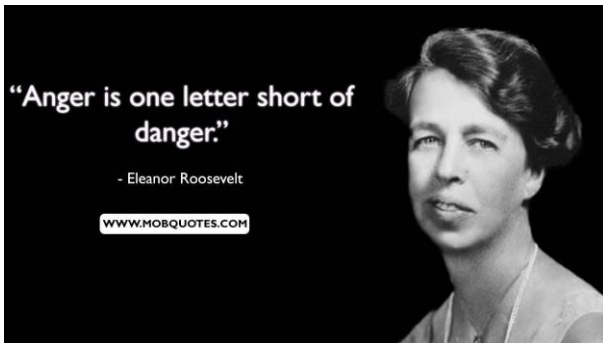




De-Escalating Emotionally- Charged People and Situations

Luke Campbell, MA LAMFT | NE/NW Regional Behavioral Health Coordinator

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Anger De-escalation- Key Concepts

- Reasoning with an angry, upset or highly anxious person is not possible.
- The first and only objective in de-escalation is to reduce the level of agitation so that discussion becomes possible.
- De-escalation techniques are inherently abnormal. They go against our natural 'fight or flight' reflexes.
- To be effective, we must remain calm, centered, and professionally detached.
- De-escalation skills require practice to become useful.

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Common Signs of Agitation

- Raised Voice
- High-pitched voice
- Rapid Speech
- Pacing
- Excessive Sweating
- Excessive Hand-Gestures
- Shaking
- Fidgeting
- Balled Fists
- Erratic Movements
- Aggressive Posture
- Verbally Abusive

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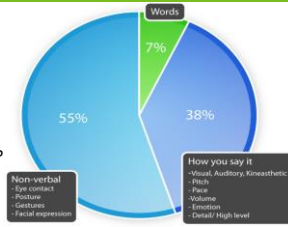
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Aspects of Communication: Can Accelerate or Reduce Aggression

1. Body Language
2. Tone of Voice
3. Word choice

Which has the most influence?



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Non-Verbal Communication



What is her body language saying?

telegraph.co.uk

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Body Language Can Escalate Tension

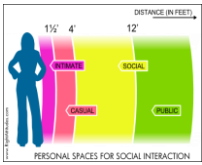
| | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shoulder shrugging 2. Jaw set with clenched teeth 3. Finger pointing 4. A fake smile 5. Excessive gesturing, pacing, fidgeting, or weight shifting 6. Touching, even when culturally appropriate | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Mocking or uncaring B. Accusing or threatening C. Anxiety D. Hostility or threatening E. Not open-minded or listening F. Uncaring or unknowing |
|--|--|

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Pay attention to Personal Space: For Yourself and Others

- **Intimate space** - interacting with friends, significant people / hand-shaking, whispering, etc. -- touch to 1.5 feet
- **Casual space** - interacting with close friends—1.5 feet to 4 feet
- **Social space** - interacting with acquaintances—4 feet to 12 feet
- **Public space** - interacting with anonymous people—further than 12 feet
- Remember that spatial distances vary due to cultural norms



PERSONAL SPACES FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION

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Physically Position Yourself for Safety

- Always face the person- Never turn your back
- Stand at an angle of about 45 degrees, feet hips width apart, one foot in front
 - Greater balance and mobility
 - Exposes less of the body as a target
- Stay far enough away that the other person cannot hit, kick or grab you.
 - Maintain at least two arms-length distance from a hostile person
- Keep exit clear: keep a triangle so agitated person has an escape route that is not through your space
- Casually position yourself behind a barrier such as a sofa, table, or chair
- Team up if possible -there is less chance of aggressive behavior if two people are talking to one person.

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Non-Verbal Action Tips

- Appear calm and self-assured even if you don't feel it.
- Maintain limited eye contact.
- Maintain a neutral facial expression.
- Place your hands in front of your body in an open and relaxed position.
- Be at the same eye level. Encourage the client or individual to be seated, but if he/she needs to stand, stand up also.

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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.



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Avoid Barriers to Verbal De-escalation

- Pre-judging
- Not Listening
- Criticizing
- Name-Calling
- Engaging in Power Struggles
- Ordering
- Threatening
- Minimizing
- Arguing



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Apply Active Listening Skills

- **Attending:** Giving your physical (and mental) attention the other person.
 - No Multi-tasking when you are listening.
- **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.)
- **Avoid:** asking questions that can be answered by a simple one-word answer
 - Use open ended questions
- **Reflecting:** Paraphrasing and reflecting, using the feelings of the other person.
 - Display empathy

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It's Not Just What You Say, But Also How You Say It

- **Tone**
 - **Stem** = confidence, possibly aggression.
 - **Timid/wavering** = fear, lack of self-assurance
 - **Lowered** = uncertainty
 - **Raised** = anger, agitation
- **Volume**
 - **Loud, overpowering** = authority, unwillingness to hear other
 - **Soft, unassuming** = docility, possibly fear
- **Rate of speech**
 - **Slow but rhythmic rate** = soothing
 - **Controlled** - both **calm** and **firm** promote confidence
- **Politeness**
 - Be **respectful**. No name calling.
 - **"Please"** and **"thank-you"** -- **"Mr."** or **"Ms."** indicate respect.

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Calming Tips

- Try your best to remain calm - *Calm is just as contagious as fear or panic!*
 - Helps to reduce the level of anxiety to encourage the possibility for discussion.
 - Reasoning with an enraged person is not possible.
- Listen - really listen!
- Avoid overreaction.
 - Don't take angry words and insults personally -- remember that this is their stress talking.
- Validate! "I can see why you are upset."
 - This does not indicate that you agree with them.

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Maintain Calm Even When the Other Person Does Not

- Do not get loud or yell over a screaming person. Wait until he/she takes a breath, speaking calmly at normal volume.
- Respond simply. Repeat if necessary. Answer informational questions, no matter how rudely asked.
- **"Why do I fill out these <expletive> forms?"**
 - This is a real information-seeking question.
- Do not answer abusive questions.
- **"Why are all Public Health employees such <expletives>?"**
- Help client talk out angry feelings rather than act on them.

Annoyed
 Negative
 Grumpy
 Exasperated
 Rageful

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De-escalate 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's call Mr. Smith ... I know he would be able to help with this..."
 - "Ms. Jones handles this for us, let's ask her what she thinks about this situation. She is always willing to help!"
- Put yourself on his/her side of finding a solution to the problem.

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Things Not To Do in a Threatening Situation

- Avoid becoming emotionally involved -- control your emotions at all times.
- Avoid engaging in power struggles. Don't argue or try to persuade.
- Avoid becoming rigid in your process.
- Avoid telling the other person that you "know how he or she feels."
- Avoid raising your voice, cussing, making threats, and giving ultimatums or demands.
- Avoid aggressive language, including body language.
- Do not attempt to intimidate a hostile person.

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Ask for Help!

- Alert someone else as soon as possible.
 - No help will arrive until someone else knows your situation. Until then, you are all alone.
- There is safety in numbers. Employ a buddy system, if possible.
 - Two heads are always better than one.
 - Someone to watch your back
 - Provide peer support
 - It will be beneficial to have a witness, if the situation deteriorates and someone is physically or emotionally injured.

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Notification and Follow-up

- After your personal safety is secured, there are several other steps that must be taken:
- Intervention must occur to end the situation. This may be accomplished by supervisors, security or police, depending on the circumstances.
 - Make sure leadership is aware of the facts.
 - Always report – even if it is a minor situation.
 - Minor situations can be a “cry for help” and/or “warning signs” of bigger things to come!
 - Minor situations can lead to major situations.
 - Always document every threatening event.
 - Documentation will help all parties when planning for further contact and for evaluating re-occurring events.

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De-Escalate Yourself: In the Moment

- Walk away before you blow up or say something you regret.
- Take a deep breath.
- Focus on your greater purpose in the conversation.
- Use a personal mantra: “it’s not about me; it’s about them.”
- Remember your role and your goals.
- Talk it out



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Understand Your Reaction Following a Threatening Situation

- People vary widely in their reactions to the experience of other people's aggression.
- How a person reacts can depend on many factors such as:
 - Previous Experiences and Exposure to aggression,
 - Upbringing, Norms of behavior, and Culture
 - Gender and Age
 - Physical and Mental Health status
 - Expectations and Individual Stress Reactions

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Coping After the Event

- Tell others about your experience.
 - Expressing feelings and reactions can help you to come to terms with what has happened and to understand that many such reactions are a normal response to hostile behavior.
- Be aware of possible reactions following such an experience:
 - Feelings of anxiety, disturbed sleep, constantly recalling the event, recurring dreams, physical reactions, depression or difficulties in concentration.
- Do not underplay the stress of an event, either to yourself or to others.
 - Do not allow others to treat it as minor. If it causes you stress, then it is important for you to deal with it!
- Utilize stress management and relaxation techniques.
- Talk to a mental health profession, if needed.

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Get Prepared Now to Deal with Job Related Stress!

What can you do to prepare for the inevitable conflicts in this job?

- Eat (don't let yourself get hangry)
- Sleep (it's hard to manage stressful times when too tired)
- Exercise (we all know it, but we don't always want to.....)
- Have other interests so work doesn't become the end all to be all
- Practice Mindfulness (we can help you with that.....)

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Mindfulness

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Guided Imagery
- Using all five senses
- Using apps to calm oneself

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Resources

- [Workplace-Violence-Fact-Sheet.pdf \(jhsph.edu\)](#)
- [Workplace Violence Prevention and De-escalation | MCIT](#)
- [Off-site Employee Safety and Security Considerations | MCIT](#)
- [SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline \(call or text 1-800-985-5990\)](#)
 - [Strength After - Online Peer Support for Healthcare Workers impacted by COVID-19](#) (using a broad definition of healthcare that includes public health staff)
 - Includes access to a crisis counselor
- [Crisis Text Line \(text MN to 741741\)](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Lifeline \(1-800-273-TALK\)](#)

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Thank You!



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