

### **De-escalation 123:**

Whenever possible, this should be our first tool. We cannot prevent crises from happening. We can only take steps to mitigate them.

Effective de-escalation is trauma-informed. Harness your emotion regulation to build trust with the individual you are de-escalating. Be empathetic, non-judgmental and listen. If you take a less authoritative, less controlling, less confrontational approach, you actually will have more control. Do everything that you can to reduce stress levels.

The process of de-escalation can be broken down into three steps:

- 1. Disengage from the power struggle.**
- 2. Establish communication after energy levels are reduced.**
- 3. Offer support and calm directives.**

#### **1. Disengage from the power struggle.**

For the person engaging, know that de-escalating is more about emotions than reasoning. Exchange names to get a personal connection. You don't need to try to relate to them, but often just agreeing with them and letting them vent will help calm an individual down.

Differentiate between aggression and violence. Ask yourself:

- What am I seeing? Is this actually violent?
- Focus on behavior, not attitude.
- This individual is not defined by their behaviors.
- Is this behavior a change from what may be the baseline for this individual?

#### **2. Establish communication after energy levels are reduced.**

Ask questions. If the individual is defensive, remember that they may not be thinking logically. When this happens, provide clear directives as an intervention. The goal here is to mitigate crisis behaviors which pose a risk of harm to the individual or to others. Provide directives only as a last resort. "How" and "what" are good ways to begin open-ended questions. Strive for phrases of 5 words or less

Active listening looks like:

- Listening attentively to them and reflecting back their feelings and what's important to them/what they are seeking, so they feel heard and understood.
- Offering alternatives to meet their needs where possible

#### **3. Offer support and calm directives.**

How to provide directives:

- Avoid telling people to calm down, relax, etc., as well as body language that communicates the same.
- Avoid the phrases like "need" or "have to"
- Avoid any use of "no," or contractions like "can't," "don't," etc..
- Do state simply and calmly why they can't do the thing they want, and what options are available. Offer at least two clear, acceptable choices.
- Don't engage in debate. Share the same message repeatedly if need be.

#### **Final Notes**

Some tips for communication with your team when de-escalating:

Communicate your plans and intentions to your team.

- One person should be responsible for primary engagement with the individual.
- Team members not directly working with an escalated individual should focus on maintaining the rest of the environment.
- If a situation is escalating beyond your ability, ask for help!

Use your body language to de-escalate. This looks like:

- Placing your hands together on your stomach, or visible and down.
- Keeping at least 2-3 feet of distance standing diagonally.
- Not standing directly in front of the individual. At most form a half circle in front of the individual, but don't go behind unless things are escalating, this could be seen as threatening.
- Moving slowly and deliberately.
- Keeping some distance, you don't want to violate their personal bubble, and this will give you more time to react.