

De-escalation Training 10 December 2021

Introduction:

This workshop is targeted at frontline staff who are dealing with clients who exhibit aggressive and /or violent behaviours.

After working through this workshop, participants will understand the following:

- Be able to identify unacceptable, aggressive and violent behaviours towards them;
- Understand the science and research around why people behave in an aggressive or violent manner, including behaviours such as anger, frustration and stress;
- Have a toolbox of strategies to allow them to diffuse a difficult situation and protect themselves;
- Recognise when they or others need further support following an aggressive confrontation or call and know what to do about it.

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Identify unacceptable, aggressive and violent behaviours

What do you come across within your organisation? Raising of voice, puffing up of chest, clenching jaw or fist, explosive reactions.... Taking a swing at you.....

When in this state it's hard for someone to be reasonable or follow logic which makes de-escalation difficult. The content I will be coaching on isn't easy and it's human not to get it right 100% of the time.



Why do people behave in an aggressive or violent manner?

Aggressive or violent tendencies can result from several different mental health conditions. Alcohol and drug abuse may produce violent behaviour. Post-traumatic stress and bipolar can also lead to violent expression of aggressive thoughts. Or, it may be as simple as a bad day and the incident that you are involved in is the straw that breaks the camel's back.

It's useful to know how someone who is under the influence of drugs will react rather than someone who is having a bad day. Mental health and / or drug abuse are different topics, and we won't have time to cover them in this session, however I acknowledge this will impact how you best manage the situation and could be topics for future training sessions.

Some of the work you may undertake allows you to have a profile on the individual and it will indicate if they have drug abuse issues, mental health concerns and / or aggressive tendencies. Where we can have a profile it's important it is discussed to ensure we can manage how the behaviour can manifest and good techniques to manage it.

eg: Someone who has dementia will need a different approach to someone who is fuelled on methamphetamine.

When facing aggressive behaviour de-escalation and emergency protocols need to be bespoke and practiced within your organisation.

Toolbox of Strategies

11 De-Escalation Tips

De-escalation tips to use during times of high stress:

Considering the many recent hardships, it feels almost glib to suggest that de-escalation is really ever this simple. The truth is that there is no magic recipe to keep troubling things from happening in the world. But there is a way that you can respond to these kinds of events that is constructive, positive, and impacts real resolution. That's why training is not so much a series of steps as it is a philosophy for viewing humanity as full of potential. These de-escalation tips are about support, not suppression, and about being human.

1. Be Empathic and Non-judgmental

Do not judge or be dismissive of the feelings of the person in distress. Remember that the person's feelings are real, whether or not you think those feelings are justified. Respect those feelings, keeping in mind that whatever the person is going through could be the most important event in their life at that moment.

2. Respect Personal Space

Be aware of your position, posture, and proximity when interacting with a person in distress. Allowing personal space shows respect, keeps you safer, and tends to decrease a person's anxiety. If you must enter someone's personal space to provide care, explain what you're doing so the person feels less confused and frightened. Also try and position yourself in such a way that allows you and the aggressor to be able to leave/exit safely.

3. Use Nonthreatening Nonverbals

The more a person is in distress, the less they hear your words – and the more they react to your nonverbal communication. Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice. Keeping your tone and body language neutral will go a long way toward diffusing a situation.

4. Keep Your Emotional Brain in Check

Remain calm, rational, and professional. While you can't control the person's behaviour, how you respond to their behaviour will have a direct effect on whether the situation escalates or diffuses. Positive thoughts like "I can handle this" and "I know what to do" will help you maintain your own rationality and calm the person down.

5. Focus on Feelings

Facts are important, but how a person feels is the heart of the matter; yet some people have trouble identifying how they feel about what's happening to them. Watch and listen carefully for the person's real message. Try saying something like "That must be scary." Supportive words like these will let the person know that you understand what's happening—and you may get a more positive response.

6. Ignore Challenging Questions

Engaging with people who ask challenging questions is rarely productive. When a person challenges your authority, redirect their attention to the issue at hand. Ignore the challenge, but not the person. Bring their focus back to how you can work together to solve the problem.

7. Set Limits

As a person progresses through a crisis, give them respectful, simple, and reasonable limits. Offer concise and respectful choices and consequences. A person who is upset may not be able to focus on everything you say. Be clear, speak simply, and offer the positive choice first.

8. Choose Wisely What You Insist Upon

It's important to be thoughtful in deciding which rules are negotiable and which are not. For example, if a person doesn't want to shower in the morning, can you allow them to choose the time of day that feels best for them? If you can offer a person options and flexibility, you may be able to avoid unnecessary altercations.

9. Allow Silence for Reflection

We've all experienced awkward silences. While it may seem counterintuitive to let moments of silence occur, sometimes it's the best choice. It can give a person a chance to reflect on what's happening, and how they need to proceed. Silence can be a powerful communication tool.

10. Allow Time for Decisions

When a person is upset, they may not be able to think clearly. Give them a few moments to think through what you've said. A person's stress rises when they feel rushed. Allowing time brings calm.

We cannot control what happens in the world. We can control how we respond to it.

Video:

[De-Escalating an Argument - Bing video](#)

11. Know yourself!

None of the above will add value unless you work out where you are at, what your triggers are, what headspace you are in on that given day and how to self-manage.

We all have our moments... here are some regarding mask use...

[Mask disputes caught on camera inside South Florida Walmart stores - Bing video](#)

It is important to check in with yourself and ensure you are able to deal with conflict as it arises. We are all human and not always in the best space to manage conflict. Know when you are having these times and seek support and your back up person within your organisation. It can be helpful to have person to hand who can help de-escalate and who knows you well enough not to judge that bad day and lend an ear and step into those situations where you need a hand to deescalate a situation.

Think about how to get that back up person to take over/be at your side....

Do you know who they are?

Have you run through the types of scenarios at work to work out strategies to get assistance and how you can tag team to manage them?

What about when alone in this situation? What's your plan?

What's the organisations policy and procedures on lone workers/volunteers?

Is it sufficient?

Have all likely scenarios been thought through and have an active management plan that can readily be applied?

At your table, please decide on a likely scenario you will come across.

Then take this example and apply the 11 tips in a role play setting. Have one or two people take the role of the aggressor and the others will apply de-escalation tools.

There is no one magical solution for all organisations, however, here are some examples of what others have implemented:

On Reception: no masks or not willing to sign in - heightened response from customer - who is in need of a food parcel and is awaiting a covid test result- Team member is behind a high counter and with a robust screen fitted which reduces physical contact (can't just jump counter to physically intimidate) ... customer wont calm down even with applying all the tips learnt in today's session. Team member feels unsafe...

Plan B required! The team member pushes the panic button to render assistance, they take the pre-planned escape route if assistance isn't forthcoming and/or isn't working. The most important thing is for our team to get to safety.... cameras in place to capture events for review after and help with debrief. What that team member has experienced could happen all too often and they are already having a bad day, week, month, or year... this can be the straw that breaks the camel's back so ensure you have support in place and the team checks in a few times to make sure the team member is coping.

Employees/volunteers are out in remote locations and spread across an area observing and recording wildlife, no cell phone coverage/patchy coverage/lack of credit on phone/ No quick solution to render assistance if in need of urgent assistance... they are in a rural setting with wildlife, gullies, shear rock faces and an agitated bloke appears out of nowhere...

You assess the situation and where your nearest assistance is coming from.

You recognise talking calmly and keeping distance and using non-threatening verbal isn't working...

You feel unsafe... He keeps approaching and what he is saying isn't making any sense... Plan A isn't working! Time for Plan B!

Keep a good amount of distance between you and ensure you have a safe passage to escape towards help/your vehicle, ensure your vehicle is close at hand and can accommodate the terrain (as you don't want to get stuck when trying to leave an unsafe environment). Ensure your keys are readily accessible and calmly ensure they are ready to go, the car is pointing in the right direction and make an excuse to leave your post (keep your gear where it is as it's more important you are safe) and head calmly and swiftly toward your car.

All of the above requires pre-planning and should be considered prior to arriving on site and when setting up. Have this plan B in your back pocket!

Further to this.... It's important to review post incident to see what we can learn from it, what we can improve on and to ensure the person/s who handled the situation have an opportunity to debrief and ensure they have ongoing support from the organisation.

I personally like to use an opportunity for improvement process to help guide us through this debrief and ensure we have corrective actions in place to prevent it from happening again and ensuring those involved get the support they need.

PLAN, DO, REVIEW!

Wrap up

This training is not exclusive to an organisational setting. Take it with you in your daily interactions with your family, your friends, your colleagues, customers, clients, neighbours, people walking by, driving. For me, it's those basic principles of the training that grows out of the basic principles of humanity and decency: "Respect each other. Know yourself and when you need help. Keep yourself each other safe."

Current events in the world remind us that conflict and crisis are never as straightforward and simple in life as they are on paper (or in a training session). By putting simple strategies to work in each element of our daily life, we acknowledge that we can't control what other people may do, but we can set a stage of positive potential for what we do. We can prepare the spaces we inhabit to be more receptive to nonviolence, we can empower individuals to respond to crisis more mindfully and compassionately, and we can maintain more hope for healing and recovery from the traumas that crises and conflict can leave in their wake.

We must each do our part to create a culture of caring.

Can a stack of tips save the world? I know it's not that simple; but a thoughtful, prepared, and supportive approach to the situations we face in life can help us navigate beyond crisis and toward connection.

Training isn't a magic wand that makes the world a better place, but it is a practical, meaningful process to equip yourself and your team with the resilience, confidence, and hope to do just that.