

# The de-escalation strategy of the Christian Hall event

[The Bethlehem Gadfly](#) [Christian Hall](#), [George Floyd killing](#) April 5, 2021

 *Latest post in a series on Christian Hall* 

## The Monroe Co. video of the Christian Hall event

ref: [Case Study of police shooting of Christian Hall ripe for good discussion](#)

ref: [Have you done your Christian Hall homework yet?](#)

ref: [Breaking down the YouTube video of the Christian Hall shooting by the Pa. State Police](#)

ref: [“CJ is responsible for his own death”](#)

ref: [Past time for the City to have “The Talk”](#)

Gadfly has said that the Christian Hall shooting is a case study ripe for discussion.

You can see from the post of [Bob Davenport](#) and the comments (especially by Michele Downing) to Bob’s and Gadfly’s previous posts on Hall that we go quickly to the politics and the ethics of this case.

But Gadfly would like to hold off as much as possible (it’s hard) on that discussion for a short while.

Right now his primary interest is “academic,” that is, he seeks to know something about de-escalation strategy and training from seeing it applied and in action here.

Apropos of our [previous post](#) on trends in policing around the country and many previous posts here on Gadfly about reimagining public safety, Gadfly wants to look closely at the de-escalation techniques employed here in as much an objective manner as possible (it’s hard).

In his [video of the event](#), the Monroe Co. District Attorney obviously is aware of the national conversation about more mental health and related training for police and about police collaboration with mental

health professionals by the way he foregrounds the credentials of the two negotiators in the Hall event.

Hall was met initially by two first responders whose basic training for such a call is not commented on. Then the interaction is turned over to two negotiators, one for about 15 minutes, the other for about an hour. The video highlights the apposite training of both these negotiators. These are the right men for the job at hand. Here's what the video says about negotiator #2 (called in the video Trooper #4):

Trooper #4, a trained crisis negotiator, who is also assigned to the Department Special Emergency Response Team, arrived on scene at approximately 1:58 PM and assumed the responsibility of communicating with Mr. Hall.

Trooper #4 also relied upon recognized crisis negotiation and de-escalation strategies used during his 15 years as a crisis negotiator during his interactions with Mr. Hall.

Now the video is 30 mins. long. The event spanned 90 mins. We do not have the full video record.

But what can we learn about de-escalation strategy from what we have?

To prepare, Gadfly **broke the video down** into its parts several days ago.

He did another run-through over the weekend, however, adding more detail (so anybody who read the previous post should do it again), and, most importantly, he numbered what he thought he could see as verbal strategies for de-escalating the Hall event.

Gadfly identified 18 verbal strategies aimed at de-escalating a potential suicide.

Here they are:

- 1) come off the bridge, and then we can talk
- 2) you are not in any trouble
- 3) we will do you no harm
- 4) tell us what your problem is
- 5) we will find someone to help you

- 6) we the police are here to help you
- 7) we can say with confidence our help will produce a positive outcome
- 8) calls Hall "CJ," establishing personal connection (not clear if the negotiators gave their names)
- 9) we're concerned about your physical comfort/state/welfare (cold? hungry? tired?)
- 10) we see your pain (empathy)
- 11) I'll come out into the open from behind the safety of the police car to talk with you
- 12) advances on Hall behind ballistic shield
- 13) I'm asking you to put the gun down
- 14) what I'm asking you to do is easy to do
- 15) name something you need, and we'll get it for you
- 16) whatever is bothering you is really not as big as you think it is
- 17) let me remind you of the impact of your death on people who love you
- 18) you really don't want to commit suicide

Now go back to the **break down post**.

To Gadfly these verbal strategies are applied scattershot. He sees no purpose, pattern, coherence in their application. Should there be?

What are the strategies most applied? Seems like #2, #3, #13. Why these?

Are there any strategies that don't seem appropriate? #16, #18? Should the officer be suggesting that the reason Hall contemplates suicide is no big deal? Will it be effective with a teen who employed elaborate planning (as was learned later) to suggest he really doesn't want to do this?

Is the approach here keyed to research and experience with an armed, non-aggressive, mostly non-responsive teen in mental crisis/distress contemplating suicide by cop?

Here's what the video stresses as the key strategy:

During the negotiations, Trooper #4  
requested or instructed Mr. Hall  
to put the gun down over  
40 times.

We have seen this so many times in these cases. The subject is at fault for disobeying a police order.

But what does research and experience tell us about the efficacy of such a full-frontal strategy with an armed, non-aggressive, mostly non-responsive teen contemplating suicide by cop?

40 times. 40 unsuccessful times.

All Gadfly can hear is Dr. Phil, his favorite philosopher, saying, “And how’s that workin’ out for ya?”

Gadfly must admit that he is troubled by what he has been told is expert police action in this case.

Now with all self-conscious humility, Gadfly recognizes that “academics” are guilty of over-thinking sometimes.

But till better instructed, he is profoundly disappointed if this is an example of the best that training has to offer.

It’s not just that the attempt at de-escalation failed here and a teen was killed. That will happen. Can’t win them all. And Hall was determined to die.

But Gadfly doesn’t understand what the de-escalation approach was here and on what it was based.

As always, he invites enlightenment.