

De-Escalation Techniques

Transportation and construction employees have constant interaction with the public whether in the field or office setting. Many times, these interactions are positive and productive and lead to positive resolutions or outcomes. However, there are some situations, for whatever reason, that can escalate into a hostile situation. This is especially true if the person seeking a solution to their problem is already in an agitated state. This supervisor safety talk provides techniques to use to diffuse escalating situations. The goal is to keep everyone safe in the event of a hostile encounter and maintain good working relationships with others.



Regardless of your setting (office or field) your personal safety is always the priority. Keep these things in mind when you suspect there is a possibility that an interaction may escalate into a hostile situation.

BE PREPARED:

- Assess your area.....Are you in a safe space?
- Is law enforcement needed and, on the way, or stationed nearby?
- Have you sized up the scene and visualized an escape path?
- Does your organization have a specific safety plan or protocol that you must follow?
- A simple acronym to remember for de-escalation is C.A.L.M. which stands for:
 - **C**ommunicate – Gather information and speak slowly.
 - **A**ssess – Identify basic needs and plan accordingly for your safety.
 - **L**isten with Empathy – Validate feelings and pay attention to body language.
 - **M**ediate – Respond with empathy and agree on a solution.

USE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND BODY LANGUAGE:

- **Stay aware.** Your goal is to project a calm and empathetic persona. Maintain a safe distance and avoid entering personal space. Approach the situation with the goal to understand the other person's situation as if it were your own.
- **Be respectful and courteous.** Listen to the initial concern and approach with civility in mind. Using words such as "please" and "thank you" along with a calm and composed approach will help bring down the other person's defenses.
- **Control your verbal communication.** Speak calmly and demonstrate empathy. Monitor your volume and avoid raising your voice. Control the tone of your voice to help calm the other person. Avoid talking from a position of authority; seek to understand what the other person is experiencing.
- **Control your body language.** Avoid frowning or scowling. Lean slightly towards the person showing you are trying to listen. Nod when you understand a key point. Always keep your hands open



and towards your side and visible. Do not touch the other person and respect personal space.

- **Know when to call for assistance.** If the situation is not improving and getting worse call a supervisor or manager to assist. If you start to feel unsafe, remove yourself from the situation and alert law enforcement if you notice the situation is escalating to potential violence.

USE ALTERNATE LANGUAGE TO MAINTAIN POSITIVE INTERACTIONS:

Instead of:

Calm Down.....
 Sorry but I can't help you.....
 I know how you feel.....
 Come with me.....

Say:

I can see you are upset and need assistance.
 I want to help you as best I can...
 I understand that you are feeling....
 May I speak with you further on this issue?

RECOGNIZE SIGNS OF ESCALATION:

There are several signs that can indicate that an interaction is escalating. Being able to recognize these signs will help determine what steps you will need to take to ensure your safety. Here are some things to watch for in the other person.

<p><u>Physical Signs:</u> Clenched fists or jaw Tensed muscles Pacing or restlessness Intense or prolonged eye contact Flushed face or rapid breathing</p>	<p><u>Verbal Signs:</u> Raised voice/shouting threatening language/profanity Interrupting/talking over others Persistent criticism or blaming Refusal to listen to other perspectives</p>
<p><u>Behavioral Signs:</u> Mood Swing Increased agitation Invading personal space Threatening jesters Finger pointing Lack of control</p>	<p><u>Emotional Signs:</u> Lack of Patience Displaying anger, contempt, or irritability Yelling/Crying</p>
<p><u>Cognitive Signs:</u> Narrow Focus Black and white thinking Lack of ability to reason or problem solve Lack of empathy</p>	<p>Signs of Escalation</p> <p>The graph shows a progression of behavior intensity over time. The stages are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CONFUSION FRUSTRATION BLAME ANGER HOSTILITY

Remember...de-escalation isn't as much about controlling a situation as much as it is about controlling how you respond to a situation. Remember to remain C.A.L.M and do your best to be empathetic and respectful to ensure that interactions remain safe for all parties.