

## Foot Pursuits

Pursuing subjects on foot is one of the most dangerous police actions that officers can engage in. Approximately 50% of arrests result in either a vehicle or foot pursuit, and many times a foot pursuit occurs after a vehicle pursuit. A police officer involved in a foot pursuit is at a total disadvantage unless a cover officer is present. Many foot pursuits end with the subject being tackled by the officer and a grappling match ensuing. Because of a police officer's instinct to pursue and apprehend a fleeing subject (the predator-prey instinct), the adrenaline rush and "must catch" mindset often overshadow safe tactics in apprehending the subject.

### 1. Foot Pursuit vs. Tactical Apprehension

A. Foot Pursuit Definition – A pursuit on foot by officers where *good visual contact*, including of the suspect's hand, is maintained at all times, and the suspect is *readily capable of being apprehended*.

1. A foot pursuit should end when the officers lose visual contact with the suspect, and a tactical apprehension should begin.
2. Officers can re-engage in a foot pursuit when they regain visual contact of the subject and he is readily capable of being apprehended.

B. Tactical Apprehension – a *tactical search and apprehension* for a subject could be accomplished by:

1. Perimeter/block searches
2. Cover/contact search
3. K9 track
4. SERT

Note: When the officer loses visual contact with the suspect and ends the foot pursuit, he should actively organize the apprehension of the suspect.

2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Foot Pursuits

A. Advantages

1. The immediate apprehension of the subject.
2. More likely to locate and/or recover evidence or contraband in the suspect's possession.

B. Disadvantages

1. Action-reaction principle applied against the officer by the suspect.

- a. The suspect stops and turns around on the officer while the officer's momentum takes him into the suspect.
- b. The suspect pulls out a weapon (gun or knife) before the officer has time to react.
- c. Because of the close proximity of the suspect, the officer has minimal time to assess a threat.

## 2. Predator-Prey Instinct

- a. Because police officers are ingrained to catch those who run, they end up tackling a potentially armed suspect and risk losing their weapons to the suspect.
- b. Many times, officers chase individuals who run for no reason, and the officer doesn't know why he is chasing someone until he catches him.

## 3. Physical Factors

- a. The officer may be too fatigued to take control of the suspect.

- b. The adrenaline rush may cause the officer to react at a higher level of control than is reasonable.
- c. The officer may be too winded to communicate.
- d. Physical injury may occur as a result of the sudden, all-out exertion of a foot pursuit.

4. Environmental and Location Hazards

- a. The officer is exposed to terrain obstacles (holes in the ground, chain link fences, low-hanging wires, shrubs, curbs).
- b. The suspect may know the area better than the officer, and lead the officer into hazards.
- c. The officer may not be aware of dogs or homeowners protecting their property.
- d. The officer may be pursuing the suspect through traffic.
- e. Pursuing a suspect at night limits the officers' visibility.

- f. When the officer apprehends the suspect, he may not know his location and will be unable to direct any assistance.

5. Apprehension Dangers

- a. Because officers run at different speeds, one may outrun his cover. When the officer catches up to the suspect, he may be alone when he attempts custody.
- b. Many times when the suspect is taken down, there is a physical confrontation during the custody.

6. Absolute “Don’ts” of Foot Pursuits

- a. **Do not engage in a foot pursuit of an armed suspect.**
  - 1. Officers should not walk up to an armed suspect and put hands on to take him into custody. The officer should use the high risk approach.
  - 2. Armed suspects have a definite advantage in reaction if they decide to use a weapon against the officer.

3. When a foot pursuit turns into a deadly force situation, the foot pursuit should be terminated immediately.

b. **Do not pursue an individual with your gun out.**

1. Pursuing officers may trip and the weapon could discharge.
2. If the officer catches up to the suspect, there is a possibility of a handgun retention problem.
3. The officer's sidearm should remain holstered during a foot pursuit.

3. Foot Pursuit Techniques

A. Cover/Contact Pursuits (Two Officers)

1. Fleeing suspects should be pursued by at least two officers who maintain visual contact with each other. Once visual contact (cover/contact) is lost, the risk to the lone officer escalates and the pursuit is terminated.
2. During any custody situation, the officer should use cover units to assist in effecting the arrest.

B. Paralleling the Suspect

1. Officers should not follow directly behind the suspect during the pursuit. Pursue slightly off to the side and preferably with gun side away.
2. If the officers are in close proximity to each other, the second officer should also be offset in his position (on the same side of the suspect).

C. Follow A Different Route

1. Officers should not follow the exact route of the suspect. If the suspect goes over a fence, the officer should go over at a different location, if he is able to maintain a visual.
2. The officer must be aware of manufactured hazards, as the suspect may intentionally lead the officer through obstacles or hazards that could be dangerous for the officer.
3. The officer may choose the tactic of cutting off the path of the fleeing suspect. This may place the officer in front of the suspect at close quarters and could be hazardous.

#### D. Knock-Down Technique

1. When officers catch up to the suspect, they often grab onto him and take him to the ground. To maintain a position of advantage and the officers' balance, the knock-down technique was developed.
2. The technique also allows the officers to use more options of control while the suspect is on the ground and the officers are on their feet.
3. Technique
  - a. While the officer is paralleling the suspect and gets close enough to touch the suspect, the officer should shove the suspect hard from the rear, in the middle of the back between the shoulders.
  - b. This will cause the suspect's body to go ahead of his feet and fall forward onto the ground.
  - c. The officers (cover and contact) will then veer off at an angle away from the suspect's arms and get distance between the officers and the suspect, while the officers then move to the head of the suspect.



- d. The officer will then give verbal commands to the suspect to stay on the ground and get into a prone position, as follows: “Hands out away from your body. Palms up. Cross your feet. Put your ear on the ground.”
- e. The officer also has some time to consider options while the suspect is trying to recover from the fall. The options include:
  - 1. Physical control with the cover officer there (two on one control to custody).
  - 2. The use of pepper spray or the baton.
  - 3. High risk, if the situation dictates.

#### 4. Foot Pursuit Threat Indicators

A. The officer who recognizes threat indicators of a suspect who is being pursued can be prepared if the suspect’s intent changes from escape to a threat to the officer. Threat indicators include:

- 1. Looking back – The suspect who looks back at the officer may be looking and preparing for the right opportunity to turn on the officer (target acquisition).

2. Change of stride – If the suspect appears to be slowing down, he could be trying to draw the officer in. If the suspect's stride appears to speed up, especially to get around corners or blind spots, he may be attempting to get to that blind spot to wait and ambush the officer.
3. Hand and shoulder movement – The officer must be aware of the suspect's hand movement toward the waistband or other threat areas. Reading the movement of the shoulders will indicate if the suspect is moving toward his waistband. If the suspect's shoulders start to dip or turn, that could indicate that he is planning to stop or turn toward the officer.

5. Tactical Apprehension Techniques

- A. The tactical apprehension is set up to organize a safe search and apprehension of a fleeing suspect. These are some of the techniques the officer should employ to enhance officer safety during this tactic.
  1. "L" movement – When the suspect goes around a corner, the officer does not go around with the suspect. The officer moves out wide, using cover, and looks down and around the corner to obtain a visual of the suspect and provide direction information.

2. Slicing the pie – Similar to the “L” movement, but a slower and more methodical clearance of the corner. The slicing the pie technique is a more cautious clearing of a corner and also can be used when there is no cover to move behind or when the officer believes that the suspect is waiting around the corner.
3. Perimeter/ block search – Setting a perimeter affords officers the time and options (K9, SERT, block search) to go in safely and apprehend the suspect.
4. Cover/contact – Considering that this foot pursuit may ultimately end in a custody, the officer should have that second officer present to effect the arrest.