



# CITY OF MADISON POLICE DEPARTMENT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE



## Interactions with Youth

---

Eff. Date 02/03/2025

### Purpose

The purpose of this standard operating procedure is to provide guidelines for interactions with youth by Madison Police Department (MPD) officers. MPD recognizes that youth are psychologically, emotionally, and physically different than adults. These differences require officers to be aware of the unique circumstances and needs youth may have when interacting with youth during the scope of their duties. Officers should be aware of the typical developmental tendencies of youth to react anxiously, distrustfully, or defiantly to unfamiliar individuals, particularly those in positions of power and authority.

Research has shown that adolescent brains are not fully developed until the age of 25. As a result, youth do not process advanced thought, reasoning, or impulses the same as adults. Most youth will naturally age out of lawbreaking behavior, even without any intervention from the justice system. Research has also shown that diversion generally decreases a young person's likelihood of re-arrest as compared with formal justice system involvement.

There are instances where alternatives to an arrest or citation will lead to better outcomes for the youth and for the community. MPD is committed to exercising alternatives to arrest and citation for young people whenever possible, consistent with public safety.

MPD is also committed to reducing the overrepresentation of youth of color in the criminal justice system. MPD is committed to the pursuit of equitable policing practices to forge positive relationships and build trust between law enforcement and communities of color.

### Definitions

#### Youth

---

A person who is under 17 years old.

### Procedure

#### Contact Standards

---

When interacting with youth, MPD officers should follow the guidelines outlined below:

1. Ask individuals their age and not make assumptions about how old they are.
2. Clearly explain what action the officer is taking (including what the action will entail), why the officer is taking the actions that he or she is taking, as well as the consequences if the youth does not follow instructions. Youth may require significantly more explanation than adults.
3. Recognize that a youth may not comply right away with orders or directives and that multiple attempts may be needed for the youth to fully understand. Officers should make efforts to slow down and not rush through interactions absent an emergency situation.
4. When feasible, seek specific information about individual youths that may identify potential rapport-building techniques and special considerations for that youth.

## Use of De-Escalation Techniques

---

Officers should use de-escalation techniques with youth, consistent with their training and the MPD Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).

Youth often respond to tone more immediately than verbal directives, which can easily lead to an unexpected and unhelpful response to a simple request or instruction. Officers can minimize that potential by:

1. Using a calm and measured tone to gain voluntary compliance;
2. Using simple, concrete language and short direct phrases, using affirmative rather than negative commands, e.g. *do* versus *don't*;
3. Using repetition in a clear voice to reinforce instructions;
4. Repeating back what youth say to demonstrate officers' understanding of the youth's statements, offer an opportunity for clarification, and slow down the interaction;
5. Not using threats, intimidation, or other gestures or behaviors that may be seen as aggressive, to gain compliance;
6. Clearly explaining why the officer is taking the actions that the officer is taking, as well as the consequences if a young person does not follow instructions;
7. Allowing youth to make choices when appropriate, even if it is only the appearance of a choice to gain compliance, and;
8. Allowing time for youth to comply, including consideration of the environment and competing stimulus (e.g. sirens, flashing lights, noise, commotion).

Original SOP: 12/30/2019  
(Reviewed Only: 01/11/2021, 02/04/2022, 01/31/2023, 02/05/2024)  
(Revised: 02/03/2025)