

What Would You Do If the Police Stopped You?

Recently, across the country, there have been several tragic incidents resulting from contact between citizens and police officers. The CSU Channel Islands Police Department is concerned and would like to avoid having these types of situations occur on our campus. For this reason, the CSU Channel Islands Police Department has developed this information to help citizens better understand what to expect from police officers if they are stopped and/or questioned. A familiarization with law enforcement concerns and practices will help avert needless confrontation or misunderstandings.

While there are no specific guidelines for citizens in handling contacts with police, the following advice is beneficial. [We are not offering legal advice.] The goals of the police department are to improve police-community relations and to have contacts and interviews resolved without unnecessary conflict or injury to either the officer or the citizen. This information will hopefully help to minimize your stress and anxiety during your contact with the police and at the same time give you some insight into the concerns and procedures of the officers.

If You Are Stopped By The Police While In Your Car

1.) As soon as you notice the police emergency lights pull your vehicle over to the right immediately.

- a.) Although you might not know the reason, you should pull over right away.
- b.) You may have committed some minor traffic violation without realizing it.
- c.) There may be some problem with your vehicle of which you are unaware.

2.) Remain in your vehicle while the officer approaches.

- a.) Do not attempt to get out of your vehicle or approach the officer.
- b.) Exiting your vehicle does not assist the officer and may be perceived as a threat.
- c.) For the officer's safety and yours, remain in your vehicle.

3.) Turn on your interior light if stopped at night.

- a.) A lit vehicle cabin will reduce the officer's concern regarding weapons or other possible threats within your reach.

4.) Keep your hands easily observable, preferably on the steering wheel where they can be easily seen by the approaching officer.

- a.) Reaching under your seat or into your glove box are actions that will cause the officer concern that you may be reaching for a weapon.

5.) Give your license and registration to the officer if asked to do so.

- a.) California law requires a driver to turn over this information upon request by a uniformed officer or an officer in plain clothes who displays proper identification.

b.) Most officers will not provide a specific reason(s) for the stop until they have received your license and registration. This is to avoid debating the reason for the stop prior to acquiring this necessary information.

6.) If you wish to inquire as to why you were stopped or offer an explanation, do so before the officer returns to his or her vehicle.

a.) Answer all questions honestly. Information pertaining to prior arrests or traffic violations is easily verified via the police dispatcher.

b.) Touching or threatening a police officer or acting in a disorderly manner could result in the filing of additional charges against you and you will be arrested.

c.) If the officer asks you to step out of your vehicle, do so without any sudden or threatening movements.

d.) Give the officer approximately 2½-3 feet of "personal" space as a safety zone to do his or her job.

e.) Remain in your vehicle at all times unless told to do otherwise.

f.) Do not become argumentative, disorderly, or abusive. If an officer has already written a ticket, it cannot be voided at that time. If you believe that you have been unfairly treated, DO NOT make that argument on the side of the road. Your best alternative is to carry your protest to Traffic Court.

Whether an officer issues you a ticket or gives you a warning is entirely up to their individual discretion. Your conduct during the stop may influence the officer's decision.

Don't Be Offended

Most citizens already realize that law enforcement is a difficult and dangerous profession. Hundreds of police officers are killed each year, and thousands more are injured and assaulted. For these reasons, police officers tend to be extremely cautious. They place a great deal of emphasis on officer safety and survival. Certain safety practices are instilled in our officers from the first day of their careers. Although the procedures maximize safety for the officer, they may seem standoffish, impolite, or offensive to citizens who may not consider such precautions necessary with "them." Even though you have no intention of doing the officer harm, he or she will probably maintain a defensive posture until the officer feels that there is no risk of confrontation or injury. As far as police officers are concerned, there is no such thing as a "routine" traffic stop. Every stop has the potential for danger.

If The Police Approach You On The Street

Innocent individuals are often offended or angered, or both, because an officer has detained them for questioning. Although the delay might be inconvenient for you, the officer believes there is a reason (reasonable suspicion) to stop you and

ask questions. Most of these stops are not officer-initiated. The most common reasons that cause an officer to stop someone are as follows:

- 1.) You might be one of only a few people walking around in the vicinity of a crime that has recently occurred.
- 2.) Your clothing might be similar or identical to that worn by the perpetrator of a crime.
- 3.) Someone may have called the police complaining about your presence or that you looked "suspicious."
- 4.) Someone may have pointed you out to the officer.
- 5.) You might be acting in a manner that the officer considers "suspicious" and you may act even more "suspicious" after realizing that the officer is observing you.

The police officer does not wish to detain you any longer than necessary. Once the officer is able to determine that you are not the individual that he or she is looking for, the officer will often apologize for the inconvenience and then quickly leave to resume the search.

In All Police Encounters

- 1.) Avoid making sudden movements (for your wallet, into your coat, toward your waistband, etc.) until you have informed the officer of your intention to do so and the officer has said it's okay.
- 2.) Do not carry weapons (real or otherwise) or even joke about having a weapon on your person.
- 3.) Do not touch the police officer or violate his or her "personal" safety zone (2½-3 feet).
- 4.) Remain calm and avoid being argumentative. (If you are uncooperative and refuse to answer reasonable questions, the officer is likely to become more suspicious and the encounter will probably last much longer than necessary.)
- 5.) Comply first, then you may seek an explanation from the officer or the officer's supervisor later.

Summary

There are times when citizens who have contact with the police come away with feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction. The CSU Channel Islands Police Department does not condone police misconduct of any type. In our experience, we have learned that those negative feelings are often a result of not knowing the reason(s) an officer has made certain requests or acted in a certain manner. Unfortunately, demands on a patrol officer do not always permit time for explanations at the time you are stopped. Hopefully, the information presented

here will give you an understanding of police procedures and let you know what to expect from a police officer if you are stopped.