resilience across all justice professions.
5. Propose systemic reforms and cross-sector collaborations that can improve mental-health outcomes for professionals and the communities they serve.

Chapter Overview

Mental health is not a fringe issue in the justice system; it is a central concern that affects every profession and every decision. Earlier chapters explored risk management, de-escalation, crisis intervention, early warning systems, and internal accountability. This chapter builds on those foundations by examining how trauma,

stress, and mental health challenges permeate police agencies, correctional facilities, courts, probation services, and legal offices. We will look at why mental health problems are common among justice workers, how occupational cultures and structural inequities influence well-being, and what interventions and reforms can help professionals thrive. Understanding mental health across the legal system is not just about supporting individual officers or attorneys; it is about ensuring fair processes, public trust, and humane treatment for everyone who enters the system.

9.1 Recognizing the Mental Health Landscape

Across the legal system, mental health challenges are widespread and often hidden. Criminal justice workers, whether they enforce laws, manage custody, prosecute cases, defend clients, or preside from the bench, experience mental health problems at higher rates than the general population (Canning et al., 2025). In a comprehensive scoping review, researchers found that justice workers, from probation officers to victim advocates, reported elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Canning et al., 2025). The same review noted that women, Two-Spirit, LGBTQIA+, and BIPOC employees face additional stressors related to discrimination and harassment (Canning et al., 2025).

Attorneys exhibit high levels of problematic alcohol use and mental health symptoms. A national survey of U.S. lawyers found that more than one fifth screened positive for problematic drinking, while 28 percent reported depression, 19 percent anxiety, and 23 percent stress (Krill et al., 2016). Younger lawyers had higher rates of distress (Krill et al., 2016). These issues are not confined to private practice; prosecutors routinely experience grief, trauma, and secondary stress, yet stigma often prevents them from seeking help (Texas District & County Attorneys Association, 2021).

Judges are not immune to mental-health problems. Historically, mental-health issues among judges have received little attention because judges are expected to be paragons of virtue and efficiency (Telfer, 2025). Recent surveys highlight pervasive distress: more than one in five judges may meet criteria for depression, nearly six percent report severe anxiety, and about one in four experience debilitating stress (Telfer, 2025). A 2022 United Nations survey found that most judges report judicial work brings stress at least sometimes and many know colleagues who struggle with stress or anxiety (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022).

Correctional staff face some of the highest rates of mental health disorders among justice workers. In Canada, 37.3 percent of correctional service providers meet criteria for major depressive disorder, 27.8 percent for generalized anxiety disorder, and roughly one fifth for post-traumatic stress disorder (Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2024). Nearly 30 percent have considered suicide, and hypermasculine, punitive cultures discourage officers from seeking help (Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2024). Probation and parole officers report significant stress as well;

research from the National Institute of Justice shows their biggest challenges are high caseloads, overwhelming paperwork, and excessive deadlines rather than physical danger (National Institute of Justice, 2007). Low salaries, limited advancement opportunities, and a lack of recognition from supervisors further erode morale (National Institute of Justice, 2007).

These numbers show that mental health concerns are found throughout the justice system. Understanding how widespread this issue is marks the first step toward real change. In the next sections, we will examine practical interventions and reforms, such as specialized training, diversion programs, supportive workplace practices, and policy solutions to address the mental health needs of justice professionals and those they serve. This chapter will walk you through evidence-based approaches and new ideas that can help build a healthier, stronger justice system.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Mental-health problems in the justice system only affect police officers."

Expert Opinion: Mental-health challenges affect police officers, correctional staff, probation officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys and judges alike. Each profession experiences unique stressors and high rates of depression, anxiety and trauma (Canning et al., 2025).

9.2 Sources of Stress and Mental-Health Challenges

Why do mental-health problems flourish in justice professions? Exposure to trauma is a common thread. Police officers and first responders encounter violence, accidents, and human suffering, which can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, alcoholism, depression, and even suicide (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2016). The cumulative nature of traumatic events makes psychological injury an occupational hazard (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2016). Correctional officers work in dangerous environments and often see violence and self-harm. Their working conditions

Slow Down and Think:
Consider the intersection of identity and occupation. How might discrimination or stigma influence whether a BIPOC attorney, a female judge or a LGBTQIA+ probation officer feels safe seeking help?

and overtime contribute to burnout, and hypermasculine cultures discourage the acknowledgment of stress (Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2024).

Workload and organizational pressures are another source of distress. Probation and parole officers cite heavy caseloads, overwhelming paperwork, and tight deadlines as their main stressors (National Institute of Justice, 2007). High caseloads leave little time for meaningful contact and increase the likelihood of mistakes. Low salaries, limited career paths, and supervisors who fail to recognize accomplishments further erode morale (National Institute of Justice, 2007). Attorneys and public defenders struggle with adversarial workloads, demanding clients, and the responsibility of protecting constitutional rights. Research shows that occupational stress is endemic to the legal profession; heavy workloads, conflict, and constant scrutiny make stress an inherent part of practicing law (Dotson et al., 2020).

Judges face their own pressures. They must make high-stakes decisions under public scrutiny, manage overloaded dockets, and confront disturbing evidence. Such responsibilities, combined with expectations of impartiality and perfection, create stress and social isolation (Telfer, 2025). Judges also operate in cultures that discourage discussing mental health; many report that talking about stress is taboo (Telfer, 2025).

Recent cross-sectional research reinforces these observations. Carleton et al. (2021) found that a substantial proportion of public-safety personnel, including police, corrections, fire, emergency medical services, and communications staff, screened positive for one or more mental disorders and reported suicidal ideation. Hilton et al. (2023) linked organizational stressors such as poor leadership, high job demands, and inadequate support to adverse mental health outcomes among correctional officers. An integrative review by Ricciardelli and Spencer (2014) concluded that comprehensive training, proactive support, and adequate staffing are critical to mitigate stress and turnover in correctional institutions. Mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to reduce stress and improve emotional regulation among police officers (Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2021). Among defense attorneys, job satisfaction, collegial support, and opportunities for professional growth can buffer the effects of stress (Wice, 2005). Training probation officers as mental health specialists equips them to connect clients to services and reduces strain on officers themselves (Slate et al., 2004).

Organizational culture plays a decisive role. Hypermasculinity and stigma discourage correctional officers from seeking help (Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2024); similarly, prosecutors may fear that acknowledging mental health struggles could be seen as weakness (Texas District & County Attorneys Association, 2021). Employees with marginalized identities often face discrimination and harassment, intensifying stress (Canning et al., 2025). Without supportive leadership, stress and trauma remain hidden. Trauma-informed supervision and effective coping strategies can shift these cultures.

Pro Tip

Developing personal coping strategies is a critical part of resilience. Justice professionals from all sectors can benefit from regular exercise, mindfulness practices, peer support groups, hobbies outside of work and setting boundaries around work hours. Encourage colleagues to share their coping techniques and support one another.

Watch Your Step

General Public: “Mental-health crises are just part of the job—there’s nothing agencies can do.”

Expert Opinion: Many stressors stem from organizational factors—heavy workloads, inadequate training, lack of recognition and stigma. Leaders can reduce these stressors by adjusting caseloads, providing peer support and fostering cultures that encourage help-seeking.

9.3 Specialized Interventions and Diversion Programs

Recognizing mental health challenges is only part of the solution. Justice agencies have developed specialized interventions to respond to crises and divert people with mental illness toward treatment. Among the most prominent is the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) model. CIT is a 40-hour training program that teaches officers to recognize mental health crises, de-escalate situations, and connect individuals to services (Crisanti et al., 2022). Studies show that CIT training improves officers’ knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy when interacting with people with mental illness (Crisanti et al., 2022). However, knowledge can fade if training is not reinforced; many agencies offer CIT as a one-time course (Crisanti et al., 2022). To address training decay, the Albuquerque Police Department created CIT ECHO, a continuing education program that connects officers and behavioral-health experts via videoconferencing. Participants reported increased knowledge and self-confidence and more positive attitudes toward people with mental illness (Crisanti et al., 2022). The program’s mission is to improve interactions, increase safety, destigmatize mental illness, and strengthen

community policing (Crisanti et al., 2022). Similar programs can help officers retain skills and build a culture of learning.

Slow Down and Think: *Why might justice professionals hide their struggles from supervisors or colleagues? How could agencies encourage openness without jeopardizing careers?*

Specialized supervision models also exist outside law enforcement. Specialized mental-health probation assigns people with mental illnesses to officers with reduced caseloads and specialized training, who meet regularly with treatment providers. Research indicates these programs improve treatment engagement and reduce recidivism (Skeem et al., 2006). However, such programs are rare; only about 15 percent of probation agencies have specialized mental-health programs (Slate et al., 2004).

Courts have also innovated. Mental-health courts divert individuals with serious mental illness into community treatment instead of incarceration. These courts reduce recidivism more effectively than traditional courts and rely on collaboration among judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and treatment providers (Manhattan Institute, 2020). Participants must consent to the program and comply with treatment and supervision. Despite their benefits, mental-health courts serve only a small fraction of offenders and cannot alone address mass incarceration (Manhattan Institute, 2020).

Pro Tip

If your agency already offers CIT, consider adding a continuing-education component like CIT ECHO. Regular case discussions with mental-health professionals and peers help officers maintain skills, share experiences and stay updated on resources.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "Mental-health courts will end mass incarceration."

Expert Opinion: Mental-health courts divert some individuals into treatment and reduce recidivism. However, they serve only a small portion of offenders and rely on treatment availability and voluntary participation. Broader reforms are needed to address systemic issues.

9.4 Building Supportive Environments and Wellness Programs

Slow Down and Think: *When diverting someone with a serious mental illness from incarceration to treatment, how do you balance public safety with therapeutic goals? What safeguards should be in place?*

Addressing mental-health challenges requires more than isolated programs; it demands comprehensive change. The scoping review of criminal-justice workers mapped recommendations across individual, interpersonal, institutional, and policy levels (Canning et al., 2025). At the individual level, healthy lifestyle choices, coping strategies, and education are critical. Interpersonally, peer support and wraparound care help professionals feel less isolated and encourage help-seeking. Institutionally, agencies must ensure fair workloads, safe working conditions, adequate staffing, and supportive supervision. At the policy level, governments should provide presumptive coverage for psychological injuries, sufficient funding for mental-health services, and protections against discrimination (Canning et al., 2025).

Confidentiality and destigmatization are key. Judges and lawyers often hesitate to discuss mental health because they fear being perceived as weak. Surveys show that many judges view mental-health discussions as taboo (Telfer, 2025), and attorneys report similar stigma (Krill et al., 2016). Agencies can counter this by offering confidential counseling, ensuring peer-support teams are trained and independent, and highlighting stories of respected professionals who have sought help.

Wellness initiatives should be tailored to each profession. Peer support programs for police and correctional staff provide a trusted space to discuss stress. Mindfulness workshops have become popular among judges, with many expressing interest in integrating mindfulness into their routines (Telfer, 2025). Probation and parole agencies can implement stress-reduction programs, as NIJ research suggests these interventions reduce turnover, improve performance, and enhance safety (National Institute of Justice, 2007). Programs must also address secondary trauma and burnout among defense attorneys; job satisfaction, social support, and professional development opportunities can buffer the effects of stress (Wice, 2005).

Diversity and equity must shape wellness efforts. Marginalized employees may face unique stressors and barriers to help, so programs should be culturally responsive and inclusive (Canning et al., 2025). Agencies can take several concrete actions to make wellness programs more inclusive. For example, they can offer mental health resources in multiple languages and ensure that counseling services reflect the cultural backgrounds of the workforce. Establishing peer support groups specifically for women, LGBTQIA+ employees, and staff of color can create safer spaces to share experiences. Agencies might also conduct regular climate surveys to identify unique needs and adjust services accordingly. Providing childcare during wellness events, scheduling activities at flexible times, and ensuring that all staff regardless of rank or shift have access to programs further promotes inclusion.

Leadership commitment is essential; supervisors who model self-care, encourage help-seeking, and recognize achievements can shift organizational culture. As an inclusivity checkpoint, leaders can ask themselves, "Who is still absent from our sessions, and why?" Regularly thinking about this question can prompt agencies to identify and address hidden barriers, driving continuous improvement in equity and access. Accreditation bodies, such as CALEA, increasingly emphasize mental health standards and can provide external accountability (Abner et al., 2023). Scholars argue that militarized policing cultures may heighten stress and impede community trust (Bieler, 2016); shifting toward guardian-oriented models can support wellness.

Pro Tip

Design wellness programs that operate on multiple levels. Combine personal strategies like mindfulness and exercise with peer-support groups, supervisor training on mental-health awareness and institutional reforms to reduce workloads. Include culturally responsive resources and ensure confidentiality.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "A single program can fix mental-health problems."

Expert Opinion: There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Successful wellness initiatives must adapt to different professions, cultures and identities. They require sustained leadership, adequate funding and collaboration with mental-health providers.

9.5 Leading Systemic Change

Transforming mental-health outcomes in the justice system requires systemic reforms and cross-sector partnerships. Leaders must advocate for adequate funding, workload management, and presumptive coverage for psychological injuries (Canning et al., 2025). Early-intervention systems, like those discussed in Chapter 5, can help identify patterns of absenteeism, complaints, or other signals of distress and trigger supportive interventions before crises occur. Policy reforms should mandate mental-health training, destigmatize help-seeking, and integrate mental-health professionals into justice teams.

Collaboration beyond agencies is crucial. Mental-health courts show how judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and treatment providers can work together to divert individuals to care (Manhattan Institute, 2020). Similarly, CIT ECHO brings law enforcement, behavioral-health experts, and community organizations into a single learning network (Crisanti et al., 2022). Probation agencies can partner with community providers to build specialized mental-health caseloads (Skeem et al., 2006). Research suggests that wraparound strategies combining individual, interpersonal, institutional, and policy interventions are most effective (Canning et al., 2025).

Systemic change also means addressing structural inequities. Discrimination and harassment amplify stress for marginalized justice professionals (Canning et al., 2025). Equity audits can identify barriers, and diversity initiatives can help ensure that leadership reflects the communities served. Public trust depends on a healthy, diverse, and responsive justice workforce. Investing in mental health across professions is not just a moral imperative; it is a prerequisite for legitimacy.

Pro Tip

Leaders should champion policies that fund mental-health services, reduce caseloads, create peer-

support teams and integrate mental-health professionals into daily operations. Partner with community organizations, universities and advocacy groups to develop evidence-based programs and to evaluate outcomes.

Watch Your Step

General Public: "If leadership cares, problems will solve themselves."

Expert Opinion: Leadership is necessary but not sufficient. Systemic change requires resources, data, collaboration and accountability. Ignoring the voices of marginalized employees and communities can undermine reforms.

Chapter Summary

Mental-health challenges permeate the justice system. From police officers and correctional workers to attorneys and judges, professionals experience high rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and trauma. Marginalized identities face additional barriers to well-being (Canning et al., 2025). The sources of distress are complex: traumatic events, heavy workloads, organizational culture, discrimination, and stigma. Recognizing these factors helps dismantle the myth that mental-health problems are inevitable or confined to one occupation.

Specialized interventions such as CIT training, CIT ECHO, mental-health courts, and specialized probation demonstrate that targeted training and collaborative programs can improve safety and link individuals to treatment (Crisanti et al., 2022; Skeem et al., 2006; Manhattan Institute, 2020). However, these programs cannot succeed without supportive environments. Comprehensive wellness initiatives must operate across individual, interpersonal, institutional, and policy levels,

combining self-care, peer support, trauma-informed supervision, and systemic reforms (Canning et al., 2025).

Finally, mental-health resilience is a leadership issue and a collective responsibility. Systemic change requires adequate funding, early-intervention systems, culturally responsive practices, and cross-sector partnerships. Addressing mental health across the justice system promotes fairness, upholds professional integrity, and strengthens public trust.

At the same time, emerging trends such as digital wellness tools, telehealth counseling, and peer-led interventions are shaping how agencies and professionals approach well-being. More research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these innovations, particularly in justice settings where stigma and organizational barriers remain significant. Innovations like mobile apps for stress reduction, virtual peer support networks, and data-driven wellness programs hold promise, but their impact and best practices for implementation are not yet fully understood. Ongoing research and experimentation in these areas will be key to supporting the next generation of justice professionals.

End of Chapter Activities

Case Study Analysis: A Cross-System Mental-Health Crisis

Your county's criminal-justice system has recently faced a series of mental-health crises: a probation officer attempted suicide after years of unmanageable caseloads; a judge disclosed severe anxiety related to overloaded dockets; a correctional officer was found drinking on duty; and several attorneys reported depression and burnout. A high-profile case involving an individual with schizophrenia highlighted the lack of community resources and diversion options.

As part of an interdisciplinary review team, you must develop a brief action plan addressing three questions:

1. Which occupational group is most in need of immediate support and why? Base your answer on evidence from this chapter.
2. Which specialized intervention (e.g., CIT training, mental-health court, specialized probation) or wellness program would you prioritize, and how would you implement it?

3. What systemic reforms could prevent similar crises in the future? Consider funding, workload management, stigma reduction and cross-agency collaboration.

Write your action plan in plain language and justify each recommendation. Then outline how you would communicate mental-health resources to each profession respectfully.

Choose Your Own (Mental-Health) Adventure

Skills Lab 1: Mapping Stressors

Working in groups, choose a justice profession (e.g., corrections, prosecution, probation, judiciary). Identify the top three sources of stress for that profession based on research presented in this chapter. Then brainstorm organizational and personal strategies to mitigate each stressor. Present your findings and discuss similarities and differences across professions.

Skills Lab 2: Designing a Peer-Support Program

Design a peer-support program for your selected profession. Determine who will serve as peer supporters, what training they need and how confidentiality will be protected. Role-play conversations between peer supporters and colleagues seeking help. Evaluate how peer support might reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking.

Skills Lab 3: Crisis Intervention Simulation

Using a scenario involving a person in mental-health crisis, practise the key steps of CIT. Assign roles for law enforcement, probation, attorneys and judges. Discuss how each actor can contribute to de-escalation, diversion and follow-up care. Reflect on communication strategies and challenges.

Skills Lab 4: Wellness Program Pitch

Create a pitch for a wellness program that could operate across multiple justice professions in your region. Outline the components (training, peer support, professional counseling, mindfulness, cultural-competence training), estimate costs and predict benefits such as reduced turnover and improved decision-making. Present your pitch to a panel of "agency leaders" (played by classmates).

Skills Lab 5: Policy Roundtable

Conduct a roundtable discussion where each group member represents a different stakeholder (e.g., law enforcement chief, correctional supervisor, judge, attorney, mental-health advocate). Debate a proposed state

policy that mandates mental-health training and provides presumptive coverage for psychological injuries. Identify concerns, negotiate compromises and craft a policy recommendation that addresses funding, equity and accountability.

Questions That Change How You Think

1. Why is it important to recognize that mental-health challenges exist across all justice professions? How do differences in role and culture shape the types of stress professionals experience?
2. Compare the primary stressors faced by correctional officers, probation officers and judges. What similarities and differences do you see, and what do those tell you about systemic reforms?
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of CIT training and CIT ECHO. In what ways might continuing education improve outcomes compared to stand-alone courses?
4. Discuss how mental-health courts and specialized probation aim to divert individuals with mental illness from incarceration. What limitations prevent them from addressing the broader problem of mass incarceration?
5. Explain why stigma and confidentiality are critical issues in judicial and legal well-being. How can agencies destigmatize help-seeking while protecting professional reputations?
6. What does the social-ecological model teach us about designing wellness programs? Provide examples of interventions at each level that could improve mental health for justice workers.
7. How can leaders measure the success of mental-health initiatives? What metrics would show genuine improvement rather than superficial compliance?
8. Discuss the role of cultural competence and intersectionality in mental-health programs. How can agencies ensure that marginalized employees receive appropriate support?
9. Why is collaboration across agencies and professions necessary for effective mental-health reforms? Provide an example of a partnership that could improve outcomes for both employees and clients.
10. Reflect on your personal beliefs about mental health and professional responsibility. How might those beliefs influence your future decisions in a justice-related career?

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APPENDIX A - PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Appendix A – Professional Associations

Law Enforcement Leadership, Training, and Membership Organizations (Alphabetical)

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
A federal law enforcement agency that supports investigations nationwide and publishes public resources used by local, state, tribal, and federal partners, including guidance tied to crime reporting, intelligence, and investigative standards. Website: https://www.fbi.gov/

Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC)
A national training provider for federal law enforcement and partner agencies, offering standardized instruction and skill development that influences field practices and professional expectations across jurisdictions. Website: https://www.fletc.gov/

Fraternal Order of Police (FOP)
A national law enforcement membership organization with local lodges that supports officers through professional resources, member services, and advocacy tied to working conditions and the profession. Website: https://fop.net/

International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)
A major policing leadership organization that publishes model policies, training resources, and professional standards that influence accountability, ethics, and operational practice across agencies. Website: https://www.theiacp.org/

Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (WSCJTC)
Washington's statewide training and certification commission that sets academy and training expectations for peace officers and other public safety roles, shaping professional norms and accountability across the state. Website: https://www.cjtc.wa.gov/

Washington State Patrol (WSP)

Washington's statewide law enforcement agency that provides public resources and statewide operational support, including investigative and forensic service coordination within Washington's justice system. Website: https://wsp.wa.gov/

Law Enforcement Investigative and Forensic Partner Organizations (Alphabetical)

American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS)
A leading forensic science organization that supports research and professional standards that directly affect how law enforcement evidence is collected, interpreted, and presented in court. Website: https://www.aafs.org/

American Board of Forensic Document Examiners (ABFDE)
A certification board that sets competency standards for forensic document examiners whose work supports law enforcement investigations and courtroom testimony. Website: https://abfde.org/

American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI)
A certification body for medicolegal death investigators who often work alongside law enforcement during unattended, suspicious, and homicide-related deaths. Website: https://www.abmdi.org/

American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD)
A professional organization for crime lab leadership focused on quality systems, accreditation support, and management practices that strengthen laboratory services used by law enforcement and prosecutors. Website: https://www.ascld.org/

American Society of Questioned Document Examiners (ASQDE)
A membership organization that promotes research and education in questioned document work that supports law enforcement investigations involving fraud, threats, and authenticity disputes. Website: https://www.asqde.org/

International Association of Bloodstain Pattern Analysts (IABPA)
A professional association supporting bloodstain pattern analysis training and guidance that informs scene reconstruction and investigative decision-making in serious violent crime cases. Website: https://www.iabpa.org/

International Association of Computer Investigative Specialists (IACIS)
A nonprofit organization that trains and certifies digital forensics practitioners whose work supports law enforcement investigations involving computers, mobile devices, and digital evidence. Website: https://www.iacis.com/

International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME)

A professional association that supports coroner and medical examiner offices that regularly partner with law enforcement during death investigations. Website: https://theiacme.com/

International Association for Identification (IAI)

A large identification-focused organization supporting training and professional exchange in areas used by law enforcement, including latent prints, crime scene work, and forensic photography. Website: https://www.theiai.org/

National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME)

A professional organization that advances standards in forensic pathology and medicolegal death investigation, which frequently intersects with law enforcement casework. Website: https://www.thename.org/

Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science (OSAC)

A NIST-administered standards structure that develops forensic science standards and best practices that shape how law enforcement and labs approach evidence reliability and quality. Website: https://www.nist.gov/osac and https://www.nist.gov/adlp/spo/organization-scientific-area-committees-forensic-science/how-to-work-with-us/apply-join

Society of Forensic Toxicologists (SOFT)

A professional community that advances forensic toxicology standards and education that support law enforcement and medicolegal investigations involving alcohol, drugs, and impairment. Website: https://www.soft-tox.org/

APPENDIX B - CAREER LAUNCH TOOLKIT

Appendix B: Career Launch Toolkit

This appendix is your job-search "field guide" for justice-system careers. It is built for students who want a clear path from college to a real hiring process. It covers local, state, tribal, and federal roles across law enforcement, corrections, courts, supervision, dispatch, victim services, investigations, and support careers.

> **Bottom line:** Hiring is not just about being "qualified." It is about being **trusted**. Most agencies screen for reliability, judgment, and integrity as much as they screen for skills.

A.1 Career Path Map (Justice System Wide)

Use this list to widen your search. Many strong careers are not patrol, and many roles still require the same professional standards.

- **Local/State/Tribal Law Enforcement:** police officer, deputy sheriff, state trooper, university/campus police, transit police, park ranger law enforcement (commissioned roles vary by agency).
- **Federal Law Enforcement:** uniformed police (federal facilities), border enforcement, corrections, and criminal investigator/special agent pathways (requirements vary by agency).
- **Corrections:** jail corrections officer, prison corrections officer, classification staff, programs staff (many institutions expect all staff to respond safely during emergencies).
- **Courts:** court clerk roles, court security, pretrial services, probation support roles, specialty court support.
- **Community Supervision:** probation officer, pretrial services officer, community corrections officer (screening often mirrors law enforcement standards).

- **Dispatch and Communications:** 911 call taker, dispatcher, records specialist, evidence/property technician (high-trust positions).
- **Victim Services:** victim advocate, program coordinator, crisis-response support (often partnered with law enforcement and courts).
- **Investigations and Analysis:** crime analyst, intelligence analyst, research/strategy analyst, records and compliance roles.
- **Forensic and Technical Support:** crime lab roles, digital evidence support, evidence intake, quality support (requirements vary by agency and lab).

A.2 What Most Agencies Screen For (The "Trust File")

Agencies do not just ask, "Can you do the job?" They ask, "Can we trust you with authority?" Background investigations commonly focus on your work history, criminal history, and personal history to judge reliability and integrity. Federal guidance notes that background evaluations look for issues that would interfere with job performance and may include information gathered from employers, coworkers, and personal contacts. (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, n.d.)

- **Integrity and honesty:** consistency, truthfulness, and willingness to own mistakes.
- **Reliability:** showing up, completing tasks, stable work habits, and follow-through.
- **Judgment under stress:** how you decide, how you communicate, how you manage emotion.
- **Professional boundaries:** respectful conduct, clean decision-making, no "ego policing."
- **Safety mindset:** risk awareness, asking for help early, and using de-escalation.
- **Documentation habits:** accuracy, completeness, and the ability to explain actions later.

Watch Your Step

Risk: Trying to "clean up" your history or hide a mistake. Background checks often verify details

and cross-check sources. A small issue can become a large one if you are not straightforward. **Better option:** Be honest, be consistent, and be ready to explain what you learned and what changed.

A.3 Washington State Snapshot (CJTC Expectations)

In Washington, many commissioned peace officer and corrections officer roles connect to certification and background requirements tied to CJTC and state law. Washington law states it is state policy that law enforcement personnel comply with their oath and agency policies related to the duty to be truthful and honest in official business. (Revised Code of Washington, n.d.-a) Washington law also addresses peace and corrections officer certification and background investigation requirements. (Revised Code of Washington, n.d.-b) CJTC guidance points agencies to RCW background requirements and related rules before making a conditional offer. (Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission, n.d.)

Student takeaway: In Washington, your credibility is not optional. Truthfulness standards can follow you across agencies and across years.

A.4 Federal Hiring Snapshot (What "Pre-Employment" Usually Includes)

Federal hiring often begins with an application, testing and interviews, then a job offer that starts a deeper screening phase. USAJOBS explains that the background check process typically begins after you accept a job offer, and you may need to provide details about where you lived, worked, and went to school. (USAJOBS, n.d.)

Depending on the role and agency, pre-employment steps may include:

- **Background investigation:** records checks, interviews, and verification of history.
- **Fingerprints:** common for federal roles and many state roles.
- **Drug test:** common across justice roles; federal agencies often treat marijuana as prohibited for testing purposes.
- **Medical exam:** used to confirm you can safely perform essential job tasks.

- **Physical fitness or task test:** common for sworn roles and some custody roles.
- **Polygraph (role-dependent):** common in some federal law enforcement pipelines.
- **Security paperwork:** some roles require forms tied to national security positions.

Pro Tip

Start a "life log" now: addresses, roommates, supervisors, job dates, school dates, and travel. Many background packets ask for details going back years, and delays often happen when applicants cannot remember dates or contacts. (USAJOBS, n.d.)

A.5 What Real Federal Pipelines Look Like (Examples)

These examples show how agencies describe their own screening steps. Your goal is not to memorize agency names. Your goal is to recognize the pattern: interview + background + medical + drug testing (and sometimes a polygraph).

- **FBI (Special Agent):** FBI hiring materials describe a background investigation that can include a personnel security interview, polygraph examination, drug test, fingerprinting, credit and arrest checks, reference interviews, and verification of education. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.)
- **ATF (Special Agent):** ATF lists steps that include a panel interview, background investigation, polygraph test, medical exam, and drug test. (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, 2025)
- **DEA (Special Agent):** DEA notes that applicants must pass a background investigation and drug test for a security clearance, and that pre-employment steps may also include a polygraph and medical examination. (Drug Enforcement Administration, n.d.)
- **Federal Corrections (BOP):** BOP describes suitability screening that can include criminal record checks, credit checks, and inquiries with employers and references, plus a drug test during the medical exam and a required physical exam for institution roles. (Federal Bureau of Prisons, n.d.)
- **Federal Probation/Pretrial (U.S. Courts):** U.S. Courts notes that probation and pretrial officer roles

require a pre-employment medical exam, drug test, background check and investigation, and lists items such as fingerprinting, SF-86, and a financial credit check. (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, n.d.)

A.6 Your Pre-Employment Checklist (Build It Like a Professional)

This is the checklist that saves stress later. Keep it in one folder (digital and paper).

- **Identity:** government ID, Social Security card, passport (if you have one), and a clean copy of your birth certificate.
- **Education:** unofficial transcripts now, official transcripts on request, and a one-page list of relevant coursework for your target job.
- **Work history:** accurate job titles, supervisor names, phone numbers, addresses, start/end dates, and reason for leaving.
- **Residency history:** every address for the last 10 years (or longer if asked), with dates and roommates.
- **References:** people who can speak to reliability and character (not just friends).
- **Driving history:** be ready to discuss tickets, collisions, and corrective steps.
- **Social media cleanup:** remove posts that show poor judgment, hostility, bias, threats, or illegal activity.
- **Financial basics:** know your credit status, payment habits, and any past issues. Some screenings include credit checks. (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.; Federal Bureau of Prisons, n.d.; Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, n.d.)

Slow Down and Think

If an investigator asked, “Why should we trust you with authority over other people?” what would your answer be in two sentences?

A.7 Resume and Interview Guidance (Justice System Style)

Resumes: Most justice employers want proof of reliability, communication skills, and service mindset. Show results and responsibility. Keep formatting clean. Avoid slang. Use clear job duties and clear outcomes.

Interviews: Expect behavioral questions and scenario questions. The pattern is simple: describe what you did, why you did it, and what you learned.

- **Behavioral example:** "Tell us about a time you made a mistake."
- **Scenario example:** "A person is yelling, recording you, and refusing to calm down. What do you do first?"
- **Integrity example:** "Would you report a coworker? Why or why not?"

Pro Tip

Practice answering in 45–60 seconds. Most panels score clarity and judgment. Long answers often hide the point.

A.8 Certifications and Training (Optional, but Helpful)

Not every role needs certifications. But the right certificate can help you stand out, especially in dispatch, corrections, investigations support, and analytical roles. Start with what your target job posting asks for.

- **Law enforcement professional development:** agency training, CJTC-aligned training (Washington), and national best-practice resources from organizations like IACP, PERF, and DOJ/COPS.
- **Dispatch/communications:** look for APCO or NENA-aligned training options (varies by agency).
- **Corrections:** academy and in-service training pathways are often internal, but external professional development can help.

- **Investigations support:** report writing, interviewing fundamentals, and digital evidence basics (role-dependent).

A.9 Job Search Resources (Where to Look)

Use a "three-lane search." Run all three lanes every week.

- **Lane 1: Federal** — USAJOBS (search by series: 0083 police, 1895 CBP officer, 0007 correctional officer, 1811 criminal investigator, and related).
- **Lane 2: State and local** — state patrol sites, county sheriff offices, city HR pages, civil service listings, and agency recruitment pages.
- **Lane 3: Justice partners** — courts, probation/community supervision agencies, jails, corrections departments, and victim service organizations.

Watch Your Step

Risk: Only applying to one role and waiting. Hiring cycles can be slow, and many openings are seasonal or limited.
Better option: Apply to a "portfolio" of roles that match your values and skills. Keep your materials ready so you can move fast.

A.10 Professional Associations and Networking (Use It the Right Way)

Networking should be professional. The goal is not "who you know." The goal is learning what the job really expects and how to prepare.

- **National law enforcement leadership and standards:** International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), Police Executive Research Forum (PERF).

- **Washington training and norms:** Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (WSCJTC).
- **Federal training awareness:** Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) and DOJ/COPS training publications (many are free).

The COPS Office has described FLETC's State, Local, and Tribal Division as providing advanced training and no-cost or low-cost options for state, local, and tribal officers, including "export" training delivered to the field. (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2024)

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APPENDIX C - JUSTICE-RELATED PROGRAMS IN THE U.S.

Appendix C: Justice-Related Programs

State/ Country	Institution Name	Program Level(s)	FEPAC Accredited?	Online/ In-Person/ Both
Arizona	Arizona State University (Tempe)	BS (Forensic Science, Digital Forensics, Death Investigations) BA/BS (Forensic Psychology) MS PSM PhD	Yes	Both
Arizona	Northern Arizona University (Flagstaff)	BS (Criminology & Criminal Justice) MS (Applied Criminology)	N/A	In-Person
California	Cal State University, Long Beach	BS (Criminology & Criminal Justice – online) MS (Criminal Justice)	N/A	Online
California	University of California, Irvine	BA/BS MA PhD (Criminology; Law & Society)	N/A	Both
Connecticut	University of New Haven	BS (Forensic Science) MS (Forensic Science)	Yes	In-Person
Florida	University of Central Florida (Orlando)	BS (Forensic Science)	Yes	In-Person
Florida	Florida State University (Tallahassee)	BS MS PhD (Criminology & Criminal Justice)	N/A	Both
Georgia	Georgia State University (Atlanta)	BA/BS MS PhD (Criminal Justice & Criminology)	N/A	Both
Massachusetts	Boston University (Boston)	MS (Criminal Justice, Metropolitan College)	N/A	Online
New York	John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY)	BS (Forensic Science) MS (Forensic Science)	Yes	In-Person

State/ Country	Institution Name	Program Level(s)	FEPAC Accredited?	Online/ In-Person/ Both
New York	University at Albany (SUNY)	BS (Forensic Chemistry) MS (Forensic Science – Investigation & Mgmt)	Yes	In-Person
New York	Pace University (New York City)	BS (Forensic Science) MS (Forensic Science)	Yes	In-Person
Washington	Washington State University	BS MA PhD (Criminal Justice & Criminology)	N/A	In-Person
Washington	Seattle University	BA (Criminal Justice & Criminology); accelerated BA/ MA BA/JD pathways	N/A	In-Person
Washington	University of Washington	BA MA PhD (via Dept. of Sociology, Criminology field)	N/A	In-Person
Washington	Western Washington University	BA (Criminal Justice via Sociology major)	N/A	In-Person
Washington	Eastern Washington University	BA (Criminal Justice)	N/A	In-Person
Japan	Ryukoku University (Kyoto)	BA MA PhD (Criminology/Law)	N/A	In-Person
Japan	Rikkyo University (Tokyo)	BA (Sociology – courses in Crime & Justice)	N/A	In-Person
Japan	University of Tokyo	BA MA PhD (Law; Public Policy – including criminology)	N/A	In-Person
Netherlands	University of Amsterdam	BA (Criminology: Crime & Society) MA PhD	N/A	Both

State/ Country	Institution Name	Program Level(s)	FEPAC Accredited?	Online/ In-Person/ Both
Netherlands	Leiden University	BA (Criminal Law & Criminology) LLM PhD	N/A	Both
Norway	University of Oslo	BA (Criminology) MA PhD (Criminology & Sociology of Law)	N/A	Both
Singapore	National University of Singapore	BA (Criminology – joint minor via Law School) MA PhD	N/A	Both
United Kingdom	University of Cambridge	MSt MPhil PhD (Criminology)	N/A	Both
United Kingdom	University of Oxford	MSc MPhil DPhil (Criminology)	N/A	Both
United Kingdom	University College London (UCL)	BA (Security & Crime Science) MS (Crime Science, Criminal Justice) PhD	N/A	Both
United Kingdom	London School of Economics (LSE)	BSc (Criminal Justice) MSc (Global Crime Science) PhD	N/A	Both
United Kingdom	King's College London	LLB (Criminal Law with electives) MA (Criminology)	N/A	Both