



Customer De-Escalation

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What is Verbal De-escalation?

- ▶ **Verbal De-escalation** is what we use during a potentially dangerous, or threatening, situation in an attempt to prevent a person from causing harm to us, themselves or others.
- ▶ Verbal De-escalation consists of **tactics** to help limit the number of staff or customers who might be injured on the job.
- ▶ Without specialized training, we should never consider the use of **physical force**.

Physical Force

- ▶ Use of physical force is NEVER recommended.
- ▶ Physical force would only be used as a last resort to prevent injury to yourself or to another person.
- ▶ Use of physical force usually results in someone (you?) getting hurt.
- ▶ Physical force can also lead to termination.
 - ▶ (CBA Article 22.2, H)

Prior to de-escalation



- ▶ First, calm yourself before interacting with the person.
- ▶ If you're upset, it's only going to escalate the situation. Calm down and then begin to look at the situation and how you can intervene safely.
- ▶ Take a deep breath if that helps you.

Verbal De-escalation Tactics

- ▶ Some **Tactics** are:
 - ▶ Simply listening
 - ▶ Empathizing with the other person
 - ▶ Giving choices
 - ▶ Re-focusing the other person on something positive
 - ▶ Changing the subject
 - ▶ Ask for their solutions or ideas
 - ▶ Help them talk out angry feelings rather than act on them

De-escalating Effectively



- ▶ To verbally de-escalate another person, you must open as many clear lines of communication as possible.
- ▶ Both you and the other person must listen to each other and have no barriers.
- ▶ **Barriers to Communication** are the things that keep the meaning of what is being said from being heard.
- ▶ **Communication Barriers:**
 - ▶ Pre-judging
 - ▶ Not Listening
 - ▶ Criticizing
 - ▶ Name-Calling
 - ▶ Engaging in Power Struggles
 - ▶ Ordering
 - ▶ Threatening
 - ▶ Minimizing
 - ▶ Arguing

De-escalating Positively



- ▶ 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”
- ▶ Put yourself on their side of finding a solution to the problem.

Listening

- ▶ Three Main Listening Skills:
 - ▶ Attending: Giving your physical (and mental) attention to another person.
 - ▶ Following: Making sure you are engaged by using eye contact. Use un-intrusive gestures (such as nodding of your head, saying okay or asking an infrequent question.)
 - ▶ Reflecting: Paraphrasing and reflecting, using the feelings of the other person. (empathy)
- ▶ Listen when you are “listening.”
 - ▶ **No other activities when listening.**
 - ▶ Multi-tasking is not good when you are listening.

Be an empathic listener



- ▶ Do **NOT** be judgmental.
- ▶ Do **NOT** ignore the person or pretend to be paying attention.
- ▶ Listen to what the person is really saying.
- ▶ Re-state the message.
- ▶ Clarify the message.
- ▶ Repeat the message.
- ▶ Be empathetic
- ▶ Validate -- “I understand why...” (Not in agreement with...)
- ▶ Try to establish rapport with the other person.

Body Language



- ▶ 80% -- 90% of our 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 also important that we **recognize and understand** the non-verbal cues from another person who has the potential of escalating.

Body Language

- ▶ When people are angry, they sometimes do not “listen” to the words that are being said.
- ▶ Remember the difference between “**hearing**” and “**listening**.”
- Hearing is the act of perceiving sound and receiving sound waves or vibrations through your ear.
- Listening is the act of hearing a sound and understanding what you hear. Listening Requires concentration so that your brain processes meaning from words and sentences
- ▶ Often, they do “see” and react to what you are “saying” with your body language.
- ▶ You must always be very careful with the message you are sending! Especially your non-verbal message

Body Language

- ▶ Try to look as non-threatening as possible.
 - ▶ Appear calm and self-assured even if you don't feel it.
 - ▶ Maintain limited eye contact (too much eye contact can be a sign of aggression)
 - ▶ Maintain a neutral facial expression.
 - ▶ Place your hands in front of your body in an open and relaxed position.
 - ▶ Don't shrug your shoulders.
 - ▶ Don't point your fingers at the person.
 - ▶ Avoid excessive gesturing, fidgeting, or weight shifting.
 - ▶ Keep your distance when ever possible.
 - ▶ 6 to 12 feet

Personal Space



- ▶ Invasion or encroachment of personal space tends to heighten or escalate anxiety.
- ▶ Note: Personal space is usually 1.5 to 3 feet -- far enough away so you cannot be hit or kicked.
- ▶ Do not touch a hostile person -- they might interpret that as an aggressive action.
- ▶ Keep your hands visible at all times -- you do not want the other person to misinterpret your physical actions.

Tone of your voice



- ▶ A **raised** voice may set a tone of anticipation or uncertainty which may promote excitement or disruption.
- ▶ Speak **slowly** -- This is usually interpreted as soothing.
- ▶ A **controlled** voice is one of calm and firmness which promotes confidence in both parties.
- ▶ **Humor** may unintentionally offend someone and escalate the situation. -- Use humor sparingly and always direct humor toward yourself. (Be very careful when attempting humor in this type of situation!)
- ▶ Always be **respectful** to the other person.
- ▶ Using **“please”** and **“thank-you”** -- indicates respect.

Tips



- ▶ Remain calm -- Listen - really listen!
- ▶ Avoid overreaction.
- ▶ Validate! “I understand why you might be upset.”
(This does not indicate that you agree with them.)
- ▶ Watch for non-verbal clues or threats.
- ▶ Bring in another trained person to assist whenever possible.
 - ▶ Call dispatch for assistance if you can safely; this could also escalate the situation.
- ▶ There is less chance of aggressive behavior if two people are talking to one person.

Call/Ask for Help!

- ▶ If verbal de-escalation is not working
- ▶ Alert someone else as soon as possible. (No help will arrive until someone else knows your situation. Until then, you are all alone.)
- ▶ Two heads are always better than one.
- ▶ There is safety in numbers.
- ▶ It will be beneficial to have a witness, if the situation deteriorates and someone is injured.

Things **NOT** to do!

- ▶ Avoid becoming emotionally involved -- control your emotions at all times.
- ▶ Avoid engaging in power struggles.
- ▶ Avoid becoming rigid in your process.
- ▶ Avoid raising your voice, cussing, making threats, and giving ultimatums or demands.
- ▶ Avoid leaving your seat
- ▶ Avoid aggressive language, including body language.
- ▶ Do not attempt to intimidate a hostile person.

Notification and Follow-up



- ▶ Always report minor situations to a supervisor
- ▶ Minor situations can lead to major situations.
- ▶ Always document every threatening event.

Not the End...

- ▶ Intervention must occur to end the situation, if that has not yet occurred. This may be accomplished by supervisors or police, depending on the circumstances. Make sure your supervisor has all of the facts.
- ▶ Counseling for post-traumatic stress and fear resulting from the incident may be appropriate.
 - ▶ Internal Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
 - ▶ 608.266.6561
 - ▶ Arlyn Gonzalez, EAP Specialist
agonzalez@cityofmadison.com
- ▶ Look at steps to be taken to prevent other similar situations from occurring in the future.
- ▶ Quick reference guide