



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

INSTRUCTIONAL AREA

Promoting Community Participation

MODULE 22

Dealing with Law Enforcement Authorities

Overview

There are potential tensions inherent in immigrants' relationships with law enforcement authorities. Some immigrants are fearful or mistrustful of law enforcement authorities. This fear and lack of trust may stem from experiences with police brutality and abuse of power in their home country, illegal status in this country, or fear that immigrants will be discriminated against or treated unfairly by police because they are immigrants.

It is important for immigrants to recognize that while their dealings with U.S. law authorities may be good or bad, U.S. law enforcement is, in most cases, systematic, professional and free of arbitrary or capricious treatment. Increasingly, police officers see their role as being one of resolving conflicts and trying to keep conflicts from arising in the future.

Unfortunately, among residents of low-income neighborhoods, including immigrants, hostility to law enforcement is common. Also residents of these neighborhoods may, in fact, have heard of someone who was treated unfairly by law enforcement authorities. However, in almost all communities there are review bodies which receive complaints about police maltreatment. Anyone has the right to file a complaint requesting that there be a review of their treatment by the police. Some community and church groups are regularly attempting to improve community-police relations, particularly in dealing with teenagers.

Police officers and other law enforcement personnel receive extensive training about the need to interact in a professional way with people in the community. However, to some degree these interactions are bound to be difficult. The underlying tensions which may initially tinge immigrants' relationships with police may be further exacerbated by the difficulties immigrants and law enforcement authorities personnel encounter in communicating with each other in stressful situations, for example, after an accident, in connection with reporting a crime, or having been stopped for a possible or actual infraction of the law.

There are several principles for all communication in a tense situation, all of which relate to effective communication. An important basic principle for immigrants is to understand exactly what police or other law enforcement officers may be asking them or tell them and remember that language difficulties may easily lead to misunderstandings. Another principle is to remain calm and seek to avoid surprises or escalation of a tense situation.

It is also important for immigrants to remember that there are many players in the field of law enforcement. Perhaps the most important, in terms of who immigrants are most likely to interact with are: The California Highway Patrol, local county sheriff's department, or city police departments. All should be distinguished from the Border Patrol, the arm of the INS which is responsible for enforcing immigration laws.

It is important to recognize that local county sheriff's departments and city police departments differ in their procedures, in the training they have provided to deputies and police officers, and

the extent to which they have recruited bilingual/bicultural officers. Sheriffs are elected by voters in their counties and police chiefs are hired by city councils in their respective cities. Police officers are trained in police academies and often receive some multicultural training and sometimes a degree of second language instruction.

The abuse of power is a potential and, unfortunately, sometimes a reality, within local law enforcement systems. To a very great extent enforcement agencies reflect the community and political climate in which they are situated. If there is a great deal of racial conflict, intolerance or hatred of immigrants, enforcement personnel may feel they have a measure of "permission" to abuse their power. But the majority are honest, fair police officers, lawyers willing to defend and protect the rights of people, fair judges, and good probation officers.

The responsibility and task for immigrants, and all citizens, is to understand laws and consequences of breaking them, the law enforcement agencies operate, how to look out for and advocate for oneself, when to seek legal advice, and how to assure that the advice they receive is good.

In the short run this means that everyone should be aware of their right to due process. In the long-run, each individual needs to understand his or her rights and how to seek redress when they are violated. In the face of abuse of power on the part of law enforcement, people can organize and demand change. The system can be reformed by voting a sheriff out of office or pressuring the city council to remove a police chief. Citizens can file formal complaints against individual officers or hire attorneys to seek justice in the face of police abuse of power. Citizens can also seek to work collaboratively with the police to make things better as part of a joint community-police effort.

Basic Skills Development

Basic Skills	Share information, ask sensitive questions in a "safe" social context, recognize and communicate appropriately in a stressful context.
Thinking Skills:	Secure information, evaluate alternative information sources, test the accuracy of information, generate "what if" scenarios to assess the impact of proposed courses of action, use mathematical reasoning together with reference information to assess the consequences of one's action.
Personal Qualities:	Demonstrate understanding, friendliness, empathy and politeness; relates well to others; displays a sense of responsibility.
Uses Resources:	Recognize that authority personnel can be a resource, use reference texts to find out definitive information about important issues; organize with others to address ongoing problems or issues.
Interpersonal Skills:	Collaborate, negotiate, compromise, use conflict resolution strategies.
Works With Systems:	Understand how laws, which govern many facets of everyday life, function and how the legal system, like other systems, may not exactly approximate the "ideal" theoretical system. Distinguish, between separate branches of a system which is often perceived as being monolithic.
Uses Technology:	Selects appropriate technology for task at hand.

Teaching Points

1. **Law enforcement officers -- the police -- belong to various organizations.** Counties and cities have law enforcement officers. Other jurisdictions such as parks, colleges, and even regulatory agencies have an enforcement arm. Some forms the police take are: the CHP (California Highway Patrol), city police, county sheriffs, animal control officers, fish and game officers, park rangers, building inspectors, air quality control officers, school truancy officers, parking enforcement personnel, college campus police, INS officers. Private and public institutions, also, may have security personnel who carry out a limited amount of law enforcement roles. Each has different priorities, concerns, responsibilities and rights, and style of interacting with people.
2. **Police officers may often be the first to respond to a medical emergency phoned in on a 911 line or at an accident scene.** Most law enforcement personnel are trained in first aid, CPR, and, often, in advanced emergency medical procedures and so they can be turned to for help with medical problems as well as with problems about a crime.
3. **While individuals requesting assistance from the police must contact the right agency that has jurisdiction in their case, police can function beyond their district or jurisdiction.** For example, a county sheriff can stop you for speeding within city limits. Any law enforcement officer, and also privately-hired security officers, can arrest you for breaking the law.
4. **Police cannot stop people and ask to see I.D.'s without probable cause.** Probable cause means when a police officer has reasonable suspicion, based upon his experience, that a law is being broken. If shown a fake I.D., the police may confiscate it. When police have probable cause to stop individuals, if they cannot identify themselves, they may be arrested. Anyone who is arrested has the right talk to an attorney before answering any questions that the police might have for them.
5. **Many police, especially in larger cities, have access to an A.T.&T. service called Language Line.** This is a translating service where the police officer and an individual who does not speak English can communicate on a conference call with an A.T.&T. translator. This service is usually used in connection with minor crimes, not in the case of serious crimes. In the case of serious crimes, bilingual officers, if available, are called. The police prefer to use bilingual officers in such cases because they can serve as future witnesses and testify as to suspect's behavior, body language.
6. **It is important to understand that if cited by a police officer, one needs to sign the citation or they can be arrested.** Signing is only an acknowledgment that a persons realizes that they have been cited and they need to appear in court to take care of the matter. It is not an admission of guilt.
7. **In general it is best to cooperate with the police. If, later after reflecting about the issue, a person feels the police have abused their power or their rights, a person can file a complaint later.** People's ideas about their legal rights which come from television, for example, are not really reliable. As in most tense situations, doing something unexpected or escalating the level of tensions is dangerous and can only make things worse.
8. **It is important to get the officer's name and badge number.** Whenever you have any interaction with an officer note the date, time and place of the interaction. If you feel that you have been a victim of police abuse of power or your rights have been violated, you may file a formal complaint with the officer's agency. Such complaints must be filed within a year. If you are seeking compensation, you need to hire a lawyer to represent you. Generally such attorneys work for a percentage of the damages awarded and consequently are not interested in taking your case unless they feel you can win.
9. **The officers must read you the Miranda Rights or your right to remain silent and to**

request the presence of an attorney before answering any questions, if you are in custody for a crime or about to be arrested for a crime and the police are going to question you regarding that crime.

10. **It is important for immigrants to educate themselves as much as possible on the laws in the U.S., in California, and in their local communities.** Some behavior which may be acceptable in their home communities is not acceptable in the U.S. To complicate things further, some things which may be legal in some California cities (for example, street vending) may not be legal in others.
11. **Police need a search warrant to enter your house or search your car**, except under special circumstances, for example, when there is an emergency. It is best to ask to see the warrant, and ask for an interpreter if you cannot read it.
12. **Immigrants should become aware of the specifics of some kinds of interactions with police.** Some examples of the range of issues that arise are presented below. These examples, of course, cover only a small portion of the full spectrum of everyday knowledge about U.S. and California laws that are useful for everyone.

a) Eviction --living in an employer or landlord's house. Individuals living as a sole boarder in an employer's house or the landlord's house, may be evicted with a written notice. The owner and police can arrest them if they do not leave at the expiration of the notice.

b) Eviction -- living on the employer's property. Tenants, living on an employer's property as part of their job, but not in the employer's house, may not be evicted without a court order. They must be served with a summons and complaint showing their employment was lawfully terminated, given an opportunity to file a response and to have a trial. It takes a landlord about one month to obtain such an eviction notice.

c) Eviction -- In general. Tenants need not leave the premises, even though a sheriff asks them, unless there is a court order, a writ of possession and a sheriff's notice to vacate scheduling the eviction for a certain date and time. They have up to 5 days to leave after being presented with a court order.

Individuals renting apartments or houses must be served with an eviction notice before being asked to leave the premises. There is no such thing as a self-help eviction or lock-out. It is illegal.

d) Disturbance of the peace. If the police are called to a house where there is a party going on, people should quietly move inside and cooperate with the police. Music should be turned down and noise should be reduced. If participants refuse to cooperate, the police can ask the host, as well as guests, for his or her I.D. and persons could be arrested. In some situations, for example renting a Veterans' Hall for a wedding, police presence is mandated. Persons renting the hall are responsible for arranging for police presence to prevent potential disorderly behavior.

e) Driving, regulations about cars, and traffic violations

There are many regulations governing ownership of vehicles, driving, and traffic laws. Immigrants would do well to find out about all of them. It is useful for students to think about how several different violations which might seem similar are actually treated differently by police officers or highway patrol officers. An example which might be useful to point out is: car seats for infants.

1. *Driving without a valid license*

The car will be impounded for 30 days and the driver must pay a fee to get it out. The driver will be cited and must appear in court. It is essential that he or she sign the citation or they will be arrested. A person with no identification, may be arrested. The

- person must be given the right to speak to an attorney before questions are asked.
2. ***Driving Under The Influence -- DUI's.***

A person may be arrested for driving under the influence no matter what their blood alcohol level is if their driving is impaired (e.g. if they are weaving around).

If it is determined by the police that an individual has consumed more than the legal limit of alcohol to drive or if the person is driving unsafely, the individual will be arrested. (Students should know that the California Department of Motor Vehicles routinely distributes a chart showing number of beers and drinks and blood level alcohol in relation to body weight). A person must submit to a blood, breath, or urine test to determine their blood alcohol level if asked to by an officer. A driver under 21 can have their driver's license taken away for having any level of alcohol in their blood.

Some police and sheriff's departments have DUI release programs which allow a licensed driver to come pick up the person cited for a DUI and sign that they will be responsible for him or her. After signing the citation, the individual cited for the DUI may leave and need not go to jail. Otherwise the vehicle may be stored and the person may be jailed for 46 hours.

The fine for a DUI depends on one's driving record. If it is a second offense, the individual will be arrested. DUIs can result in mandatory jail sentences. People should not drive after drinking. An accident can result in being charged with major clean-up costs, even if no one is seriously injured or killed.

3. ***Driving without Insurance***

All California drivers must carry insurance with coverage of at least \$15,000 per person/\$30,000 per accident for bodily injury and \$5,000 for property damage. There are steep fines for violating this requirement -- over \$100. There are legislative efforts to make insurance more affordable about which students must keep informed.

4. ***Driving without seat belts or car seats***

In California driver and passengers must buckle on their seat belts. They can be cited for an infraction if they do not, and even with child endangerment if they are involved in an accident.

Sample Learning Activities

1. Have students write and share about interactions or experiences with the police.
2. Have students, in small groups, evaluate the local police and sheriff's department and share observations.
3. Describe an ideal police or sheriff's department. Compare this with your local departments. Come up with suggestions for how your department could be improved.
4. Find out how long your sheriff and police chief have served. Call and try to find out what are their policies, programs and vision for their departments.
5. Design an interview in class and invite a policeman and/or sheriff to be interviewed by the students. Discuss how they spend their time. What are their concerns? What are their priorities?
6. Determine the racial and cultural makeup of the local police department and sheriff's department compare it to the racial and cultural makeup of the community at large. Is it a match?
7. Take photos of various law enforcement vehicles - police cars, sheriffs' cars, CHP cars, animal control cars, rangers' vehicles, etc. Have small groups of students choose one of the photos

and research and report on the jurisdictions, job duties and job descriptions of the law enforcement agencies.

8. El Protector is a program of the California Highway Patrol which originated in Fresno, CA in 1987. In 1996, the program has a 1.5 million dollar grant. Hispanic officers visit schools and ESL programs in order to educate Hispanics about traffic safety. Laws are explained in an effort to prevent DUI's. Use of child safety seats, bicycle helmets and seat belts are promoted. Promotional items are given away during presentations. Invite an officer from the program to visit your site and give a presentation.
9. Arrange a field trip to traffic court. Have students write up their impressions and what they learned upon their return to class.
10. Using the DMV chart of the relationship of number of drinks over a given time period, body weight, and blood alcohol level ask students to estimate how much it would take different members of the class to be arrested for exceeding the permissible blood alcohol level.
11. Using a Pocket Guide to California Law have students research the costs of not having children in a car seat and estimate how much it would cost for each class member's family. Students may want to discuss how they would respond to a police officer who cited them for driving with children who are not in a car seat.
12. Have students design their own personalized license plate and explain to the class what it represents and the reasons behind their design.
13. Discuss in class how well police are dealing with the problem of youth crime and what activities or initiatives class participants think are most useful, which are least useful, and what more should be done. Invite a police department representative to meet with the class to describe what the department is doing, answer questions, and respond to suggestions.
14. If there is a local group dealing with community-police relations invite a representative to meet with the class (ideally, invite a police representative also) and discuss their perspectives on how things are going, what the problems are, and what the solutions might be.

Resources

California Department of Motor Vehicles -- 0.08% DUI Charts (Charts of Drinks, Blood Level Alcohol, and Bodyweight). This is free and provides an opportunity for students to understand how reading tabular information relates directly to everyday life.

Lisa Guerin, Patti Gima, et al, Nolo's Pocket Guide to California Law, Nolo Press, Berkeley, CA 1995. Cost is \$10.95. This is an affordable and comprehensive reference which teachers might wish to purchase and have available for students to use as a reference.

California Department of Motor Vehicles --<http://www.dmv.ca.gov>

Commercial Textbooks

Choices: It's Your Right, Contemporary Books
Ch. 8, He Didn't Do It
Ch. 10, My Papers Are Good

Crossroads 4, Oxford University Press
Unit 2, Transportation

English Day By Day, Academic Therapy Publications
Unit 11, Law

English for Adult Competency 2, Prentice Hall
Ch. 9, Government and Law

Expressways 2, Prentice Hall
P. 142, Let Me See Your Driver's License

You and the Law, Educational Design, Inc.
P. 38, The Rights of an Arrested Person
P. 37, Cars

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