

DE-ESCALATION - A USER GUIDE

WHAT IS DE-ESCALATION?

This handout is for groups **interested in building an ongoing de-escalation practice**. We understand de-escalation as one tool among many that we can use to preserve the integrity of their events and those of their allies, and a way to build skills and trust-based relationships.

De-escalation gives us the opportunity to problem solve in a way that's consistent with our values. This is a balancing act, as it is important to stay grounded in our own beliefs without losing track of where people are at when they are escalating.

KNOWING YOURSELF

We all have different vulnerabilities, some of which are visible and some of which are not. We also all have different reactions to challenging situations rooted in our life experience, our identities, and the immediate conditions of our surroundings.

Reflections on your relationship to danger

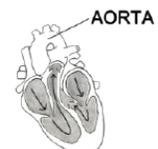
- How do you react to trouble? Fight, Flight, Freeze?
- How does your body and identity impact what you bring into a situation?
- What three things can you do to center yourself?

Reflections on you and your surroundings

- How do different physical situations impact how you de-escalate?
- How do you know that you are committed to de-escalating?
- Are there scenarios you know you know are not best for you to intervene? Why?

STEPS TO DE-ESCALATION

1. Assess the Situation
2. Calm yourself – Remember - how do you respond to trouble? How do you get grounded?
3. Then Act



ABCD'S OF DE-ESCALATION

- Accountability – to organizations, participants, values
- Boundaries – understand the physical perimeters and political parameters
- Communication – keep info flowing through the team and communicate to participants
- De-escalation – prevent or minimize situations that can bring harm to participants or that would interrupt the action as planned

DE-ESCALATION - BEST PRACTICES

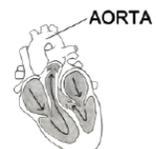
- Do what you can to calm yourself
- Take a strong but not aggressive posture (defensive)
- Speak slowly and firmly (not aggressive)
- Use short, simple phrases
- Phrase requests positively ('You need to leave' vs. 'Don't stay there')
- Don't enter into a back and forth with them

Note:

- ♥ The ideal people to lead de-escalations are those who can be trusted to be respectful, patient, cool-headed, affable (NOT short-tempered!)
- ♥ The purpose is to de-escalate heated situations and resolve or minimize conflict.
- ♥ Calm, compassionate, "take a walk with me" style behavior is prized.

Verbal De-escalation Tactics

- PREVENT - Listen for tension; breezily interrupt; separate people.
 - Everything okay over here?
 - So-and-so, can I talk with you for a minute?"
- BE WHERE THEY ARE AT - This is not a moment to convince. Escalated people believe they are right and misunderstood, so de-escalation team members must be prepared to listen and speak to people where they're at.
- ACTIVE LISTENING - We can practice active listening even when in disagreement. This can mean reflecting back what we're hearing.
 - "I hear that you want ____."
 - "I understand that you're upset / feel threatened / we see this differently." ○ "I see you're really frustrated."
 - "I hear you" / "I'm listening."
- CONVERSATIONAL OFFERS - Identify a point of agreement and build from there.



- o “You know, I agree with you about ____.”
- o “What I really like about what you just said is ____.”
- YOU DON’T HAVE TO ENGAGE - Non-engagement can be powerful and unexpected. It is difficult to engage with a silent party. Try letting people exhaust themselves.
- DISTRACTION - Offer to show them something or introduce them to someone. Ask if you can add their name to a list. Propose an alternative project they might like. Ask them to take a walk with you. If it’s one of our own people, ask them to pass out flyers, hold signs, or join in some other coordinated effort.
- GET HELP - Try approaching someone who is connected to the escalated person to assist you in calming them down. Sometimes it’s better to approach a situation as a small group, but remember, it’s usually best to limit # of responders to #s reacting.
- CHOICES - A lack of choice can feel violating.
 - o “You can lower your voice, or leave.”
 - o “You can step over here, or lower your voice.”
- SURPRISE - Sometimes you can disarm someone with vulnerability.
 - o “You’re right. I should not have said that.”
 - o If you feel comfortable, offer your hand to them and introduce yourself.
- RESPECT - Avoid assuming someone’s identity. Refrain from using gender-specific words such as Sir, Mam, She, Him, Sister, Brother, etc.

Body language

- POSTURE – Equal but not threatening. Don’t touch people you’ve never met – if you know them, at least ask for consent. With police: palms up and open.
- NEUTRAL FACE – Neutral face harder to engage with. Not hostile, not beaming.
- VOICE – Talk low and slow. Never scream. Gentle and firm tones.
- EYE CONTACT – Not same across cultures, sometimes can help humanize and make people less likely to hurt you.
- PAUSE – Don’t be afraid to pause or do nothing. Take deep breaths: in for two counts, out for five.
- ALLOW FOR EXIT – Try not to block someone’s exit.
- DON’T POINT OR SHAKE FINGERS - No one likes that.

Adapted from Resources developed by Jewish Voice for Peace, Cat Willet and Vision Change Win consulting.

