

# Verbal De-Escalation

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## How do you know when you are being threatened?

- You will know it when it happens to you.
- You will "feel" it.
- Trust your instincts!!!!

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## WHAT IS VERBAL DE-ESCALATION?

- **Verbal De-Escalation** is what we use during a potentially dangerous, or threatening, situation in an attempt to prevent a person from causing harm to us, ourselves or others.
- Without specialized training you should never consider the use of physical force.
- Verbal De-escalation consists of tactics to help minimize or **defuse** the situation and most of all to help limit the potential of injury on the job.
- Verbal De-escalation tactics are non-physical skills used to prevent a potentially dangerous situation from escalating into a physical confrontation or injury.

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## De-Escalating Effectively

To verbally de-escalate another person, you must open as many clear lines of communication as possible.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION are the things that keep the meaning of what is being said from being heard.

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS:

- Pre-judging
- Not Listening
- Criticizing
- Engaging in Power Struggles
- Minimizing the situation

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## Verbal De-Escalation Tactics

- Simply listening
- Re-focusing the other person on something positive
- Use humor (sparingly) to lighten the mood (be very careful with this!!!!)
- Motivating the other person
- Empathizing with the other person
- Giving choices
- Setting limits (however, if done, maintain the limits set)

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## DE-ESCALATING POSITIVELY

- Use positive and helpful statements such as:
  - "I want help you!"
  - "Please tell me more so I better understand how to help you."
  - "Let's call Mr. Smith.... I know he would be able to help with this."
- Put yourself on his/her side of finding a solution the problem.

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## LISTENING

- Three Main Listening Skills:
  - ATTENDING: Giving your physical (and mental) attention to another person.
  - FOLLOWING: Making sure you are engaged by using eye contact. Use un-intrusive gestures (such as nodding your head, saying okay or asking an infrequent question.)
  - REFLECTING: Paraphrasing and reflecting, using the feelings of the other person (empathy).
- Listen when you are "LISTENING."
  - No other activities when listening.
  - Multi-tasking is not good when you are listening.

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## Be an empathetic listener

- Do NOT be judgmental.
- Do NOT ignore the person or pretend to be paying attention.
- Listen to what the person is really saying.
- Re-state the message.
- Clarify the message.
- Repeat the message.
- Be empathetic.
- Validate – "I understand why...." (However, NOT agreeing with....)
- Try to establish rapport with the other person.

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## WHAT ARE YOU REALLY SAYING?

- 80%-90% of our communication is non-verbal. It is very important to be able to identify exactly what **we** are communicating to others non-verbally.
- You may be trying to de-escalate the situation by talking to the other person, but **your body language** may be showing a willingness to get physical.
- It is also just as important to **recognize and understand** the non-verbal cues from the other person who has the potential of escalating the situation.

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### Body Language

- ❖ Finger pointing may seem accusing or threatening.
- ❖ Shoulder shrugging may seem uncaring or unknowing.
- ❖ Rigid walking may seem unyielding or challenging.
- ❖ Jaw set with clinched teeth shows you are not open-minded to listening to his/her side of the story.
- ❖ A natural smile is good – a fake smile can aggravate the situation.
- ❖ Use slow and deliberate movements -- quick actions may surprise or scare the other person.

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### Body Language and your Eyes

- One eyebrow raised = "sternness"
- Eyes open wide = "surprise"
- A hard stare = "threatening gesture"
- Closing eyes longer than normal = "I'm not listening" and/or "I don't care" (this may be a warning that you are unintentionally escalating the situation)

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### VOICE TONE – VOICE INFLECTION

- A **lowered** voice level may set a tone of anger which create fear or challenges.
- A **raised** voice may set a tone of anticipation or uncertainty which may promote excitement or disruption.
- Speak **slowly** -- This usually is interpreted as soothing.
- A **controlled** voice is one of calm and firmness which promotes confidence in both parties.
- **Humor** may intentionally offend someone and escalate the situation – use humor sparingly and always direct the humor towards yourself.
- Always be **respectful** to the other person.
- Use words like "**please**" and "**thank-you**" – "Mr." or "Ms." these words indicate respect.

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### TIPS

- Remain clam – Listen – really listen!!!!
- Avoid overreaction.
- Validate – “I understand why you might be upset.” (this does not indicate that you agree with them)
- Remove onlookers – or relocate if needed. (Onlookers can become either cheerleaders or pot stirrers)
- Watch for non-verbal clues or threats – keeping in mind your own non-verbal communications.
- Bring in another person to assist whenever possible – there is always less chance of aggressive behavior if two people are talking to one person.

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### Things NOT to Do !!!!

- Avoid becoming emotionally involved – control your emotions at all times.
- Avoid engaging in power struggles.
- Avoid becoming rigid in your process.
- Avoid telling the other person that you “know how she/he feels.”
- Avoid raising your voice, cussing, making threats, and giving ultimatums or demands.
- Avoid aggressive language, including body language.
- Do not attempt to intimidate a hostile person.

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### QUESTIONS - COMMENTS

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