



# COMMUNITY LIAISON UNIT

COLUMBUS DIVISION OF POLICE • STRATEGIC RESPONSE BUREAU

## What to Do If Stopped by Law Enforcement

### From the Officer's Perspective

Often, a person who has been stopped by a law enforcement officer forgets that the officer is under a unique and challenging set of circumstances. They are trying to enforce the law while at the same time attempting to ensure your safety as well as the safety of those around you.

When stopped by a law enforcement officer, the average citizen may become angry, fearful or nervous. The officer's training and experience teaches them to look for and expect these same emotions from criminals they confront. These emotions are often an indication of criminal activity and may be precursors to flight from, or assault on, the officer.

If you are stopped and issued a citation, understand that it is part of the officer's job. Officers have a duty to regulate traffic and enforce the law.

In all law enforcement encounters remember the Golden Rules

1. Do Not make sudden movements IE: for your wallet, coat, towards your waistband, etc.) Until you have informed the officer of your intentions to do so and the officer has given approval.
2. Do Not carry weapons (Unless you have a permit) or make a joke about having a weapon in you possession.
3. Do Not reach for or display your weapon if you are a CCW permit holder. Comply with the officers orders. Advise the officer that you have a weapon and where it is located if you are detained.
4. Do Not touch the officer or invade his or her personal safety space (**3 feet rule**)
5. Do Not be argumentative  
Being uncooperative will only prolong your encounter.
6. Do Not immediately demand an explanation  
Comply first, and then seek an explanation from the officer or the officer's supervisor.

## How to ensure your safety if you are stopped while in your car

1. Pull over to the right immediately upon seeing the law enforcement emergency lights.
2. Remain in your vehicle while the officer approaches.
3. Turn on your interior light if stopped at night.
4. Keep your hands in sight – preferably on the steering wheel where the approaching officer can easily see them.
5. Give your license, registration and proof of insurance to the officer if asked to do so.
6. If you are a Carry Concealed Weapons Permit Holder (CCW), advise the officer “I’m a CCW permit holder and armed” then state where your weapon is located.
7. 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.
8. Do not touch, threaten or act in a disorderly manner toward a law enforcement officer.
9. If the officer asks you to step out of your vehicle, do so without any sudden or threatening movements.
10. Give the officer at least three feet of professional space to do his or her job.
11. Remain in your vehicle at all times unless told otherwise.

## How to ensure your safety if you are stopped while on the street

If an officer should approach you on the street – it is not because he or she has any interest in upsetting you. If you are detained, keep in mind there is always a reason for which you are most likely unaware.

*The most common reasons that cause an officer to stop a citizen are as follows:*

1. You might be one of only a few people walking 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 law enforcement agency complaining about your presence or that you look “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 act even more suspicious after realizing that the officer is observing you.

The law enforcement officer does not wish to detain you any longer than necessary. As soon as the officer finds that you are not the suspect, he or she will often apologize for the inconvenience and quickly resume the search elsewhere.