

Mentally Ill Man on Roof

Facilitator:

You are just starting your tour of duty. As you turn on the radio, you hear an officer verifying an address with the dispatcher. The address is in your area of responsibility but you did not hear the initial dispatch to that location. You then hear this same officer request the assignment of an additional patrol unit to the response. After waiting for the additional unit to be assigned, you inquire with the dispatcher about the details of the call.

They inform you that three patrol units are responding to West Main Street for a mental health medical call, but that it may also be a domestic assault and battery. A father is reporting his middle-aged son has mental health issues and is currently suffering a mental health crisis. The son “attacked” the father, punching and kicking him, when he tried to take him to the hospital. The father is stating that he wants his son arrested. He is leaving the residence right now and will meet the officers at the end of the street. (Consider Step 3 of the Critical Decision-Making Model: Law and Your Police Powers. There is a legal reason to be here and police are compelled to take some action.)

What are your initial thoughts based on the information?

FLS Response:

1. *Possible answers:*
 - a. *Respond to assist the officers.*
 - i. *Why did one officer request an additional unit?*
 - ii. *Is the address or persons known to the officer or your agency?*
 - b. *Respond and send additional units to assist if needed.*
 - c. *Ask dispatch to keep the reporting person on the phone for updates or call them back if needed.*

Scenario Update: When the officers arrive, they meet with the father, mother, and sister of the adult subject. It is determined that only the father was assaulted, but they all left the residence because they were afraid he would continue to be violent. The family explains the subject has a long history of mental illness and has been refusing to take his medications for over a week. The father states this has been an ongoing problem for many years, and he wants his son arrested for hitting him. They do not believe he has access to any guns or other weapons. The family has no immediate place to go while the police handle the situation. The subject was last observed in his room on the second floor, but the family is not sure where he is now. You now arrive at the corner of the street with your officers.

What is your plan?

Scenario Update: You and the officers respond to the residence. As you reach the house, you and the officers observe an adult male sitting on the roof. The male begins ripping up the shingles from the roof and throwing them down at the officers. The subject is verbally engaging the officers, taunting them to “come and get him” off the roof. There is a ladder leaning on the side of the house from the driveway to the roof. You observe two of your officers walking into the driveway towards the ladder.

What actions should you take at this time?

FLS Response:

1. *Call the two officers back to you at the front of the house. Do not allow them to use the ladder.*
2. *Create distance around the house and set a perimeter.*
3. *Stage medical aid.*
4. *Slow the initial response down.*
5. *Recognize this is a barricaded subject on a roof.*
6. *Call for on-duty Hostage Negotiation Team (HNT).*
7. *Establish a command post.*

(Facilitator Note: It is imperative for the on-scene FLS of this incident to prevent officers from closing the distance and forcing a confrontation with the subject. The use of time and distance as a tactic provides more opportunity for additional resources to arrive and helps maintain the safety of everyone on scene. The officers should recognize they are not in any danger if they position themselves outside of the subject’s throwing range.

This is clearly a subject in mental crisis. If there is no immediate threat of harm to the officers, it is appropriate to provide him the time needed to move past this moment of mental crisis and return to a better state of mind if possible. When dealing with people in mental crisis, who only pose a danger to themselves, successfully using time and distance as a tactic yields a better and safer outcome for everyone on scene. When officers force a confrontation with a person in mental crisis, the risk of harm to the officers and the subject increase.

Two of the officers appeared as though they intended to go up on the roof. This plan of action could have disastrous results, as the suspect and the officers might end up falling to the ground. An FLS, or any field supervisor, must take immediate action to prevent officers from acting independently during a crisis incident. Officers and supervisors must understand that this subject may jump off the roof whether officers are on the roof with him or not. It is better for the officers and the agency if the subject decides to jump for their own reasons and not because the police came onto the roof and were closing in on him.

More importantly, if the officers close the distance and the subject did jump, he may grab an officer(s) and taken them off the roof with him.)

FLS Response:

1. *Assign officers on-scene to:*
 - a. *Be primary communicator (one officer) with subject until HNT arrives.*
 - b. *Set a perimeter.*
 - c. *Manage traffic to ensure additional units and Fire/EMS can arrive on-scene.*
 - d. *Act as primary scribe and communicator with dispatch (one officer).*
2. *Once HNT arrives, some patrol officers may be able to go back in service.*