

Dealing with individuals who are belligerent, hostile, or noncompliant can be an everyday occurrence for some people.

Your effective response to this defensive behavior is often the **key to avoiding** a physical confrontation with an **out-of-control individual**.

These tips for verbal intervention and de-escalation will **help you intervene** in the **safest, most effective way possible**.

- Reasoning with an enraged person is not possible.
- The first and only objective in de-escalation is to reduce the level of arousal so that discussion becomes possible.

1. **REMAIN CALM.** This may be easier said than done, especially when a person is screaming, making threats, or using abusive language. Remember that the verbally escalating person is beginning to lose control. If the person senses that you are also losing control, the situation will probably get worse. Try to keep your cool, even when challenged, insulted, or threatened.

2. **WATCH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE.** As a person becomes increasingly agitated, they will pay less attention to your words and more attention to your body language, 65% of it. Be aware of your use of space, posture, and gestures. Don't get too close to the person, and avoid gestures that might seem threatening. Make sure your nonverbal behavior is consistent with your verbal message.

3. **KEEP IT SIMPLE.** Be clear and direct in your message. Avoid jargon and complicated choices. A person who is beginning to lose rational control will not be processing information as well as they usually do. Complex messages will increase their anxiety and probably make their behavior more difficult to manage.

4. **USE REFLECTIONS.** Put the person's statements in your own words and then check with them to see if you have understood what they meant. By repeating or reflecting the person's message, you'll give them an opportunity to clarify that message. This reflective listening is also a powerful way to let the person know that you care enough to listen carefully to their words.

5. **USE SILENCE.** Surprisingly, silence is a very effective technique. Silence on your part allows the individual time to clarify their thoughts and restate their message. This often leads to valuable insight and clearer understanding of the true source of the person's conflict.

6. **WATCH YOUR PARAVERBALS.** Paraverbal communication refers to the tone, volume, speed and rhythm of your speech. Many identical statements can have completely opposite meanings, depending on your paraverbals. For example, the question, "What's wrong?" could be stated in a caring, supportive way or in an impatient, condescending way. Avoid double messages by making sure that your paraverbal communication is consistent with the words you use.

Effective de-escalation techniques feel abnormal. We are driven into "fight or flight" mode when scared. However, in de-escalation, we can do neither. **We must appear centered and calm even when we are terrified.** These techniques *must* be practiced before they are needed so that they can become "second nature".

When under stress, people tend to hold their breath or breathe shallowly. Practice slow, deep diaphragmatic breathing when confronted by stressful situations to decrease your own level of arousal. Also use positive affirmations or self-talk. It is a fact that our thoughts trigger emotions and are triggered by our communication with ourselves. Stay positive when under attack by maintaining a win-win attitude.

DON'T GIVE UP

While there is no guarantee that a person will not physically act out, following these tips will help you reduce the anxiety and defensiveness that often precede dangerous behavior.

Call **Mutual Ground** at 630-897-0080 for help due to sexual assault, domestic violence, or assistance with obtaining an Order of Protection. *There is no charge for the services.

Call **Kendall County Health Department** at 630-553-9100 for Parent Education, Children Services, Substance Abuse, Elder Resources, Medical and Mental Health

Always Dial 911 for Emergency