

What is your name?
What is your date of birth?
Where do you live?
Do you have identification?

These are simple questions that can be answered easily by almost everyone. However, when a police officer asks these questions, it may cause some tension on the part of the citizen. While we have trained our officers and implemented policy regarding expectations for them, we recognize the need also exists to inform our community partners (you) of what to expect if or when a police officer contacts you. There are many different reasons why you might be stopped by the police. Whatever the reason, the officer needs your cooperation. This pamphlet was prepared in order to enhance communication and strengthen the partnership between police officers and citizens.

The officer asking you such questions will have a reason even though it may seem to you that he or she does not.

The officer may be investigating a complaint phoned in by someone in the neighborhood, may have been informed over the police radio or by computer that a crime has just been committed in the area, may think you have information that will help with an investigation, or may believe that you are in need of assistance.

The officer has a responsibility to obtain pertinent information to resolve disputes or calls for service. Part of the investigation process is to ask questions relevant to the investigation. Please remain calm and do not be offended. Comply with the officer's request even if you feel that the officer is wrong. Do not confront or threaten the officer. The officer will attempt to explain what they are doing, but situations may arise that cause a delay in the explanation of the officer's actions. If you believe the actions of the officer are improper, you may file a complaint at a later time.



What If I Have Questions?

The Fire and Police Commission encourages you to contact us whenever you have a question. Our trained staff is available to help you weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.

Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission

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24-Hour Message Line

414-286-5000

Website

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What To Expect When Interacting With The Police



If A Police Officer Comes To Your Home

It is important for you to make sure the individual is in fact a law enforcement officer. The individual should be in a recognizable police uniform or if in "street clothes", will provide his/her badge and law enforcement identification. There are several reasons a law enforcement officer may come to your home. Some of these include: 911 was dialed from your home; they are investigating your well being; there is a neighborhood problem or crime concern the officer wants to alert you to; they are investigating an incident in which you may be a witness; or they have other useful information.



Stopped By Police While Driving

When stopped by an officer while driving, feeling confused, anxious, or even angry are common reactions. Here are a few tips if you are stopped while driving.

As soon as you notice the police emergency lights and/or hear the siren, slow down and pull over at the first safe location.

Remain in your vehicle and wait for the officer to approach. Exiting the vehicle can be perceived as aggression. For your safety and the safety of the officer, please remain in the vehicle. It is also helpful to keep your hands easily observable.

When the officer approaches you, the officer will inform you of the purpose for the stop. The officer will then request additional information. The first words spoken by either the officer or you will establish the tone of the encounter.

Comply with the officer's request to see your driver's license or identification. If your documents are out of reach, tell the officer where they are before you reach for them.

Try to avoid any sudden movements, such as reaching under the seat, floorboard, or into the back seat or glove box.

Many people stopped by the police will be released without further action. However, if you are issued a citation, the officer may request that you sign it and provide a finger print. This does not mean you're guilty of anything, just that you are aware of getting the citation. Do not become argumentative, disorderly, or abusive. The officer will explain the procedure for you to contest the citation in court.

Can The Police Stop And Question People Who Are Not Under Arrest?

Yes. The police can stop a person, and ask questions, without "arresting" the person. Sometimes police also stop and talk to people as a community relations tool to learn about the neighborhood.

Upon seeing suspicious activity, the police may temporarily detain people to request that they identify themselves and to question them about suspicious activity. For their own safety, the police can perform a "weapons frisk" on the outside of a person's clothes. During this frisk, if they feel something, they may remove it for further examination.

If I Am Arrested, Can The Police Search Me?

Yes. The police have the authority to search you and your immediate surroundings including the room or area you are in. They are also required to handcuff persons that are arrested.

If you are arrested in a car, they may have the authority to search the entire passenger compartment of the car. If your car is towed, the police may perform an "inventory search" of the entire car, including the contents of the trunk.



When Is A Person "Under Arrest"?

Many people think an arrest can only occur when an officer says, "You are under arrest," followed by the reading of the "Miranda Rights" as seen in many TV programs.

Reality is a bit more complicated. An arrest occurs when a person no longer reasonably expects that they are free to leave. If a person is not allowed to leave the scene for an extended period of time, the person may be considered to be "under arrest," even though those words are never used. If a person is handcuffed, is locked in the back of a police car, or is otherwise restrained from leaving, the person will ordinarily be considered to be "under arrest."

Do The Police Have To "Read Me My Rights" If I Am Arrested?

If you are being questioned regarding your involvement in a crime and you are not free to leave (under arrest), you will be advised of your "Miranda Rights."

Proper police tactics can be experienced by innocent people as frightening and alienating.