

Using Verbal De-escalation

INTRODUCTION

What is Verbal Escalation?



Verbal De-escalation is what we use during a potentially threatening situation in an attempt to prevent a person from causing harm to us, themselves or others.

Verbal De-escalation consists of tactics to help limit the number of staff who might be injured on the job.

Without specialized training, we should never consider the use of physical force.

Who Needs Verbal Escalation Training?

- Everyone needs it!
- Some school employees, such as Special-Ed teachers and aides, School Resource Officers and others may receive training that exceeds the limits of this program.
- This is NOT “self-defense” training
- This safety message focuses only on your personal safety.

This Training WILL Teach You:

- Verbal De-escalation tactics that are non-physical skills used to prevent a potentially dangerous situation from escalating into a physical confrontation or injury.
- Tactics have four main categories:
 - PREVENTING a potentially dangerous situation from escalating
 - DE-ESCALATING a threatening situation
 - Tactics used DURING a confrontation to ensure your personal safety
 - Tactics used to EVADE or ESCAPE from an attack

When Might You Need to Use Verbal De-escalation?

- With patients or visitors who are out of control
- With an injured person
- At an extracurricular event such as an athletic contest, school dance, etc.
- With a violent intruder
- Whenever you feel threatened!

How Will You Know When You are Personally or Physically Threatened?

- You will know it when it happens to you
- You will “feel” it
- Trust your instincts

Identifying the Escalated Client

- Raised Voice
- High-pitched Voice
- Rapid Speech
- Pacing
- Excessive Sweating
- Balled Fists / Excessive Hand Gestures
- Erratic Movements
- Fidgeting
- Aggressive Posture
- Shaking



What is NOT Verbal De-escalation

- Hostage negotiation skills
- How to break up fights
- Physical intervention techniques
- Judo take-downs
- Techniques for use with out-of-control or violent situations
- ... or anything else that might get you hurt!

DE-ESCALATION TACTICS

Use of Physical Force

- The use of physical force is NEVER recommended
- The use of physical force is a LAST RESORT to prevent injury to yourself or another person
- The use of physical force usually results in someone (YOU?) getting hurt

Verbal De-escalation Tactics

- Simply listening
- Distracting the other person
- Refocusing the other person onto something positive
- Changing the subject
- Using humor (sparingly) to lighten the mood (be very careful with this!)
- Motivating the other person (especially useful with students)
- Empathizing with the other person
- Giving choices
- Setting limits



De-escalating Effectively

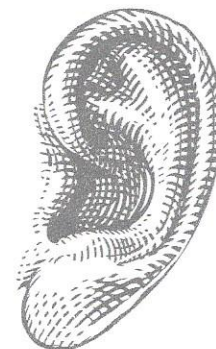
- To verbally de-escalate another person, you must open as many clear lines of communication as possible.
- Both you and the other person must listen to each other and have no Barriers to Communication.
- Barriers to Communication are the things that keep the meaning of what is being said from being heard.
- Examples of Communication Barriers
 - Pre-judging
 - Not listening
 - Criticizing
 - Name Calling
 - Engaging in power struggles
 - Giving orders
 - Threatening
 - Minimizing
 - Arguing

De-escalating Positively

- Use positive and helpful statements:
 - “I want to 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 ...”
 - “Ms. Jones handles this for our district, let’s ask her what she thinks about this situation ; She is always willing to help!”
- Put yourself on his/her side in finding a solution

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 unintrusive gestures (such as nodding your head, saying “okay” or asking an infrequent question)
 - **Reflecting:** Paraphrasing and reflecting back verbally what the person is saying and feeling (empathy)
- Listen when you are “listening.”
 - No other activities when listening
 - Multi-talking is not good when you’re listening
- Learn the difference between hearing and listening



Being an Empathetic Listener

- Do NOT be judgemental
- 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...” (not agreement)
- Try to establish rapport with the other person

BODY LANGUAGE

Introduction to Body Language

- 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 important that we recognize and understand the non-verbal cues from another person who has the potential of escalating.

The Importance of Body Language

- When people are angry, they sometimes do not “listen” to the words that are being said (Remember the difference between “hearing” and “listening.”)
- Often they see and react to what you are “saying” with your body language.
- You must always be very careful with the message you are sending!

How to Use 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 clenched teeth communicates that you are not open-minded to listening to his/her side of the story.
- Smile naturally, a fake smile can aggravate the situation.
- Use slow and deliberate movements – quick actions may surprise or startle the other person.

Body Language: What the Eyes Say

- One eyebrow raised = “sternness”
- Eyes open wide = “surprise”
- A hard stare = “threatening gesture”
- Closing eyes longer than normal = “I’m not listening” and/or “Change your message!” (This may be a warning that you are unintentionally escalating the situation!)

Challenging Postures

- Challenging postures that tend to threaten another person and escalate the situation:
 - Face to face
 - Nose to nose
 - Toe to toe
 - Eyeball to eyeball
 - Touching
 - Finger pointing

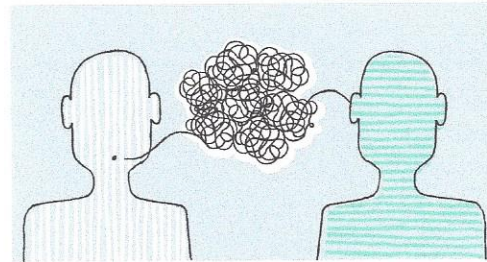
Personal Space

- Invasion or encroachment of personal space tends to heighten or escalate anxiety.
- Personal space is usually 1.5-3 feet – far enough away so that you cannot be hit or kicked.
- Do not touch a hostile person – they might interpret it as an aggressive action.
- Keep your hands visible at all times, you do not want the other person to misinterpret your physical actions.

Protect Yourself at All Times

- While de-escalating another person, you want to be in a non-threatening, non-challenging and self-protecting position.
- Slightly more than a leg’s length away, on an angle, and off to the side of the other person.
- Stay far enough away that the other person cannot hit, kick or grab you.

Tone of Voice



- A low voice level may set a tone of anger, which could create fear or challenges.
- A raised voice may set a tone of anticipation or uncertainty, which may promote excitement or disruption.
- Speak slowly – this is usually interpreted as soothing.
- A controlled voice is one of calm and firmness, which promotes confidence in both parties.
- Humor may unintentionally offend someone and escalate the situation – Use humor sparingly and always direct humor toward yourself. (Be very careful when attempting humor in this type of situation!)
- Always be respectful to the other person.
- Using “please” and “thank-you,” “Mr.” or “Ms.” indicates respect.
- Be careful of your **volume** (speaking loudly, sternly or yelling), your **inflection of speech** (showing sarcasm, defensiveness, provoking) and **rate of speech** (speaking rapidly can heighten anxiety).

CONCLUSION

Tips for Successful De-escalation

- Remain calm – **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 to a safer place. (Onlookers can become either “cheerleaders” or additional victims.”) Send an onlooker for help.
- Watch for non-verbal cues or threats.
- Bring in another trained person to assist whenever possible.
- There is less chance of aggressive behavior if two people are talking to one person.

Call for Help!

- Alert someone else as soon as possible. (No help will arrive until someone else knows your situation. Until then, you’re all alone.)
- Two heads are always better than one.
- There is safety in numbers.
- It will be beneficial to have a witness, if the situation deteriorates and someone is injured.



Notification and Follow-up

- Always report minor situations.
- A minor situation can be a “cry for help” and/or a “warning sign” of bigger things to come!
- Minor situations can lead to major situations.
- After any confrontation, advise or direct the person to counseling, if possible.
- Always document every threatening event.
- Documentation will help all parties when evaluating recurring events.

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 he or she 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.

Not the End...

- After your personal safety is secured, there are several other steps that must be taken:
 - Intervention must occur to end the situation, if that has not yet occurred. This may be accomplished by administrators, counselors or police, depending on the circumstances.
 - The individual who threatened your personal safety must be dealt with appropriately; e.g. counseling, suspension, expulsion, criminal proceedings, incarceration, etc.

...Just the Beginning!

- You should receive medical treatment for any physical injuries.
- Counseling for post-traumatic stress and fear resulting from the incident.
- Conduct a debriefing session with involved staff.
- Steps must be taken to prevent other similar situations from occurring in the future. This may include the adoption of new policies and/or an action plan.

Information Provided by:

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Based on *Verbal De-Escalation* by:
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To: riskmanager@cvip.net
Subject: Verbal De-escalation
Attachments: Verbal De-escalation.pdf

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Memorandum For: JPA Liaisons, Contact People/Safety Officers, Servicing agents

Subject: Verbal De-escalation

You may wish to share the attached verbal de-escalation information with your staff members who would be the most likely to utilize it.

Henry Brock
Risk Manager