

2 pedestrian stop safety tips that could save your life

Any discussion about pedestrian stops is not complete until we review two major areas: 'moving in' and 'contact/cover'

[As seen in PoliceOne.Com](https://www.policeone.com)

My previous article reviewed pedestrian stops (PS) and their inherent dangers, while also providing some suggestions to decrease officer risk. The two most prominent risk-mitigating suggestions were:

- always have an object (police car, mailbox) between the suspect and yourself
- substantially increase the typical standoff distances (upward of 10 feet)

These two officer behaviors are key assets to increasing an officers performance through visual capabilities (better view of full body), action / reaction concepts, and most importantly, in preventing the “one shot” knockdown. HF science supports these tactical theories as increasing officer safety, but only through testing can we confirm the hypothesis.

These initial advantages are only worthwhile if they are followed up by continued good judgment and optimal officer safety techniques as the stop progresses. In keeping with the sound training methodology of performing to a natural conclusion, the PS discussion is not complete until we review two major areas: “moving in” and “contact / cover.”

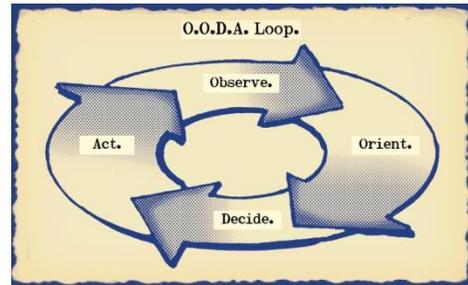
Have a Plan; Have a Back Up Plan

Before you move in, have a plan. Remember, the same Human Factors affecting you also apply to the suspect. A quick plan will help you move expeditiously and ensure you act before the suspect reacts. Having a secondary plan will allow you to “stay in the game” if the suspect does something unexpected.

Consider this: Having a plan can be compared to having Microsoft word open in the background of your computer. Click on the icon and the program is ready to go. Otherwise, your brain, much like a computer, takes time to “spool” up.

The OODA

Aside from performing your plan with speed and surprise, a secondary consideration should be placing the suspect at the most disadvantageous position before you move in. This entire methodology is supported firmly in Boyd's loop theory as it is advantageous to act quickly and with purpose while confusing the opponent and operating "inside" his OODA Loop.



A few examples to think about, depending on your situation:

- Place the subject in a position easiest for you to gain a control hold (Advantage: You!)
- Have the subject lift his shirt and perform a 360 turn while you are ready to take whatever action is necessary at a distance and behind cover (Advantage: You!)
- Have the subject sit on the curb or on the ground with legs crossed and outstretched and hands interlaced in their lap or behind their head (Advantage: You!)
- Have the subject assume the felony prone if necessary (Advantage: You!)
- Approach from the suspect's blind angle (Advantage: You!)

Each of these options provides you with obvious tactical advantages, but there is another concept warranting consideration. The suspect has shown a level of compliance by performing these types of demands and placing himself at further disadvantage. Although you never ever drop guard, seeing negative suspect behavior early on can certainly give you an advantage on what to expect and how to proceed.

Contact / Cover

Contact / Cover is an essential protective measure reducing risk and elevating our advantage over a suspect. It allows one officer to concentrate on the search / handcuffing while the second is focused on pre-assaultive indicators. This division of responsibility is based in sound scientific data concerning human attention abilities.

Science has provided mounds of evidence stating human beings simply don't perform well during divided attention tasks. Multi-tasking is not a reality and those who believe they do it well are fooling themselves. For these reasons, it's scientifically safe to hypothesize that officers conducting searches or handcuffing by themselves are

increasing their own risk while; maintaining suspect control, remaining vigilant for attacks, and talking to the suspect.

A suspect-initiated assault during the search phase places the officer in a high-stress, cognitive overload situation, where overcoming adversity becomes more difficult. This is a situation where the suspect is inside your OODA loop process and is something we want to avoid at all costs. This situation can cause hypervigilance resulting in poor decision making and a multitude of performance deficits.

Contact / cover can provide the milliseconds you may need to recover from an initial assault and to re-engage while both officers overwhelm and overcome the suspect's resistance.

Lone Warriors

I'm sympathetic to those officers who do not have the luxury of cover. You have a job to do and a discussion on resources is not my purpose here. I can only add that you must perform a personal risk assessment when cover is not available. Listen to what your brain is telling you as it is often unconsciously guiding behavior. Make good decision based upon a personal risk assessment:

Ask yourself whether the next enforcement steps you take are worth suffering serious injury or maybe losing the most precious thing you have — your life.

The idea of "simply letting this one go" is unpopular, but there is always another day when more resources may be available. Live to fight another day!

Conclusion

Please remember my suggested variations to your current tactics are intended to provide optimal officer safety based on human performance concepts. There is no "one way" of doing things and these tactical considerations are provided to get you thinking, implementing and testing new ways of doing things — hopefully better ways. LEOKA continues to show the close range suspect contact as the most dangerous job task a patrol officer performs — we might benefit from enacting some if not all of these tactics when faced with situations that justify them. Be safe, always!

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Certified Force Science Analyst, Dave Blake, M.Sc., CCI., is currently an Adjunct Professor of Criminal Justice, a Police Academy Instructor, and a Force Options Simulator Instructor at a large regional training center. His policing experience includes positions in; SWAT, Field Training, Gangs, Narcotics, Supervision, and Use of Force Training. Dave has instructor certifications in; Force Options Simulator, Firearms, DT, and Reality Based Training. He is a published author in several periodicals and journals to include a quarterly column with PoliceOne online magazine entitled; "The Science of Training". He holds a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice Management and a Master's of Science in Psychology. He is a Certified Criminal Investigator with the American College of Forensic Examiners Institute. Dave owns The Blake Consulting and Training Group which provides consulting / expert witness services on police practices (use of force) and human factors.