

Fountain of Hope Family Services Inc.

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Staffs Verbal De-Escalation Techniques Training Handbook

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For Defusing or Talking Down an Explosive Situation

When a potentially violent situation threatens to erupt on the spot and no weapon is present, verbal de-escalation is appropriate.

There are two important concepts to keep in mind:

1. 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.
2. De-escalation techniques are abnormal. We are driven to flight or freeze when scared. However, in de-escalation, we can do none of these. We must appear centered and calm even when we are frightened. Therefore these techniques must be practiced before they are needed so that they can become "second nature."

THERE ARE 3 PARTS TO BE MASTERED IN VERBAL DE-ESCALATION

A. The Worker in Control of Him/Her Self

1. Appear calm; centered and self-assured even though you don't feel it. Relax facial muscles and look confident. Your anxiety can make the client feel anxious and unsafe and that can escalate aggression.
2. Use a modulated, low monotonous tone of voice (our normal tendency is to have a high pitched tight voice when scared).
3. If you have time, remove necktie, scarf, hanging jewelry, religious or political symbols before you see the client (not in front of him/her).
4. Do not be defensive-even if the comments or insults are directed at you, they are not about you. Do not defend yourself or anyone else from insults, curses or misconceptions about their roles.
5. Be aware of any resources available for back up. Know that you have the choice to leave, tell the client to leave or call the police should de-escalation not be effective.
6. Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for help. The agitated individual is very sensitive to feeling shamed and disrespected. We want him/her to know that it is not necessary to show us that they must be respected. We automatically treat them with dignity and respect.

B. The Physical Stance

1. Never turn your back for any reason.
2. Always be at the same eye level. Encourage the client to be seated, but if he/she needs to stand, you stand up also.
3. Allow extra physical space between you – about four times your usual distance. Anger and agitation fill the extra space between you and your client.
4. Do not stand full front to client. Stand at an angle so you can sidestep away if needed.
5. Do not maintain constant eye contact. Allow the client to break his/her gaze and look away.
6. Do not point or shake your finger.
7. DO NOT smile. This could look like mockery or anxiety.
8. Do not touch – even if some touching is generally culturally appropriate and usual in your setting. Cognitive dysfunction in agitated people allow for easy misinterpretation of physical

