



# Customer De-Escalation

**Verbal de-escalation** is what we use during a potentially dangerous, or threatening, situation to prevent a person from causing harm to you, themselves, or others.

Without specialized training, we should **NEVER** consider the use of physical force. Applying verbal de-escalation tactics helps to limit the number of injuries on the job.



## VERBAL DE-ESCALATION TACTICS

Some de-escalation tactics include:

- Simply listening
- Having empathy
- Distracting or re-focus with something positive
- Changing the subject
- Motivating them
- Giving choices or options



## DE-ESCALATING EFFECTIVELY

To de-escalate effectively, you must open as many clear lines of communication as possible. Clear communication means active listening and eliminating any communication barriers. Barriers keep the meaning of what is being said, from being heard.



Eliminate communication barriers like... judging, not listening, criticizing, name-calling, exerting power, giving orders, making threats, minimizing, and arguing.

## DE-ESCALATING POSITIVELY

Put yourself on their side of finding a solution to the problem. Use positive and helpful statements such as:

- “I want to help you”
- “Please tell me more so I better understand how to help you”
- “Let me call someone I know that can help with this situation”



## LISTEN

Three main listening skills:

1. **Attending:** Giving your physical (and mental) attention to another person.
2. **Following:** Making sure you are engaged by using eye contact. Use un-intrusive gestures (such as nodding of your head, saying okay or asking infrequent questions.)
3. **Reflecting:** Paraphrasing and reflecting, using the feelings of the other person. (Empathy)



## HAVE EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to emotionally understand what other people feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine yourself in their place. Essentially, it is putting yourself in someone else's position and feeling what they must be feeling.

- Do not be judgmental
- Do not ignore the person or pretend to be paying attention – listen to what they really have to say
- Re-state, repeat, and clarify the message
- Validate – “I understand why...”
- Try to establish rapport with the person



## BODY LANGUAGE

80% to 90% of all 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 important that we recognize and understand the non-verbal cues. Often, people “see” and react to what you are “saying” with your body language. You must always be careful with the message you are sending.

## BODY LANGUAGE TIPS:

- Avoid finger pointing – may seem accusing or threatening
- Avoid shoulder shrugging – may seem uncaring or unknowing
- Use slow and deliberate movements – quick actions may surprise or scare the other person
- Avoid a hard stare – threatening gesture

Avoid closing eyes longer than normal – “you are not listening and/or annoyed.”

## TONE OF YOUR VOICE

A raised voice may set a tone of anticipation or uncertainty, which may promote excitement or disruption. Speak slowly and controlled. A calm, but firm voice promotes confidence in both parties. Always be respectful and polite, using ‘please and thank you.’



## DE-ESCALATION REMINDERS:

- Remain calm – Listen, REALLY LISTEN!
- If driving, do not leave your seat.
- Keep your distance from the other person (6 to 10 feet).
- Avoid overreaction.
- Validate! “I understand why you might be upset.”
- Watch for non-verbal clues or threats.
- Bring in another trained person to assist whenever possible. Call dispatch for assistance if you can safely. There is less chance of aggressive behavior if two people are talking to one person.



## REMEMBER TO ALWAYS REPORT!

Report and document every threatening event, even if you think it's minor. Documentation will help all parties when evaluating re-occurring events.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



[8 Step Guide to Customer De-Escalation](#)



[Call Center De-Escalation Techniques \(5-minute video\)](#)



[9 Best De-Escalation Techniques for Customer Service Agents](#)



Check out Organizational Development's webpages for more resources to use in your daily work.