

# Group Application: Understanding Your Rights & Police Interactions

## Learning Objective:

Practice de-escalation techniques while understanding fundamental rights

## Materials Needed:

Whiteboard/flipchart, markers, handouts on basic rights

## Part 1: Opening Icebreaker (10 minutes) - The Calm Zone

Facilitator Script: "Welcome, everyone. Today we're starting with an activity called 'The Calm Zone.' We'll pair up and practice staying calm in challenging situations.

Form two circles, an inner circle and outer circle facing each other. Inner circle, you'll describe a mildly frustrating situation, like someone cutting in line or making an unfair accusation. Outer circle, your job is to respond calmly using these techniques:

- Take a deep breath, or use Box Breathing
- Box Breathing (Demonstrate the technique, then practice as a group)
  - Inhale for 4 counts
  - Hold for 4 counts
  - Exhale for 4 counts
  - Hold for 4 counts
- Use a calm, steady voice
- Ask clarifying questions
- Express understanding of the other person's perspective

After 1 minute, we'll rotate. Outer circle moves one person to the right. We'll do 4 rotations total."

Process Questions:

- "What helped you stay calm?"
- "What was challenging about responding calmly?"
- "How might these skills help in real-life situations?"

## Part 2: Main Lesson (30 minutes) - Know Your Rights

Opening Discussion (5 minutes): "Today we're discussing your rights when interacting with police. Understanding your rights helps you make informed decisions and manage these situations safely. Talking about this can be tough, especially if you have already had negative interactions with police. If this discussion becomes uncomfortable to you, you can step out at any time."

Discussion questions:

- Does anyone know their rights?
- Does anyone want to share about a difficult experience they had with law enforcement?

## Part 3: Key Rights Overview (10 minutes)

"Let's review fundamental rights. Remember these core points:

1. Right to remain silent
2. Right to refuse searches (with exceptions)
3. Right to leave if not under arrest
4. Right to an attorney
5. Right to be treated with respect

These rights apply regardless of your age, though there are some special considerations for minors."

#### **Part 4: CBT Component (15 minutes)**

Thought Patterns Discussion: "Let's examine common thoughts that might come up during police interactions:

- 'They're out to get me' (and they might be out to get you, they also might not be)
- 'I need to prove my innocence right now'
- 'If I explain everything, this will be over quickly'

Let's reframe these thoughts while maintaining our rights:

- 'I can stay calm and assert my rights respectfully'
- 'I don't have to prove anything right now'
- 'I can wait for legal representation before explaining my side'

Remember the CBT triangle: Thoughts influence feelings, which influence behaviors. By managing our thoughts, we can stay calmer and make better decisions. This is all about surviving the situation without making it worse. Remembering back to our discussion about how the brain works, it's hard to remember these things when your 'fight or flight' response is activated, and your feelings become overwhelming."

Role-Play Scenarios: Break into groups of three. Practice these scenarios:

1. Being stopped while walking
2. Questioned about an incident
3. Asked to consent to a search

In each scenario, practice:

- Staying calm (breathing techniques)
- Using respectful language
- Asserting rights clearly
- Identifying and managing anxious thoughts

#### **Part 5: Closing Activity (5 minutes) - Rights Rapid Response**

"Let's end with a quick practice activity. Stand in a circle. I'll describe a situation, and you'll take turns stating one right or strategy you would use, building on what others have said. Remember to focus on both your rights and maintaining calm, respectful behavior."

Example Situations:

- "An officer asks to search your backpack"
- "You're questioned about an incident at school"
- "You're stopped while walking with friends"

Are there any other examples that have happened to you?

Closing Reflection: "Take a moment to share one thing you learned today that you didn't know before, or one strategy you plan to use if needed."

#### Session Wrap-Up

Key Takeaways to Emphasize:

- Rights and respect can coexist
- Staying calm helps you make better decisions
- It's okay to assert your rights
- When in doubt, wait for legal representation
- Your safety is the top priority

Homework Suggestion: "Practice the breathing techniques we learned today. Notice situations where you feel anxious and try using these calming strategies."

**Facilitator Notes:**

Group Management Tips:

- Monitor energy levels and adjust pace as needed
- Acknowledge and validate participants' past experiences
- Maintain focus on safety and legal rights
- Be prepared for participants sharing difficult experiences
- Have resources available for additional legal support

Safety Considerations:

- Emphasize that this information is for safety and understanding, not confrontation
- Stress the importance of compliance with lawful orders
- Remind participants that their safety is the primary concern
- Be prepared to address trauma responses if triggered

## NAACP Guidelines on Knowing Your Rights - <https://naacp.org/find-resources/know-your-rights>

If you are approached by the police:

1. Do ask for a lawyer immediately upon being arrested or being placed into custody.
2. Do stay calm and keep your emotions from getting the best of you. Be courteous even if the police officer is not. You will only give the officers more ammunition against you if you begin yelling, arguing, or refusing reasonable directives.
3. Do carry identification at all times and be prepared to produce it.
4. Do keep your hands where the police officer can see them.
5. Do take photographs if you are injured, and seek medical attention as soon as possible.
6. Do remember the officer's name and badge number as well as any witness information. Write down everything you remember about the encounter as soon as possible.
7. Don't run.
8. Don't touch the police officer.
9. Don't make any statements about the incident without first having spoken to an attorney. Reiterate your right to remain silent, if necessary.

If you're in your car:

1. Upon request, present your driver's license, registration, and proof of insurance.
2. If you are suspected of drunk driving and refuse to take a sobriety test, the police may seize your driver's license.
3. You have the right not to consent to a search of your vehicle.
4. If the police state they have probable cause, they may begin to search your car without your consent. Do not interfere but clearly state your lack of consent.
5. If you are given a ticket, sign it. You can always fight the case in court later.

If you're on the street:

1. A police officer may briefly stop you to ask identifying questions.
2. You are not required to answer any questions but failing to truthfully answer simple ones will make the police suspicious.
3. If requested, show your identification.
4. You are not required to consent to a search of yourself or your property.
5. If police have reasonable suspicion that you have a weapon or illegal substance, they may do a "pat-down" to check. Don't resist.
6. If you feel you have been unlawfully detained, remember the officer's badge number and all identifying information. Use your cell phone or other technology to record/photograph the interaction, if you can do so safely.

If you're in your home:

1. Absent a warrant or emergency circumstances, the police do not have the right to enter your home. If the police knock at your door, you have the right to deny them entrance.
2. If the police say they have a warrant, ask to see it before letting them enter your home.
3. If you are arrested in your home, the police can search you and the area around you, which usually means the room.

If you are arrested:

1. Immediately CLEARLY state your refusal to speak to the police and make a request for an attorney. Do not make any statements other than giving your name and address. You have the right to a court appointed attorney if you cannot afford one.
2. If you are under 18 years old, ask for your parents to be contacted immediately.
3. After you are arrested, you must be given the opportunity to make a local phone call. Know beforehand who you will call in a situation like this and contact them. The police may not listen in on this phone call.
4. You must be taken before a judge or magistrate within a day after being arrested.
5. If you are required to post bail after being arrested, you may request to have your bail lowered.
6. Do not make any decisions until you have spoken with your attorney. Do not allow the police to trick you into saying anything. Remember, the police can lie to get you to confess to a crime.