

MILWAUKEE  
POLICE  
DEPARTMENT

# CODE OF CONDUCT



COMPETENCE  
COURAGE  
INTEGRITY  
LEADERSHIP  
RESPECT  
RESTRAINT



# **Milwaukee Police Department Code of Conduct**

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## Preamble

# Milwaukee Police Department Code of Conduct

The Milwaukee Police Department hereby adopts a Code of Conduct which encompasses our Vision Statement, Mission Statement, Core Values, Guiding Principles, and Standard Operating Procedures. This Code serves as the foundation for ethical behavior and professional performance, reflecting the highest standards and excellence in policing.

Our vision statement defines what we strive to achieve as a police department. Our mission outlines how we will achieve that vision. Our core values and guiding principles shape our conduct both on and off duty, while our policies and procedures guide our actions in situations we most commonly face.

The Milwaukee Police Department recognizes the challenges inherent in modern policing and the necessity of exercising legitimate discretion to address them effectively. However, discretion has its limits – it must never be arbitrary or used to justify personal preferences, poor performance, or failure to act. In situations where no clear policy or procedure applies, members must rely on our core values and guiding principles to guide their decisions and actions.

Department members are expected to conduct themselves – both on and off duty – in accordance with the provisions of this Code. Any conduct that brings, or is likely to bring discredit upon the Milwaukee Police Department may be subject to investigation to determine whether or not a breach of the Code has occurred. Such a breach may result, in appropriate circumstances, in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, as directed by the Chief of Police or the Fire and Police Commission.

When department members are investigated for a breach of this Code – whether directed by the Chief of Police or the Fire and Police Commission – the investigation will be conducted promptly, thoroughly, and impartially. These Standards shall be applied reasonably and objectively in all investigations, hearings and decisions relating to misconduct. Due consideration shall be given to the degree of negligence or intent, as well as the nature and circumstances of the misconduct. If a violation is substantiated, the Chief of Police or the Fire and Police Commission reserves the right to impose discipline up to and including discharge from the department.



## Vision, Mission, Core Values and Guiding Principles

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# Milwaukee Police Department Code of Conduct

## VISION

To be a department where every member works with our community to help build sustainable healthy neighborhoods, free of crime and maintained by positive relationships.

## MISSION

By using effective community engagement, we will impact crime, help build sustainable neighborhoods and foster positive community relations.

## CORE VALUES

### 1.00 – Competence

We responsibly manage the authority and resources entrusted to us by the public. We hold ourselves accountable for the quality of our performance and the standards of our conduct. We are exemplary leaders and exemplary followers.

#### 1.01

All probationary members shall be evaluated on their conduct and fitness to perform assigned duties. If a member's conduct or performance of duties is deemed unsatisfactory for continued service, the member shall be discharged, with no right of appeal to the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners.

#### 1.02

We work collaboratively – with our colleagues, other agencies, system partners, and the community – to ensure public safety, improve the quality of life, protect those who cannot protect themselves and uphold the law.

#### 1.03

All department members shall provide prompt and efficient service to the community. When not actively responding to a call for service, members are expected to use their time to support and advance the mission of the department.

#### 1.04

Police investigations shall be based, at a minimum, on reasonable suspicion or the occurrence of an actual or possible criminal offense. All investigations shall be conducted – and reports prepared – in a prompt, thorough, impartial, and careful manner to ensure accountability and compliance with the law.

#### 1.05

All department members shall be familiar with departmental policies, procedures, and training and expected to conduct themselves in full accordance with them.

#### 1.06

All department members shall report for duty at the time designated by their supervisors.

#### 1.07

All department members shall report to court at the time designated by their subpoena.

#### 1.08

All department members shall report fit for duty, and free from impairment. Members shall not be under the influence of alcohol, non-medically used drugs, misused prescription medications, or any substance that may impair their ability to perform their assigned duties.

#### 1.09

No department member shall consume, purchase or possess intoxicating liquor or fermented malt beverages while on duty or in uniform, except with the express approval of the Chief of Police or designee.

#### 1.10

All department members are responsible for the care and safeguarding of both personal and department-issued equipment. Members shall not deface, damage, destroy, modify, or misuse any department property without proper authorization.

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## Core Values and Guiding Principles

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# Milwaukee Police Department Code of Conduct

### 2.00 – Courage

We place the safety of others above our own and embrace our moral responsibility to act against injustice and wrongdoing. Department members are expected to take prudent risks in service to the public.

#### 2.01

Police members shall perform their duties with composure and determination. In times of danger or adversity, they are expected to act in unity and support each other in restoring peace and order.

#### 2.02

Members shall actively oppose and, when possible, prevent any violation of these Standards of Conduct. If a violation occurs, members are required to report it. Members who report violations will not face punishment; instead, they will be protected and supported for upholding the standards of the department.

#### 2.03

Failure to intervene when a violation of a Standard of Conduct occurs – or is about to occur – shall be treated as if the member committed the violation.

### 3.00 – Integrity

We recognize the complexity of police work and exercise discretion in ways that are beyond reproach and worthy of public trust. Honesty and truthfulness are essential to integrity. It is our duty to earn and maintain public trust through consistent, principled words and actions. We are honest in both word and deed.

#### 3.01

Our conduct shall inspire and sustain the confidence of the community we serve. Whether on or off duty, department members shall not engage in behavior that a reasonable person would view as discrediting to the department, or creating the appearance of impropriety or corruption.

#### 3.02

Members shall avoid regular or ongoing associations with individuals or groups they reasonably believe, know, or should know are engaged in – or planning to engage in – criminal activity, or who advocate the overthrow of government, when such associations could undermine the public trust or compromise the member's credibility or integrity. Exceptions include associations necessary for the performance of duty or familial relationships of which the Chief of Police or designee is cognizant.

#### 3.03

Police members shall exercise powers of arrest, search, seizure and surveillance only when such actions are lawful, necessary and proportionate.

#### 3.04

Department members shall treat all official department business as confidential. Such information shall not be disclosed – verbally, electronically or in writing – except to those for whom it is intended or as required by due process of law.

#### 3.05

Department members shall obey all local ordinances, as well as state and federal laws, whether on or off-duty. Any violation of ordinances or laws in any jurisdiction shall be reported to the member's supervisor as soon as practical.

#### 3.06

Department members shall not use their official position or affiliation with the Milwaukee Police Department to unnecessarily interfere in the personal affairs or professional responsibilities of any individual or agency.

#### 3.07

Members shall not recommend or refer any specific attorney to individuals who has been arrested or to anyone acting on their behalf. Members shall not participate in securing legal representation for any victim of a crime or accident.

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## Core Values and Guiding Principles

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# Milwaukee Police Department Code of Conduct

### 3.08

Department members shall not, directly or indirectly, solicit or accept anything of value – such as gratuities, money, rewards, gifts, fees, loans or special considerations – as a result of their official position. Members are not precluded from receiving nominal courtesies and gratuities (i.e., small amounts of food or non-alcoholic beverages) provided that it is not sought and not given in exchange for, or with the expectation of, any official favor.

### 3.09

All sworn members, and civilian members designated as emergency personnel, are subject to the residency requirements outlined in the City of Milwaukee Charter Ordinance. These members are required to establish and maintain their actual and bona fide residence within 15 miles of the jurisdictional boundaries of the City of Milwaukee for the duration of their employment with the department. The Fire and Police Commission (FPC), in accordance with Wis. Stat. § 66.0502(4)(b) has listed the civilian positions classified as emergency personnel in FPC Rule V.

### 3.10

All department members shall be honest, forthright and fully candid – whether verbally or in writing – in connection with any administrative inquiry or when preparing or submitting any department report or form.

### 3.11

Department members are required to be thorough, honest, and accurate in all matters pertaining to criminal or civil investigations, reports, or inquiries. No member shall knowingly or with reckless disregard for the truth, make or sign any false official statement.

*Note: The provisions of this guiding principle do not apply to a member's questioning or interrogation of a person involved in a criminal investigation or where the member is engaged in an approved undercover role where such representation is not inconsistent with law or is accepted professional practice.*

## 4.00 – Leadership

We strive to influence human behavior in pursuit of organizational goals that serve the public trust, while fostering the growth of individuals, teams, and the organization for future service. We embrace our responsibility to be lead – both within the community and among our peers – and to be accountable for own actions as well as those of our colleagues. We all share the responsibility for the performance, reputation, and morale, of the department.

### 4.01

We commit to working collaboratively and setting an example that reflects respect, compassion, integrity and efficiency in all that we do.

### 4.02

Leadership is not defined by position or rank alone. No rank carries special privileges – only greater responsibility. True leadership is demonstrated through actions, accountability, and service to others.

### 4.03

Failure to act when there is an opportunity to prevent or stop misconduct is not only a lapse in courage – it is a failure of leadership. Every member has a responsibility to uphold the integrity of the department by intervening when necessary.

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## Core Values and Guiding Principles

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# Milwaukee Police Department Code of Conduct

## 4.04

Supervisors shall serve as role models by delivering professional, impartial and effective police service. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that those under their supervision perform their duties properly and in accordance with departmental standards. Supervisors must prioritize the department's mission in both word and action, and not engage in any conduct that undermines or interferes with its accomplishment.

## 4.05

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that those under their supervision are supported, guided in the professional execution of their duties, and encouraged to pursue ongoing professional development. Supervisors have a distinct obligation to uphold, promote, and enhance professional standards and integrity by providing constant advice and guidance. Supervisors have an obligation to recognize and commend exemplary behavior, address and correct substandard performance and apply disciplinary measures when necessary.

## 5.00 – Respect

**We hold the sanctity of life in the highest regard. In all our interactions, we treat citizens and colleagues with dignity and respect, and we carry out our duties with fairness, impartiality, and integrity.**

### 5.01

Department members shall treat both the public and each other with courtesy and professionalism. Civility and patience are essential qualities that build trust, while the use of profane, disrespectful, or insolent language or behavior undermines public confidence and the reputation of the department.

### 5.02

Members shall perform their duties with fairness, self-control, tolerance and impartiality.

### 5.03

Members shall promptly comply with any proper or lawful order issued by an officer of higher rank. Should any member receive an order believed to be improper or unlawful order, it must be reported immediately to a supervisor of higher rank.

### 5.04

A conflicting order shall be brought to the attention of the member issuing the order. If this member does not amend the order, the order shall stand as given, and that member shall assume full responsibility for its execution.

## 6.00 – Restraint

**We exercise only the minimum force and authority necessary to achieve legitimate law enforcement objectives. We demonstrate the highest standards of self-discipline – even when no one is watching or listening.**

### 6.01

Members shall exercise restraint in the use of force, employing only the amount of force necessary to perform their duties and aligned with department policy. The use of unlawful or excessive force is strictly prohibited.

### 6.02

Members shall not subject any individual to torture or to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. Under no circumstances – regardless of situation or justification – may torture or other forms of cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment be permitted or excused.

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# Milwaukee Police Department Code of Conduct

## Appendix - Discipline Matrix

### PURPOSE

This document outlines the factors that will be taken into consideration when making disciplinary decisions regarding violations of the Code of Conduct. Establishing a fair and consistent disciplinary system is essential to reducing the misuse of police authority and upholding the department's reputation for professionalism. It is vital that every member of the department understands and adheres to the Standards of Conduct.

It is understood that, in the course of fulfilling their public service duties, department members may occasionally make errors in judgment. While these instances can provide meaningful opportunities for growth and improvement, it is also recognized that not all errors carry the same weight – some may result in more significant consequences for the public, the department, and the member involved.

The department has a responsibility to clearly communicate its expectations to all members. Equally important is the obligation to ensure that the consequences of failing to meet those expectations are well understood. When evaluating conduct deemed improper, it is essential to consider any circumstances that may have

contributed to errors in judgment or poor decision-making, as these factors can influence the determination of appropriate consequences

Disciplinary action must be applied in a manner that is both consistent and fair, and not based on race, sex, religion, national origin, ancestry, color, creed, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, marital status, disability, military status, or any other protected characteristic as defined by federal, state, or local regulations. Consistency means holding all members equally accountable for unacceptable behavior, while fairness involves considering the circumstances that contributed to the conduct and applying consequences that reflect that understanding. To ensure treatment, disciplinary decisions will be based on a balanced evaluation of all relevant factors. After thoroughly reviewing each case, every effort will be made to impose discipline appropriate to the specific incident, aligned with department standards.

This discipline matrix may be updated periodically to reflect the addition of new violations, shifts in disciplinary trends, and evolving priorities for department members. It does not override any applicable laws or provisions outlined in collective bargaining agreements.

### DISCIPLINE (AGGRAVATING/ MITIGATING FACTORS)

### EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

The department exists to serve the public. When evaluating a member's conduct, a key consideration is whether their actions aligned with the public interest. If a member violates a policy or procedure while pursuing a legitimate policing goal – and demonstrates an awareness of the broader public good – their actions may be viewed more favorably than those driven by personal motives. At times, the line between public and personal interest may be unclear. For example, arresting a dangerous criminal serves the public's interest. However, violating the individual's Constitutional rights in the process does not. The greater public interest lies in law enforcement fulfilling its duties while upholding Constitutional protections. However, if a member develops a creative or unconventional solution to address a persistent crime or service issue and unintentionally breaches a minor standard, their initiative may be considered. In such cases, the department may place significant value on encouraging innovation, in the course of determining disciplinary action.





## Appendix - Discipline Matrix

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## DEGREE OF HARM

The degree of harm caused by an error is a key factor in determining the appropriate consequences for a member's actions. Harm can be assessed in several ways. It can be measured in terms of the financial impact to the department and community. For instance, an error that results in significant damage to department or community property – such as a vehicle – the cost of repairs may be considered. Harm can also be assessed in terms of physical harm. Errors that lead to personal injury, such as those involving an unnecessary use of force, are weighed based on the severity of the harm caused. Another way in which harm can be assessed is the impact on the public trust. The effect of an error on public confidence is critical. When a member engages in criminal behavior, the department's response must clearly demonstrate that such conduct is unacceptable. Failing to do so can erode both trust and confidence in the department.

## EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

A member's level of experience is an important factor in disciplinary decisions. Greater consideration will be given to relatively new Members, or to experienced members working in an unfamiliar role or assignment, when they

make an error in judgment. On the other hand, a member with significant experience who makes a mistake that would not typically be expected at their level may face more serious consequences.

## ERRORS - UNINTENTIONAL/ INTENTIONAL

Errors made by department members can generally be classified as either unintentional or intentional, and the distinction plays a significant role in determining consequences. An unintentional error is an action or decision that, based on the information available at the time, appeared to comply with policy and seemed appropriate. They may also include brief lapses in judgment or acts of carelessness that result in minimal harm. While members will be held accountable for unintentional errors, the response will typically be corrective rather than punitive, unless the same errors are repeated over time.

An intentional error involves an action or decision that the member knew – or reasonably should have known – were in violation of the law, department policy, training or the Code of Conduct. Generally, intentional errors will be treated more seriously and carry greater disciplinary consequences. Within the framework of intentional errors, there are certain intentional behaviors that are fundamentally inconsistent with

the responsibilities of the policing profession. These include, but are not limited to, lying, theft, physical abuse of citizens, and other equally serious breaches of the public trust. Because truthfulness is essential in maintaining the public trust, any clear or deliberate attempt to be untruthful – especially by sworn members – may result in separation of service. Similarly, acts of theft, abuse, or criminal behavior represent egregious violations that will be addressed with the utmost seriousness.

## DISCIPLINE MATRIX

The discipline matrix lists Code of Conduct violations and sanction categories of A through E. The least punitive discipline is category A with discipline becoming more severe as the categories progress to category E. Because certain Code of Conduct violations may include a wide range of facts and circumstances, certain violations contain multiple sanction categories.

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## Appendix - Discipline Matrix

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Given the extensive number of policies contained within the department's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), the discipline matrix includes only the most commonly cited SOP violations. Any violation not specifically reflected in the matrix, the full range of disciplinary options remains available and may be applied based on the circumstances of the case.

For each category of misconduct, there are recommended disciplinary guidelines. These guidelines are generally shaped by precedent – specifically, by reviewing comparable disciplinary actions from prior Internal Affairs Division cases. This ensures consistency, fairness, and transparency in how discipline is applied across the department.

### PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE

The Chief of Police may consider a member's prior sustained misconduct as an aggravating factor when determining the appropriate level of discipline for a current violation.

The discipline matrix serves as a guideline and may not always be followed in strict sequence – particularly in cases involving multiple violations or exceptionally egregious circumstances. The Chief of Police reserves the right for

discretion to deviate from the matrix based on the specifics of each case, ensuring that disciplinary decisions reflect both the nature of the misconduct and the broader context in which it occurred.

| Category A   | Category B   | Category C  | Category D   | Category E   |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Conduct violation occurring in a single incident that results in minimal negative impact on department operations. Category A sanctions are considered non-disciplinary corrective action, intended to address the behavior without formal discipline. | Violations that result in more than a minimal negative impact on the department operations or reputation. This category also includes actions that undermine relationships with fellow members, other agencies, or the public. | Violations that cause a pronounced negative impact on department operations, reputation, or relationships. This includes significant harm to working relationships with employees, other agencies, or the public. | Violations that are fundamentally inconsistent with the core values of MPD and involve a substantial risk to officer or public safety. | Violations that are directly contrary to the core values of MPD. This includes acts of serious misconduct; criminal behavior; and/or any conduct that will effectively disqualify a sworn member from continued employment as law enforcement officer. |
| -Counseling<br>-Policy Review<br>-Remedial Training  | -Counseling<br>-Policy Review<br>-Remedial Training<br>-Letter of Written Reprimand  | -Letter of Written Reprimand<br>-Suspension of Days (≤5 days)   | -Suspension of Days (≥6 but ≤10 days)  | -Suspension of Days (>10 days)<br>-Reduction in Rank<br>-Separation of Service   |

The following dispositions are considered formal discipline:

1. Letter of Written Reprimand
2. Suspension of Days
3. Reduction in Rank
4. Separation of Service

In addition to the discipline listed in the matrix above, the Chief of Police reserves the right to impose the following measures which are not considered to be formal discipline: transfer of assignment, extension of probation, counseling, alcohol/drug assessment, psychiatric evaluation, fitness for duty evaluation, or any other training, treatment, or evaluation reasonably deemed necessary by the Chief of Police.

The following dispositions are considered non-disciplinary:

1. Counseling
2. Remedial Training
3. Policy Review

For a complete list of the Code of Conduct and Standard Operating Procedure violations associated please refer to the Discipline Matrix located on the Directives Intranet

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