



**San Diego County Sheriff**

**Training Bulletin**

**William D. Gore, Sheriff**

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## **Considerations when dealing with Suicidal People**

*Imagine you are at work, driving around in your black and white when you hear a radio call of a potential suicidal subject looking over the railing at the Bradley Avenue Bridge in the unincorporated area of El Cajon. Dispatch updates unit's enroute to the call that the communication center received several radio calls about the subject and he is now pacing up and down the sidewalk of the Bradley Avenue Bridge over state route 67 and keeps looking over the railing.*

The above scenario is a typical radio call a deputy may encounter at one point in their career. Ask yourself: what would you do, what do you need to consider, and what additional resources will you need? The likelihood of a deputy having to interact with a suicidal subject is growing. Deputies can find themselves having to intervene with a suicidal subject in many ways. The suicidal subject may have a plan to end their life, deputies may have to help the subject find help, place them on a 72 hour hold for mental evaluation, or act as a counselor for the subject because they need someone to talk to.

While making contact with a suicidal subject, there are several things you should consider prior to making contact.

- If you have a Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT) unit on call, consider using them as a resource. A PERT clinician can let you know whether or not they have a history with the subject and whether they have visited a facility for a 5150 W&I evaluation.
- Have dispatch attach any related CAD calls referencing your subject to your call.
- Officer safety is always your priority. Do not put yourself or your partners in an unsafe position. Approach the person who is the focus of your contact safely.
- A suicidal person can become homicidal at any moment. Remain vigilant, and don't treat the radio call as a typical suicidal call you have responded to in the past. Remember, each radio call presents its own unique challenges and circumstances and every call is different.
- Listen to what the suicidal subject is telling you and watch their movements.
- Assess the suicidal risk the subject poses.

- Time is on your side. Do not rush your contact with a suicidal subject. Obtain as much information as you can – not only from the subject, but also from bystanders, friends, family and professionals who may have good intelligence to share with you.
- Practice due diligence. For example, if you are called to a residence for a potential suicidal subject and the property is large and the subject may have access to numerous areas within the property, take the time and effort to look for the person. Remember, residents know their homes better than us. As a result, they can find clever ways to hide from law enforcement if they do not want to talk to us.
- Develop a rapport with the subject. Notify your partners if you anticipate being on the radio call for a long period of time. It is easier to work with someone when you have a rapport and they trust you.

*Now imagine you are at work, driving around in your black and white when you hear a radio call of a potential suicidal subject inside his residence. The subject had a prior conversation with a neighbor (who calls the Communication Center) stating he did not want to live. His bills were piling up and to resolve his issues, he was going to shoot himself in the head. You contact the neighbor and confirm the suicidal subject has a firearm. The neighbor tells you he knows this because he has gone shooting with his neighbor who told him he does not want to live. You arrive at the residence of the person in question and knock on the door. A subject yells through the door and verbally confirms who he is. He also confirms that he has a firearm and he wants to kill himself. He thanks you for coming to his house to check on him and tells you to leave.*

While making contact with the suicidal subject in the above example, there are several things you should consider.

- Contact dispatch and update them with any pertinent information you obtained. Ask dispatch to notify the Crisis Negotiation Team (CNT). CNT will let dispatch know whether or not they would respond based on the information they receive. CNT has additional resources and specialized training in negotiations and would be able to assist you when dealing with suicidal subjects if they responded to a call out.
- Think about the legal reasons you can enter a residence and does this satisfy one of the reasons?
  - Probation /Parole
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Waiver
  - Warrant
  - Exigency
- Risk vs. Reward?

What are the legal/safety ramifications you will encounter if you enter the residence?

This training bulletin was originally prepared by Sergeant Aloha Bona in 2014 and was edited for distribution by the In Service Training Unit. If you have any information or expertise in a specific area and would like to write a training bulletin, please contact Corporal Michael Cruz at In Service Training, [REDACTED]