Crisis or Hostage Negotiators

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Definition

A trained crisis or hostage negotiator is a specialist police responder trained to communicate with a person during a high-risk incident in order to reduce danger, gather information, influence behaviour, and seek a peaceful resolution where circumstances permit.

Negotiators may be deployed to incidents involving:

- suicidal or self-harming persons;
- barricaded persons;
- hostage taking;
- kidnapping or extortion;
- armed persons in crisis;
- emotionally disturbed or highly agitated persons;
- persons threatening violence to others;
- persons threatening to jump from height; or
- other prolonged critical incidents in which communication may reduce the probability of injury or death.

Although historically associated with hostage taking, contemporary police negotiation is substantially broader. Modern deployment data suggest that negotiators frequently respond to crisis incidents involving suicidal, mentally distressed, or otherwise vulnerable persons, rather than traditional hostage events alone (Grubb et al., 2019a; Grubb, 2020). This category refers to a specialist negotiation capability, not simply ordinary officer communication or basic de-escalation.

How It Is Designed to Work

Negotiation attempts to change behaviour through communication rather than physical force, and the mechanism is therefore behavioural influence over time rather than physical incapacitation. The intervention generally seeks to:

- establish contact;
- keep the person engaged;
- reduce emotional intensity;
- gather information;

- identify needs, motives, fears, and constraints;
- develop rapport and trust;
- slow decision-making;
- increase the person's sense that alternatives remain available;
- influence movement toward safer behaviour; and
- create conditions for surrender, release of hostages, relinquishment of weapons, or another safe resolution.

Active listening

Active listening is central to most modern negotiation models and encompasses a range of techniques including:

- open-ended questions;
- minimal encouragers;
- paraphrasing;
- emotion labelling;
- summarizing;
- reflective listening;
- deliberate pauses;
- clarification; and
- statements intended to demonstrate understanding without necessarily agreeing with the person's demands or beliefs.

Royce (Royce, 2005) and Charlés (Charlés, 2007) illustrate how active listening and interactional communication can be used to maintain dialogue, reduce confrontation, and move an incident toward resolution.

Rapport and influence

Negotiation models generally assume that behavioural influence is more likely after the negotiator has established sufficient communication and rapport. The broad sequence – contact, listening, rapport, influence, and behavioural change – varies in terminology across models, but the underlying logic is consistent: a person in acute crisis is less likely to respond constructively to persuasion if they do not believe the negotiator is listening, understands the problem, or can be trusted sufficiently to continue communication.

Communication is reciprocal

Negotiation is not a one-way delivery of scripted techniques. Taylor's communication research (Taylor, 2002) demonstrated that crisis negotiation develops through changing patterns of interaction between the

negotiator and subject. Rogan and Hammer (G.Rogan & Hammer, 1995) similarly found that negotiator and subject communication can shift affect and interaction over the course of actual negotiations.

This is important because the negotiator must continually adapt to:

- the person's emotional state;
- new information;
- changing demands;
- behavioural cues;
- tactical events;
- silence;
- setbacks; and
- opportunities for resolution.

Negotiation Is a Team Capability

A trained negotiator generally does not operate alone; negotiation teams may include:

- primary negotiator – communicates directly with the subject;
- secondary negotiator – listens, supports, takes notes, identifies themes, and helps formulate responses;
- team leader – coordinates the negotiation function;
- intelligence personnel – gather background and contextual information;
- mental health consultant or psychologist – advises where specialist behavioural or clinical knowledge is useful;
- tactical personnel – maintain containment and protective capability; and
- incident command – integrates negotiation into the broader operational plan.

Stokoe (Stokoe & Sikveland, 2020) demonstrates that substantial negotiation work occurs behind the conversation, particularly through secondary negotiators and team coordination, suggesting that the intervention should not be reduced to a single officer talking with the subject. It is better understood as a communication and decision-support system embedded within the tactical response.

Crisis Negotiation and Hostage Negotiation Are Related but Different

Crisis negotiation

Many contemporary deployments involve a person whose behaviour is driven primarily by suicidal intent, emotional distress, mental disorder, relationship breakdown, intoxication, fear, anger, or another acute crisis. The operational objective is often to prevent suicide, self-harm, assault, forced police intervention, or escalation to lethal force.

Hostage negotiation

A hostage incident adds another person's immediate safety and may involve instrumental demands, coercion, criminal objectives, relationship violence, escape demands, ideology, revenge, or a deteriorating personal crisis. The communication skills overlap considerably, but the strategic problem differs because the negotiator must then balance:

- the subject's behaviour;
- hostage welfare;
- intelligence gathering;
- tactical rescue contingencies; and
- opportunities for incremental concessions such as release of a hostage.

Evidence of Effectiveness

Overall assessment

The evidence base is moderate in strength for describing negotiation processes, communication strategies, specialist competencies, and deployment patterns, but low-to-moderate for causal estimates of whether negotiator deployment prevents injury, force, or death.

Police negotiation is a well-established specialist capability with a substantial professional and academic literature, but the evidence base has a recurring limitation: it describes how negotiation works much better than it demonstrates how often negotiation causes a successful outcome compared with what would otherwise have occurred. High-risk incidents cannot ethically or practically be randomized to a negotiator condition, no-negotiator condition, or immediate tactical intervention, and incident types vary so dramatically that a barricaded suicidal person who communicates for six hours is not directly comparable with a hostage taker actively assaulting a victim.

Communication-process evidence

Taylor (Taylor, 2002) analyzed communication from resolved hostage incidents and identified structured patterns of negotiator–subject interaction. Rogan and Hammer (G.Rogan & Hammer, 1995) examined affective communication in actual crisis negotiations and demonstrated that changes in negotiator and subject communication occur dynamically rather than randomly. Royce (Royce, 2005) provided detailed analysis of active listening during an armed high-risk incident, illustrating how listening behaviour can support the progression of negotiation. Charlés (Charlés, 2007) micro-analyzed an actual school hostage negotiation and identified interactional strategies associated with the peaceful resolution.

Taken together, these studies support the mechanism of negotiation – careful listening, emotional regulation, rapport, strategic communication, and behavioural influence – but do not establish a universal probability of success.

Deployment-pattern evidence

Grubb and colleagues (Grubb et al., 2019b) found that police negotiator deployments extend far beyond traditional hostage-taking. Their work identified deployments involving suicidal individuals, persons in mental health crisis, barricades, domestic incidents, criminality, kidnapping, and other high-risk situations. Grubb (Grubb, 2020) subsequently analyzed pilot data from England's national negotiator deployment database. This research is particularly useful for the evidence library because it shows what negotiation is actually used for, rather than relying on the popular image of hostage negotiation.

Negotiator competencies

Johnson and colleagues (Johnson et al., 2018) examined the skills, behaviours, and qualities that experienced crisis negotiators associate with expertise. Grubb and colleagues (Grubb et al., 2019a) likewise identified characteristics associated with the self-perceived successful negotiator. These findings consistently support the rationale for specialist training rather than assuming that ordinary conversational ability is sufficient, with common themes including:

- active listening;
- empathy;
- flexibility;
- emotional control;
- patience;
- adaptability;
- teamwork;
- credibility;
- perseverance; and
- ability to process information under pressure.

Negotiation structure

Grubb and colleagues (Grubb et al., 2021) proposed the D.I.A.M.O.N.D. model to describe negotiation from deployment through debriefing – a model that aligns closely with the specialist-resource framing used in this library. It emphasizes that negotiation extends beyond the spoken exchange to encompass:

- deployment preparation;
- information gathering;
- assessment;

- communication;
- operational coordination;
- resolution; and
- post-incident processes.

Outcome Evidence

Peaceful resolution

The professional rationale for negotiation is straightforward: if communication can produce surrender, release, or safe behavioural change, force may be avoided entirely. That potential benefit is substantial, though the published literature rarely provides a denominator sufficient to support a statement such as "the presence of a trained negotiator reduces fatalities by X percent." Incident complexity, selection, tactical containment, and the fact that negotiators are preferentially deployed to incidents where communication is possible make causal interpretation difficult.

Officer-involved shooting samples

Mohandie and Meloy (Mohandie & Meloy, 2010) examined hostage and barricade incidents within a sample of officer-involved shootings. Among the hostage, barricade, and jumper incidents identified in that shooting sample, suicidal behaviour and suicide-by-cop dynamics were common. The study is useful because it demonstrates that some crisis incidents progress to firearm force despite the broader availability of negotiation or crisis-management strategies. It should not be interpreted as a failure rate for negotiation because the source sample consisted of officer-involved shootings.

Mental disorder and suicidality

A recent systematic review (Clugston et al., 2024) examined mental disorder and suicidality in high-risk incidents involving police negotiation. Only 11 studies met inclusion criteria, and much of the evidence was indirect. The review reinforces that mental disorder and suicidality are highly relevant to contemporary police negotiation, and that the empirical literature on negotiator deployments remains much thinner than the operational importance of the practice would suggest.

Negotiation Takes Time

Time is not simply a side effect of negotiation but often part of the intervention itself; extended time may allow:

- emotional arousal to decrease;
- intoxication to diminish;
- fatigue to alter behaviour;

- rapport to develop;
- intelligence to accumulate;
- tactical options to improve;
- hostages to be released;
- family or clinicians to be consulted;
- environmental conditions to change; and
- the subject to reconsider irreversible action.

This is sometimes described operationally as slowing the incident down, though time is beneficial only when the threat can be safely contained.

When Its Use May Be Appropriate

Negotiator deployment is most valuable where:

- the incident is prolonged or potentially prolonged;
- a subject is barricaded;
- a person is suicidal;
- hostages are present;
- an armed subject is contained;
- the person is communicating or may communicate;
- immediate forced intervention carries substantial risk;
- officers can create time and distance;
- specialist tactical resources are deploying; or
- the incident involves complex behavioural or emotional dynamics.

Early deployment

Calling negotiators early can be valuable, and doing so does not require the negotiator to immediately take over communication if that would disrupt productive rapport already established by another officer. In particular:

- rapport may be easier to establish before repeated confrontation;
- the negotiator gains more time to understand the subject;
- fewer communication patterns have become entrenched;
- intelligence can begin accumulating; and
- tactical commanders gain an additional option before the incident deteriorates.

When Its Use May Be Inappropriate or Insufficient

Active assault

Negotiation cannot substitute for immediate protective action where a person is:

- actively stabbing someone;
- actively shooting;
- causing serious bodily injury;
- about to kill a hostage;
- rapidly attacking officers or third parties; or
- otherwise creating a lethal threat that cannot safely be contained.

The fact that a negotiator is available does not mean officers must allow an attack to continue while attempting dialogue.

Communication is impossible

Negotiation may be limited where:

- the person cannot hear the negotiator;
- there is no communication channel;
- the person refuses all communication;
- profound intoxication or impairment prevents meaningful engagement;
- tactical noise or environmental conditions prevent dialogue; or
- the incident develops too quickly for specialist deployment.

Delay without tactical benefit

Time is not automatically de-escalatory; delay can become harmful if it:

- prolongs hostage abuse;
- increases third-party exposure;
- allows the subject to improve a defensive position;
- permits acquisition of additional weapons;
- worsens a medical emergency; or
- creates other foreseeable risks.

Negotiation must therefore remain integrated with ongoing threat assessment.

Relevance to Edged-Weapon Encounters

Trained negotiators may be particularly valuable in contained edged-weapon incidents, especially where the weapon is associated with suicidal behaviour, mental health crisis, barricade, domestic crisis, threatened self-harm, threatened harm to others, or hostage taking. Their value decreases sharply as the encounter becomes immediate and assaultive.

Potential role

In a contained edged-weapon incident, a negotiator may help:

- establish sustained communication;
- clarify the person's intentions;
- distinguish self-directed from other-directed threats;
- identify triggers and grievances;
- reduce emotional intensity;
- encourage the person to place the weapon down;
- negotiate movement away from other people;
- obtain release of hostages;
- identify medications, diagnoses, relationships, or stressors relevant to behaviour;
- coordinate communication with family or clinicians; and
- create time for a non-force resolution.

Conditions favouring deployment

Negotiation is most viable where:

- officers have established containment;
- the subject cannot immediately reach uninvolved persons;
- officers have distance or barriers;
- the subject is stationary or geographically constrained;
- communication can occur;
- the incident can safely continue without immediate physical intervention; and
- tactical personnel can respond if behaviour changes.

A person holding a knife inside a contained room while threatening self-harm presents a fundamentally different negotiation opportunity from a person running toward another person with the same knife.

Hostages

An edged weapon may create a particularly difficult hostage situation because the subject can inflict lethal injury with little warning and without the acoustic or mechanical cues associated with firearm discharge.

Negotiators may seek to increase physical separation between subject and hostage, obtain release of vulnerable hostages, encourage the subject to place or move the weapon, reduce physical contact, maintain communication during tactical planning, and identify changes suggesting imminent violence. Negotiation does not remove the need for a rescue option where hostage danger becomes immediate.

Failure consequences

Negotiation does not mechanically prevent weapon use. A subject may:

- disengage from communication;
- suddenly advance;
- assault a hostage;
- self-harm;
- become more agitated;
- reposition; or
- use the negotiation period to alter the tactical situation.

The key question is therefore whether responders can safely maintain the conditions that allow negotiation to continue while preserving immediate protective options if the threat changes.

Risk trade-off

For the subject, successful negotiation can produce an exceptional benefit – resolution without any physical force. For officers and third parties, prolonged communication can reduce the need for hazardous close contact or immediate forced entry. The countervailing risk is that a strategy built around time and communication can become inappropriate if containment fails or another person is exposed to immediate harm.

Negotiation is therefore strongest as an edged-weapon intervention when time is available, space is controlled, the threat is contained, and communication can change the outcome. It is weakest when the threat is already in motion.

Specialist Negotiators and Mental Health Co-Responders

Negotiators and mental health co-responders overlap in communication skill but serve different functions.

A mental health co-responder primarily contributes:

- clinical assessment;
- treatment-system knowledge;
- mental-health disposition;
- diagnostic context; and

- crisis-service linkage.

A trained negotiator primarily contributes:

- sustained high-risk communication;
- behavioural influence;
- team-based crisis communication;
- tactical integration;
- hostage/crisis strategy; and
- management of prolonged high-risk dialogue.

The two resources may complement each other; a mental health professional may serve as a consultant, intelligence source, clinical adviser, or secondary support without necessarily becoming the primary negotiator. Hatcher et al. (Hatcher et al., 1998) and Butler et al. (Butler et al., 1993) describe the longstanding role of psychologists and mental health professionals as consultants to negotiation teams.

U.S. Legal Considerations

No general rule requiring negotiation before force

The constitutional question governing police force remains whether the force used was objectively reasonable under the circumstances. There is no general U.S. constitutional rule that officers must summon or exhaust a trained negotiator before using otherwise reasonable force.

Time and containment can change the factual context

Where officers have established containment and the threat is not immediately reaching another person, the factual circumstances may differ substantially from a rapidly developing assault, and that difference can affect the immediacy of the threat, the feasibility of warning, the opportunities for communication, available tactical alternatives, and what information officers possess when force is ultimately used. The availability of time does not automatically create a constitutional duty to negotiate, but it can matter to the overall reasonableness analysis.

Mental illness and crisis

Cases such as *Deorle v. Rutherford* recognize that where circumstances permit, officers may need to account for apparent emotional disturbance when selecting tactics. *City and County of San Francisco v. Sheehan* demonstrates the other side of the analysis: mental illness does not require officers to disregard an immediate weapon threat. Negotiation therefore fits most naturally into the legal analysis when circumstances actually permit communication and tactical patience.

Ethical and Moral Considerations

Preserving life

Negotiation's core ethical justification is unusually direct: it can create the possibility of resolving a dangerous incident without injuring anyone, including the subject, hostages, officers, family members, bystanders, and tactical responders.

Time as restraint on coercion

Where containment is effective, continuing communication may prevent the need to impose immediate physical force. This can be especially important when the person is suicidal, mentally ill, intoxicated, traumatized, or temporarily overwhelmed.

No guarantee of peaceful outcome

An ethical commitment to negotiation should not become an obligation to continue indefinitely when another person's life is in immediate danger; a strategy intended to preserve life can become ethically problematic if it exposes hostages or third parties to avoidable lethal risk.

Truth, trust, and tactical necessity

Negotiators seek credibility because influence depends heavily on trust, and that creates ethical tension around promises, deception, tactical information, demands, deadlines, and commitments the negotiator may not have authority to fulfil. Professional negotiation practice generally emphasizes avoiding promises that cannot be kept and preserving credibility where possible.

Negotiator welfare

Specialist negotiators repeatedly engage with suicidal intent, threats of murder, hostage trauma, family distress, death, and prolonged emotional crisis. Recent national UK data suggest that negotiators can demonstrate substantial resilience, but the role still exposes them to trauma, secondary trauma, sleep disruption, and occupational stress (Tehrani & Hesketh, 2026). Agencies therefore have an ethical responsibility to support training, supervision, debriefing, peer support, psychological monitoring, and workload management.

Evidence Limitations

- There are very few controlled studies testing whether negotiator deployment causes better outcomes than alternative responses.
- Negotiation incidents are highly heterogeneous. Suicide threats, domestic barricades, hostage taking, kidnapping, and terrorism should not be treated as one equivalent population.

- Successful negotiation is difficult to define. Possible outcomes include surrender, release of hostages, weapon relinquishment, delayed tactical intervention, suicide prevention, or simply improved intelligence.
- Resolved cases are overrepresented in communication research because recordings and transcripts are more available and interpretable.
- Deployment datasets may not capture incidents resolved before a specialist arrives.
- Agencies differ substantially in negotiator selection, training, staffing, command structure, and deployment thresholds.
- Communication models are better studied than causal injury reduction.
- Hostage/crisis negotiation literature frequently relies on qualitative or small-sample research because high-risk incidents are uncommon and difficult to study experimentally.
- Mental health and suicidality are common in negotiation, but diagnostic information is often incomplete or retrospective.
- There is very little direct empirical research isolating negotiation outcomes specifically in edged-weapon encounters.
- Successful containment is a major confounder. Negotiation often works because tactical personnel first create the time and space in which communication is possible.
- The absence of force during a successful negotiation does not tell us what would have occurred without the negotiator.

Bottom Line

Communication mechanism

Active listening, rapport, adaptive communication, and behavioural influence are strongly supported in the literature.

Specialist competency

Negotiator research consistently identifies specialist interpersonal, cognitive, emotional-regulation, and teamwork skills, constituting moderate-to-strong evidence for the specialist-competency case.

Peaceful-resolution effectiveness

The operational case is plausible and widely established, but causal quantification is difficult. There is no robust universal estimate of how much negotiator deployment reduces force, injury, or death.

Hostage/crisis deployment

Contemporary negotiation extends far beyond classical hostage incidents and frequently involves suicidal and mentally distressed persons, as the deployment evidence well establishes.

Edged-weapon relevance

Information value is high where the subject is contained and low during an active attack. Negotiation can be extremely valuable where time and space allow officers to influence behaviour without force, but it does not physically prevent weapon use.

Risk-benefit assessment

The strongest use of a trained negotiator is a contained, prolonged, high-risk incident in which dialogue can alter the outcome while tactical resources preserve safety. Its weakest use is as a reason to delay immediate protective action during an active lethal assault.

Bibliography Compatibility Note

Citation tags in this explainer have been checked against the supplied `bibliography.csl` file.

Two cited sources are not currently present in that bibliography and require Zotero import before the page will render without missing-citation warnings: `<span class="cite">(Grubb et al., 2019a)</span>` (Grubb et al., 2019, *The self-perceived successful hostage and crisis negotiator profile*) and `<span class="cite">(Stokoe & Sikveland, 2020)</span>` (Stokoe & Sikveland, 2020, *The backstage work negotiators do when communicating with persons in crisis*).

All other citation tags in this explainer match an existing key in the supplied bibliography.

Core Peer-Reviewed Evidence

1. Grubb, A. R. (2010)
Modern day hostage (crisis) negotiation: The evolution of an art form within the policing arena.
Aggression and Violent Behavior, 15(5), 341–348.
DOI: 10.1016/j.avb.2010.06.002

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Grubb, 2010)</span>`

Priority: Foundational contemporary review.

Contribution: Describes the evolution from traditional hostage negotiation toward broader crisis negotiation and reviews modern police negotiation principles.

Key value: Provides the conceptual foundation for treating crisis negotiation as broader than hostage taking.

Limitation: Narrative review rather than an outcome trial.

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2. Taylor, P. J. (2002)

A Cylindrical Model of Communication Behavior in Crisis Negotiations.

Human Communication Research, 28(1), 7–48.

DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00797.x

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Taylor, 2002)</span>`

Priority: Essential communication-process evidence.

Contribution: Analyzed 189 dialogue spans from nine resolved hostage negotiations across 41 communication variables.

Key finding: Negotiator–subject communication could be organized into systematic patterns reflecting different levels of interaction.

Key value: Strong empirical support for negotiation as a dynamic interpersonal process.

Limitation: Small number of resolved cases; does not estimate outcome effectiveness.

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3. Rogan, R. G., & Hammer, M. R. (1995)

Assessing Message Affect in Crisis Negotiations: An Exploratory Study.

Human Communication Research, 21(4), 553–574.

DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.1995.tb00358.x

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(G.Rogan & Hammer, 1995)</span>`

Priority: Foundational communication evidence.

Contribution: Examined negotiator and perpetrator message affect in three actual crisis negotiation incidents.

Key value: Demonstrates reciprocal emotional and communication dynamics during negotiation.

Limitation: Very small case sample.

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4. Royce, T. (2005)

The Negotiator and the Bomber: Analyzing the Critical Role of Active Listening in Crisis Negotiations.

Negotiation Journal, 21(1), 5–27.

DOI: 10.1111/j.1571-9979.2005.00045.x

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Royce, 2005)</span>`

Priority: Important active-listening evidence.

Contribution: Detailed analysis of police negotiation with an armed, dangerous person during a high-risk warrant.

Key value: Shows how active listening is operationalized during an actual high-risk incident.

Limitation: Case-based analysis rather than comparative outcome research.

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5. Grubb, A. R., Brown, S. J., Hall, P., & Bowen, E. (2019)
From “Sad People on Bridges” to “Kidnap and Extortion”: Understanding the Nature and Situational Characteristics of Hostage and Crisis Negotiator Deployments.
Negotiation and Conflict Management Research, 12(1), 41–65.
DOI: 10.1111/ncmr.12126

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Grubb et al., 2019b)</span>`

Priority: Essential deployment evidence.

Contribution: Describes the real-world range and characteristics of police negotiator deployments.

Key value: Demonstrates that modern negotiator work is dominated by a much broader set of crisis situations than classical hostage incidents.

Limitation: Descriptive rather than causal effectiveness evidence.

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6. Grubb, A. R. (2020)
Understanding the Prevalence and Situational Characteristics of Hostage and Crisis Negotiation in England: An Analysis of Pilot Data from the National Negotiator Deployment Database.
Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 35, 98–111.
DOI: 10.1007/s11896-020-09369-z

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Grubb, 2020)</span>`

Priority: High real-world deployment evidence.

Contribution: Uses national negotiator deployment data to describe the prevalence and characteristics of negotiation in England.

Key value: Stronger denominator and deployment-context evidence than isolated case studies.

Limitation: Describes deployment rather than proving outcome efficacy.

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7. Johnson, K. E., Thompson, J., Hall, J. A., & Meyer, C. (2018)

Crisis (hostage) negotiators weigh in: The skills, behaviors, and qualities that characterize an expert crisis negotiator.

Police Practice and Research, 19(5), 472–489.

DOI: 10.1080/15614263.2017.1419131

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Johnson et al., 2018)</span>`

Priority: High specialist-competency evidence.

Contribution: Examines negotiators' views of the skills and characteristics associated with expertise.

Key value: Supports the rationale for trained specialist resources rather than relying solely on general police communication skill.

Limitation: Expertise is assessed through practitioner perceptions rather than incident outcomes.

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8. Grubb, A. R., Brown, S. J., Hall, P., & Bowen, E. (2021)

From deployment to debriefing: Introducing the D.I.A.M.O.N.D. model of hostage and crisis negotiation.

Police Practice and Research, 22(1), 953–976.

DOI: 10.1080/15614263.2019.1677229

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Grubb et al., 2021)</span>`

Priority: Important process-model evidence.

Contribution: Conceptualizes negotiation as an end-to-end specialist process extending from deployment through resolution and debriefing.

Key value: Reinforces the team/system framing used in this library.

Limitation: Model development does not itself establish causal outcome improvement.

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9. Hatcher, C., Mohandie, K., Turner, J., & Gelles, M. G. (1998)

The role of the psychologist in crisis/hostage negotiations.

Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 16(4), 455–472.

DOI: 10.1002/(SICI)1099-0798(199823)16:4<455::AID-BSL321>3.0.CO;2-G

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Hatcher et al., 1998)</span>`

Priority: Foundational specialist-team evidence.

Contribution: Describes the history and functions of psychologists and behavioural consultants within police negotiation teams.

Key value: Establishes that negotiation is multidisciplinary and may use mental health expertise without making the clinician the primary negotiator.

Limitation: Primarily professional/conceptual rather than controlled outcome evidence.

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10. Butler, W. M., Leitenberg, H., & Fuselier, G. D. (1993)
The use of mental health professional consultants to police hostage negotiation teams.
Behavioral Sciences & the Law, 11(2), 213–221.
DOI: 10.1002/bsl.2370110210

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Butler et al., 1993)</span>`

Priority: Foundational team-structure evidence.

Contribution: Surveyed 300 U.S. law-enforcement agencies using hostage negotiators regarding their use of mental health consultants.

Key value: Documents the longstanding integration of specialist behavioural expertise into negotiation teams.

Limitation: Survey of agency practices rather than intervention outcomes.

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11. Grubb, A. R., Brown, S. J., Hall, P., & Bowen, E. (2022)
"The More You Do, the More Comfortable You Feel": The Police Hostage and Crisis Negotiator Journey.
Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 37, 195–211.
DOI: 10.1007/s11896-021-09486-3

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Grubb et al., 2022)</span>`

Priority: Important negotiator-development evidence.

Contribution: Examines the development, training, experience, and professional trajectory of police negotiators.

Key value: Supports the proposition that negotiation expertise develops through specialist training and repeated deployment.

Limitation: Qualitative/professional-development focus rather than effectiveness trial.

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12. Tehrani, N., & Hesketh, I. (2026)

Police hostage and crisis negotiators: building resilience in specialist roles.

Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 20, paag026.

DOI: 10.1093/police/paag026

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Tehrani & Hesketh, 2026)</span>`

Priority: High contemporary occupational evidence.

Contribution: Analyzes 4,570 psychological screenings from negotiators across 47 UK police forces over seven years.

Key finding: Negotiators showed relatively low symptom burden and evidence of resilience, while job stress, sleep loss, illness, and relationship difficulties remained important hazards.

Key value: Provides unusually large-scale evidence about the sustainability and psychological demands of the specialist role.

Limitation: Occupational-health outcomes rather than incident effectiveness.

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13. Clugston, B., Meurk, C., Harris, M., Burgess, P., & Heffernan, E. (2023)

Persons with mental disorders and suicidality in crisis or high-risk situations involving police negotiation: a systematic review.

Psychiatry, Psychology and Law, 31(1), 57–75.

DOI: 10.1080/13218719.2023.2175066

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Clugston et al., 2024)</span>`

Priority: Essential contemporary systematic review.

Contribution: Systematically reviews peer-reviewed evidence concerning mental disorder and suicidality in crisis and high-risk incidents involving police negotiation.

Key finding: Of 1,455 records identified, only 11 studies met inclusion criteria. Suicidality and mental disorder were prominent features of negotiation incidents, but the evidence was too limited and heterogeneous to produce reliable prevalence estimates.

Key value: Strong support for treating suicidal and mental-health crises as a central contemporary negotiation context while remaining cautious about the strength of the empirical evidence.

Limitation: Much of the included evidence was indirect, and the review could not estimate the effectiveness of negotiation itself.

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14. Grubb, A. R., Brown, S. J., Hall, P., & Bowen, E. (2019)

The self-perceived successful hostage and crisis negotiator profile: a qualitative assessment of negotiator competencies.

Police Practice and Research, 20(4), 321–342.

DOI: 10.1080/15614263.2018.1473772

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Grubb et al., 2019a)</span>`

Priority: High specialist-competency evidence.

Contribution: Uses interviews with 15 negotiators from nine English police forces to identify the attributes and skills associated with the self-perceived successful negotiator.

Key value: Supports the specialist-selection and training rationale used in this library.

Limitation: Qualitative practitioner-perception study rather than incident-outcome research.

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15. Stokoe, E., & Sikveland, R. O. (2020)

The backstage work negotiators do when communicating with persons in crisis.

Journal of Sociolinguistics, 24(2), 185–208.

DOI: 10.1111/josl.12347

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Stokoe & Sikveland, 2020)</span>`

Priority: Important team-process evidence.

Contribution: Uses 31 hours of audio-recorded British negotiations to examine how secondary negotiators support primary negotiators behind the scenes.

Key finding: Secondary negotiators influence delivery and next actions, although some interventions can also disrupt conversational flow.

Key value: Strong empirical support for treating negotiation as a team capability rather than a single-officer conversation.

Limitation: Communication-process study rather than outcome-effectiveness research.

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16. Mohandie, K., & Meloy, J. R. (2010)

Hostage and barricade incidents within an officer-involved shooting sample: suicide by cop, intervention efficacy, and descriptive characteristics.

Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations, 10(1–2), 101–115.
DOI: 10.1080/15332581003799737

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Mohandie & Meloy, 2010)</span>`

Priority: Supporting high-risk incident evidence.

Contribution: Examines hostage, barricade, and jumper incidents within an officer-involved-shooting sample, including suicide-by-cop dynamics.

Key value: Illustrates that some prolonged crisis incidents still progress to firearm force.

Limitation: The source sample consists of officer-involved shootings and therefore cannot estimate negotiation failure rates.

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17. Charlés, L. L. (2007)
Disarming people with words: Strategies of interactional communication that crisis (hostage) negotiators share with systemic clinicians.
Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 33(1), 51–68.
DOI: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2007.00006.x

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Charlés, 2007)</span>`

Priority: Important interactional communication evidence.

Contribution: Micro-analyzes an actual school hostage negotiation and identifies communication strategies associated with movement toward peaceful resolution.

Key value: Bridges negotiation practice and systemic clinical communication.

Limitation: Case-based analysis rather than comparative outcome research.

Evidence Rating

Communication-process evidence: ★★★★☆
Substantial theoretical, linguistic, case, and observational support.

Specialist competency evidence: ★★★★☆
Consistent evidence regarding listening, empathy, adaptability, emotional control, and teamwork.

Deployment-pattern evidence: ★★★★☆
Increasingly strong real-world data, particularly from UK national systems.

Peaceful-resolution causal evidence: ★★☆☆☆ to ★★★☆☆

Operationally plausible and widely accepted, but controlled comparative evidence is weak.

Injury / force reduction evidence: ★★☆☆☆

Likely where negotiation avoids forced intervention, but direct causal estimates are scarce.

Hostage-specific evidence: ★★★☆☆

Substantial professional literature but relatively limited controlled empirical research.

Suicide / mental-health crisis evidence: ★★★☆☆ to ★★★★☆

Clearly central to contemporary deployments; outcome evidence remains less developed.

Edged-weapon-specific evidence: ★☆☆☆☆

Direct research isolating knife or edged-weapon negotiation outcomes is very limited.

Overall confidence: Moderate.

Research-library conclusion

Trained crisis and hostage negotiators are best understood as a specialist communication and decision-support resource rather than simply highly skilled de-escalators. Their principal advantage is the ability to sustain structured communication over time while a broader team gathers intelligence, assesses behaviour, coordinates with tactical personnel, and searches for a non-force resolution. Research strongly supports the importance of active listening, rapport, adaptive communication, specialist competencies, and team processes, and contemporary deployment data show that negotiators frequently respond to suicidal and mental-health crises rather than traditional hostage incidents alone. What remains much harder to quantify is the causal probability that negotiator deployment prevents force, injury, or death, because these incidents are heterogeneous and cannot readily be studied experimentally. In edged-weapon encounters, negotiation has greatest value once officers have created containment, distance, and time. A person holding a knife in a contained suicidal crisis may be an excellent candidate for specialist negotiation; a person actively stabbing another person is not. The specialist resource therefore works by exploiting tactical time and space – not by replacing immediate protective action when those conditions do not exist.

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