

# DE-ESCALATION SKILLS

CMHA-CEI

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**Community**

MENTAL HEALTH

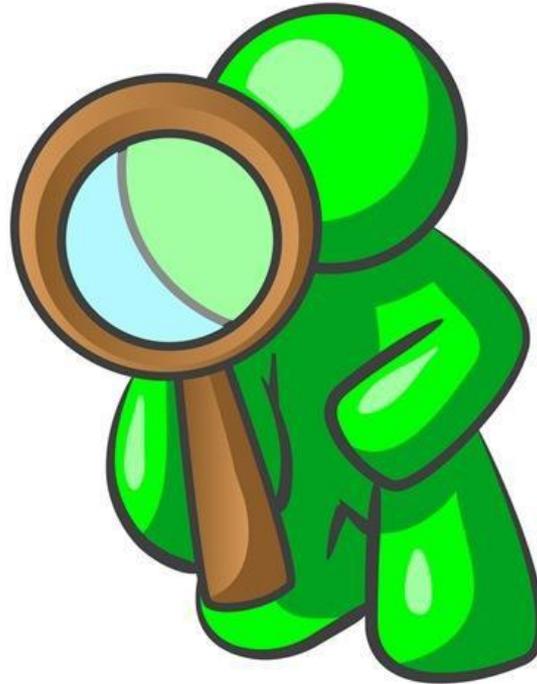
CLINTON • EATON • INGHAM

# GOALS

- The purpose of this material is to provide staff with some basic information on how to reduce the level of conflict in crisis situations.
- Thus increasing the level of safety for everyone involved.

# Objectives

- Content Covered in this Course
  - Escalation
    - Definition
    - Causes
    - Early Warning Signs
    - Imminent Danger Signs
  - Elements of non- verbal communication techniques
  - Verbal communication techniques
  - Strategies of De-Escalation



# The Underlying Cause of Escalation

Before we go there

# Feeling Unsafe



# Possible Causes of Feeling Unsafe

- Physical Illness or Disability
- Mental Illness
- Developmental Disability
- History
- Losses
- Environment
- Lack of Meaning in One's Life

# Indicators of Feeling Unsafe

- Runs away
- Cries a lot
- Expressionless
- Sad appearance
- Hits self or others
- Sleeps poorly
- Refuses to participate
- Self stimulates
- Hoards
- Flinches
- Curses
- Complains

# Four Pillars of Companionship



You are Safe with me



It is Good to be Loved



It is Good to  
be Loving

It feels  
Good when  
you Engage  
with me



# Indicators of Feeling Safe

- Stays with others
- Expresses joy
- Relaxed
- Contented appearance
- Enjoys participating
- Respects self





# What is escalation?

An increase in the level of conflict

# Escalation

- An increase in the number of and size of issues being debated
- An increase in
  - hostility,
  - tension,
  - competitive behavior
  - Bringing personalities into conflict

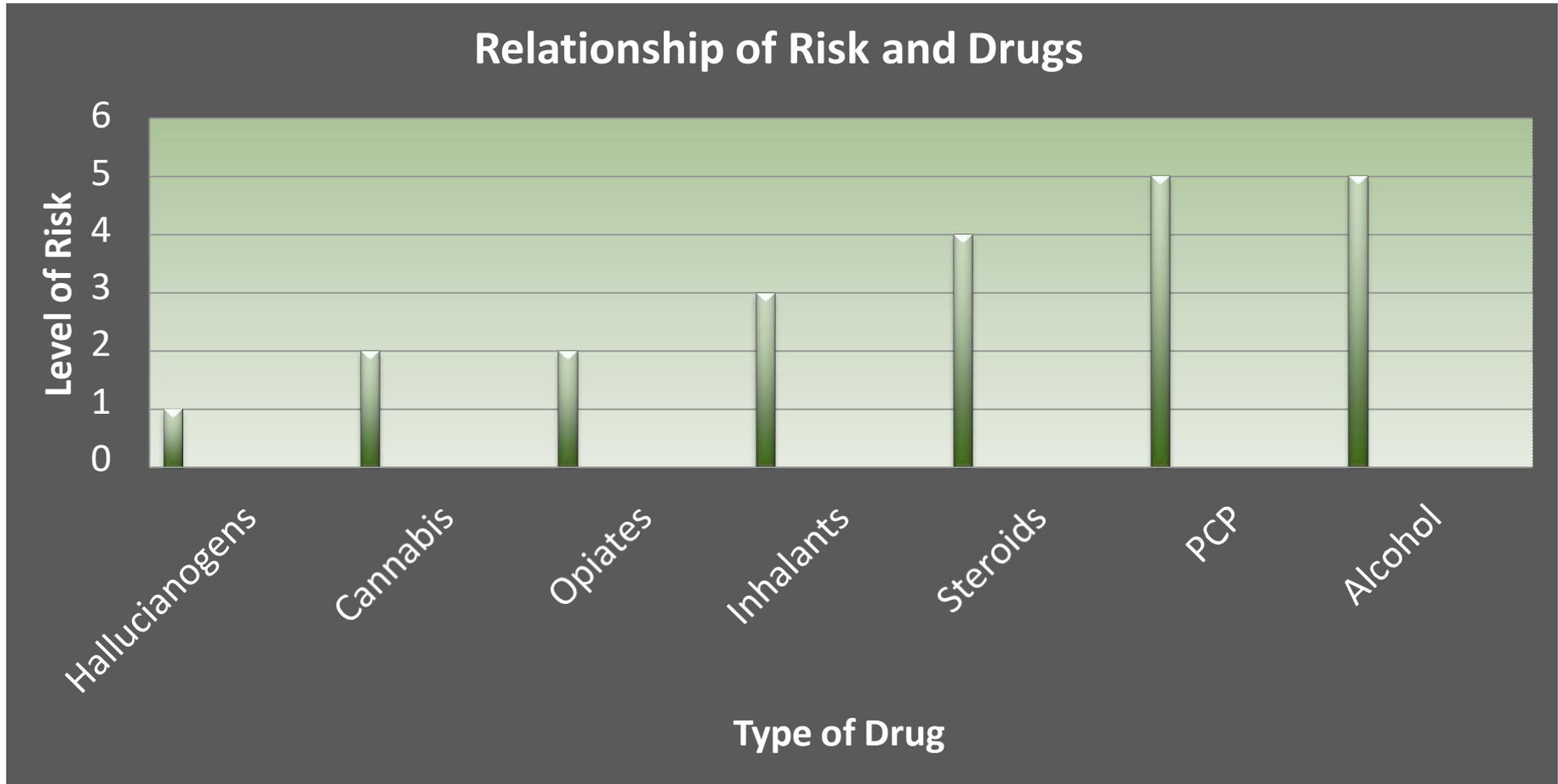
# Causes of Escalation

- The helper engages in a power struggle
- The helper does not attend to person's body language
- The helper overreacts to threats, posturing, or emotional displays
- The helper's own issues become engaged
- The person feels he is not being heard
- The person himself feels threatened
- The helper pushes and becomes provocative

# More Causes of Escalation

- Fear
- Peer pressure
- Weapons
- Pride
- Tone of voice
- Facial expressions
- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Self-esteem
- Bad communication
- Body language
- Not enough personal space
- Anger

# If Drugs are involved



# Person's view

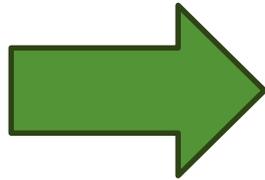
- **People are doing the best they can to get their needs met**
  - **1. Love and Belonging**
  - **2. Power**
  - **3. Freedom**
  - **4. Fun**



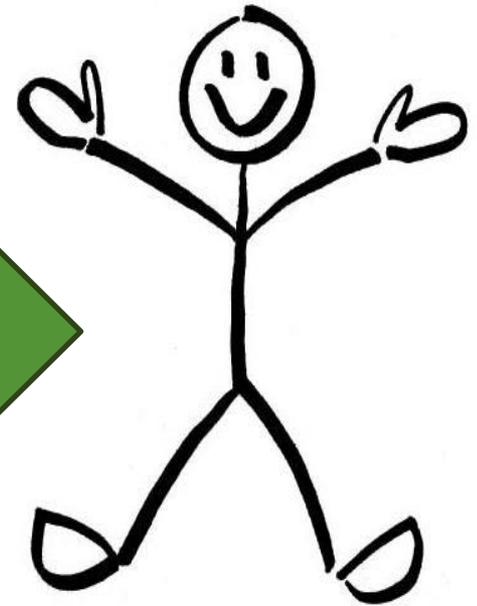
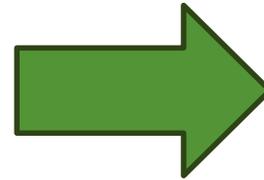
# Escalating Person's View



**ANGRY PERSON**



**YOU**



**WHAT THEY WANT  
WANT  
(UNMET NEED)**

# What does an Escalating Person Look Like?

- Early Warning Signs
  - Change in mood and level of anxiety
  - Pacing, movement (toward you or away)
  - What they are saying, how they are saying it
  - Changes in baseline behaviors
  - Eyes, - watchful, scanning, assessing
  - Concentration problems
  - Disorganized behaviors
  - Gestures - jerky / uncontrolled

# What does an Escalating Person Look Like?

- *IMMINENT DANGER SIGNS*

- **Face**

- pale, flushed, lips tighten over teeth
- Eyebrows drop to cover/protect eyes
- Break stare, then look at intended target
- Chin drops to protect neck

- **General**

- Breathing rapid and deep
- Clenched fists
- Stance goes from square to bladed
- Body movement may stop -or- rocking from heel to toe
- Lowering of entire body to lunge



# DE-ESCALATION

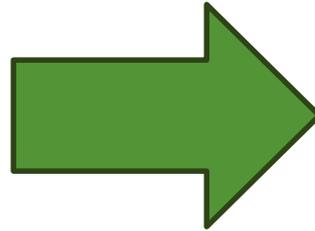
A reduction in the level of conflict

The goal of de-escalation is to build rapid rapport and a sense of connectedness with an agitated person in order to reduce the likelihood of escalation to physical violence. This sense of connectedness is established through the use of specific verbal, psychological, and nonverbal techniques that emphasize controlling one's own emotional response to threat while guiding communication.

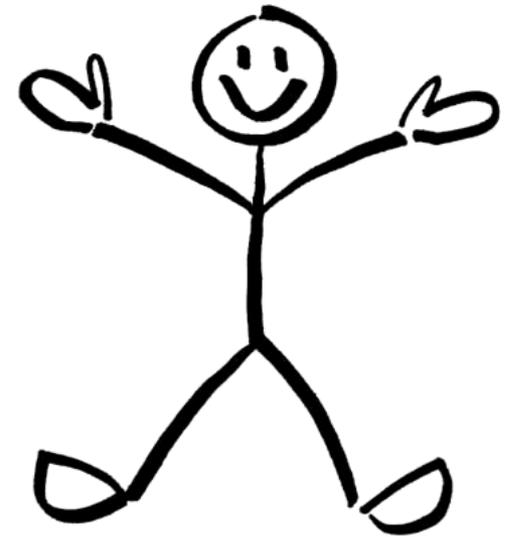
# Collaborative view



**WORKING  
TOGETHER**



**TO ACHEIVE**



**WHAT THEY  
WANT/NEED**

---

**We are not creatures  
of circumstance:  
we are creators of  
circumstance**

**-- Benjamin Disraeli**



# The A's of De-Escalation

- Awareness & Assessment
  - The sum total of information you have accumulated about the nature, circumstances, stages and dynamics of various forms of escalation.
- Action
  - Verbal and Non-verbal behaviors and strategies we use in order to guide the communication.
  - De-Escalation techniques used to resolve the crisis without the use of force.

# Awareness/Assessment



- Helps identify precipitating factors
- Helps with our own ability to control our emotional response
- Helps with identifying interventions to use
- Helps with timing the intervention

# Know yourself

- How we react in return determines whether the situation escalates, de-escalates, or becomes mutually or individually tolerable.



# What are your hot buttons?

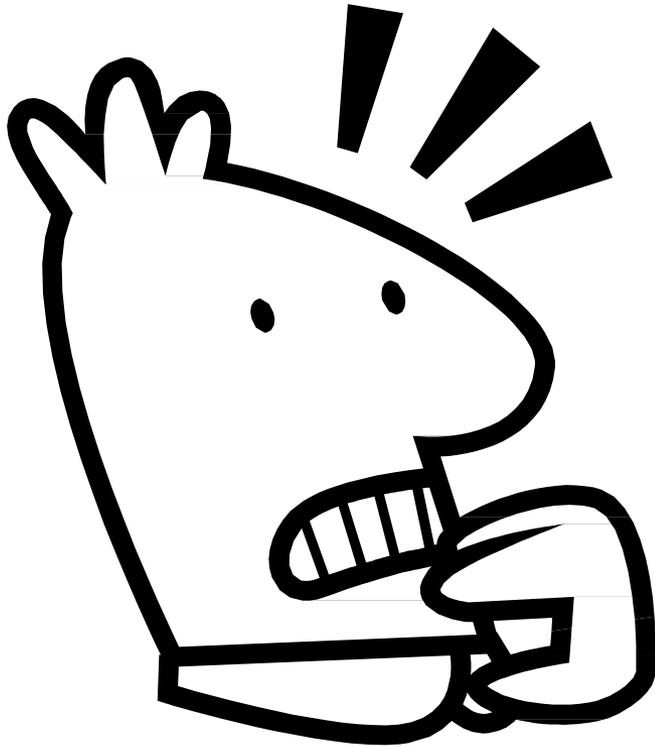
- Need to Be Right
- Need to please others / be accepted
- Need to Be in control (leads to a power struggle)
- Need to Solve the problem
- Burn out
- Entitlement issues
- Personalizing
- Tendency to compete (leads to power struggle)
- Tendency to blame
- Response to “threats” (right violation, telling boss, etc)
- Your reputation
- “Just like”

# Barriers to Positive Reactions

- Cultural differences
- Poor listening skills
- Making assumptions
- Being preoccupied or in a hurry
- Reacting with anger
- Defensiveness
- Blaming
- Our hot buttons
- Language differences



# YOUR PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS



- Increased heart rate
- Adrenaline
- Increased body temperature
- Face flushing
- Shaking
- Increase in volume and intonation of speech
- Nervous laughter
- Sweaty palms
- Clenched fists

# De-Escalate yourself first

- REMEMBER TO BREATHE!
- **Act Calm**
  - Fake it
  - Maintain Eye contact
  - Neutral Facial expression
  - Relaxed Body
  - Keep gestures to a minimum
- **Reassure self**
  - Positive Self Talk
  - Project Success
- **Ask for help**
- **Position yourself for safety**
  - Avoid the Danger Zone - within one arm length
  - Safety Zone – Out side of person's reach
  - Zone of Influence – Within Safety Zone, but still close enough to communicate effectively
  - Use Natural Barriers



# Awareness & Assessment of the Individual

- Do they feel unsafe
- Substance use or abuse, or withdrawal
- History of violence
- Paranoia
- Medication Non-Compliance
- Physical Illness/pain
- Difficulties with Communication





- History of abuse
- Feeling discriminated against
- Money problems
- No cigarettes
- Low self-esteem
- Social Stressors
- Plans of Service
- Cultural Background

# Risk factors for violence

- Past history of violence
- Suicidal tendencies
- Patterns
- Individual's Triggers
  - Divorce
  - Loss of employment
  - Major life changes



# Awareness & Assessment of the Environment

- Audience
- Crowded / No personal space
- Noisy
- Weather
- Changes from the norm
- Colors
- Behavior of others
- Holidays
- Potential Weapons
- Avenues of Escape
- Use of natural barriers



# Action!

## Non-Verbal Skills

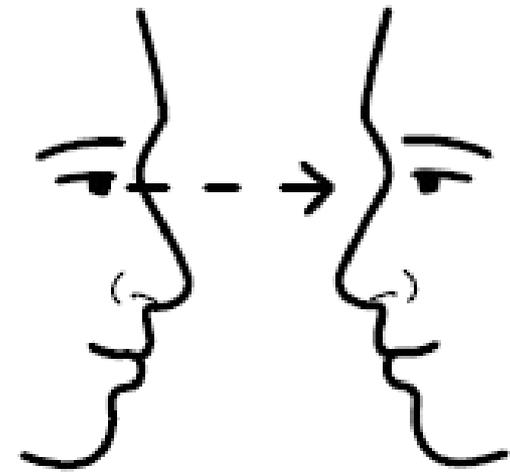
- Appear calm, centered, and self-assured even if you don't feel it. Your anxiety can make the client feel anxious and unsafe which can escalate aggression.
- Maintain limited eye contact. Loss of eye contact may be interpreted as an expression of fear, lack of interest or regard, or rejection. Excessive eye contact may be interpreted as a threat or challenge.

# Non-Verbal Skills

- Maintain a neutral facial expression. A calm, attentive expression reduces hostility.
- Keep a relaxed and alert posture. Stand up straight with feet about shoulder width apart and weight evenly balanced. Avoid aggressive stances.
- Minimize body movements such as excessive gesturing, pacing, fidgeting, or weight shifting. These are all indications of anxiety and will tend to increase agitation.

# Non-Verbal Skills

- Always be at the same eye level. Encourage the client to be seated, but if he/she needs to stand, stand up also.
- Do not point or shake your finger.





- Use extreme caution with touch. Even if some touching is generally culturally appropriate and usual in your setting. Cognitive disorders in agitated people allow for easy misinterpretation of physical contact as hostile and threatening.



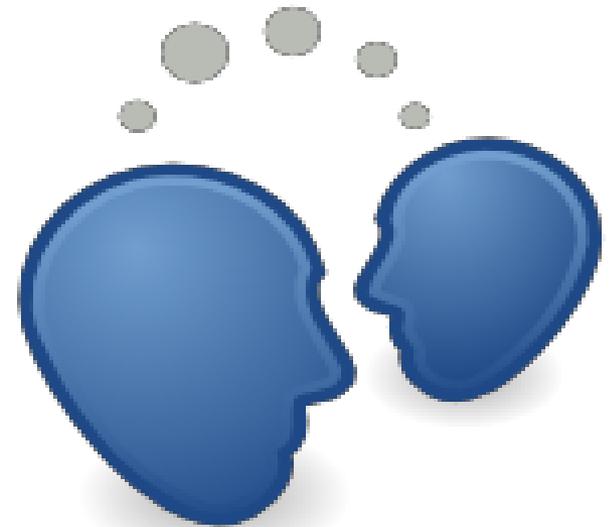
**BEFORE MOVING TO VERBAL  
SKILLS, ALLOW THE PERSON  
TO VENT!**

# 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 the person's feelings
  - "I understand why..."
  - (Not in agreement with...)
- Try to establish rapport with the other person.



# 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.



# Communication Barriers:

- The things that keep the meaning of what is being said from being heard.
  - Pre-judging
  - Not Listening
  - Criticizing
  - Name-Calling
  - Engaging in Power Struggles
  - Ordering
  - Threatening
  - Minimizing
  - Arguing



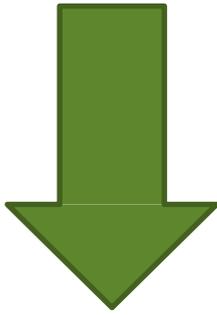
# Phrases for miscommunication

- **Ordering**– you must...you have to...
- **Relationship dependent** (Management directives)
- **Threatening**– if you don't, then ...
- **Preaching**– you should...
- **Lecturing**–here's why you are wrong
- **Judging**–you're Lazy... you'll never change
- **Excusing**–it's not so bad ...
- **Labeling**–you're being unrealistic

# 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’s call Mr. Smith ... I know he would be able to help with this...”
  - “Ms. Jones handles this for our district, 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.

- Decrease Demands



- Increase Praise

# Communicate Clearly

- Explain your intentions and convey your expectations clearly
- You may need to repeat
- Use the person's name
- Make requests simple and specific
- Be an active and reflective listener

**Tip:**  
**It's always better to REQUEST and SUGGEST than COMMAND and DEMAND**



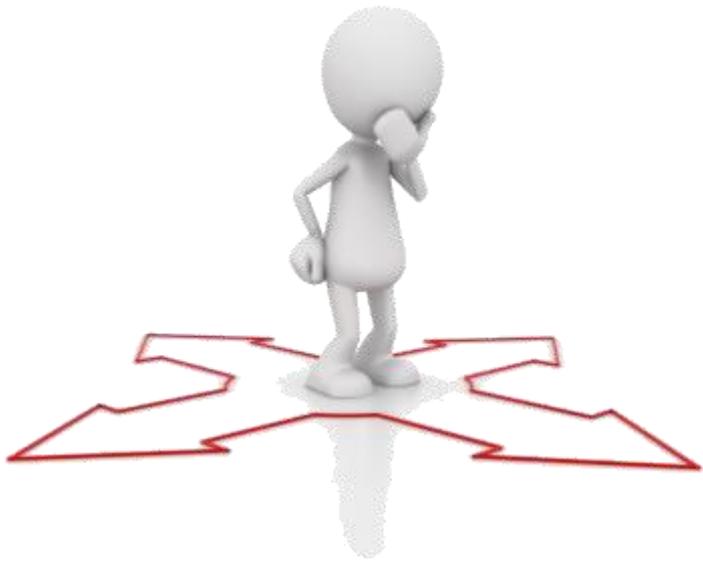


Remember that there is no content  
except trying to calmly bring the level of  
arousal down to a safer place.

# De-Escalation Techniques

- **Align yourself with the person**
  - Find a point of agreement (getting to yes)
  - Cast yourself as an ally
  - Distance yourself from authority
  - Acknowledge a grain of truth





- **Redirect attention**

- a learned skill that assists someone to shift the focus or direction of energy for example, change topic of conversation to assist the speaker to get out of a rut-when the topic of conversation is no longer productive.

*great!*

*I really liked*

*brilliant!*

## • **Feedback**

- Identifying or pointing out a person's behavior without demanding a change
- List consequences of inappropriate behavior without threats or anger.

*not enough...*

*i felt that...*

*thank you for...*

*could you...*





Model:

Behavior = Effect = Alternative

Feedback may help prevent someone who is beginning to escalate from further escalation or prevent future escalations. **However, it is not useful if someone is already highly agitated**

- **Changing the immediate environment**
  - Useful if someone present is contributing to the escalation by removing the audience
  - Moving to somewhere safe where there is back-up



- **Ask them to sit down**

- Lowers general arousal
- Decreases aggression

- **Use Humor-carefully**

- Powerful tension reliever
- Decreases stress
- Careful not to be insensitive-you have to know the person

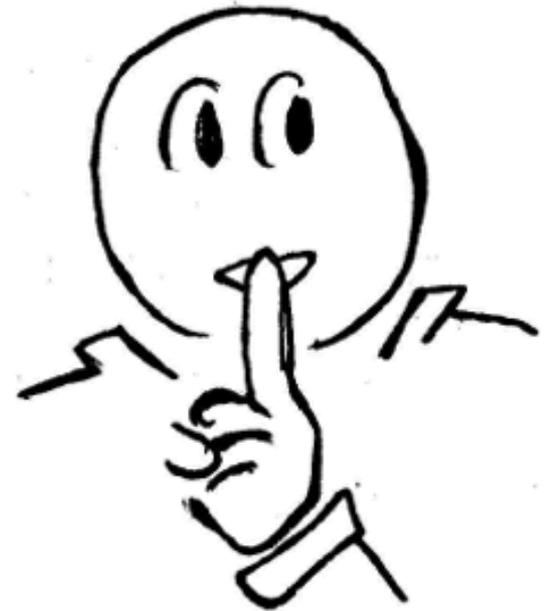




- Do not be defensive even if comments or insults are directed at you. They are not about you. Do not defend yourself or anyone else from insults, curses, or misconceptions about their roles or behaviors.
- Do not try to argue or convince.

- Use a modulated, low monotonous tone of voice (our normal tendency is to have a high-pitched, tight voice when scared).

Do not get loud or try to yell over a screaming person. Wait until he/she takes a breath, then talk. Speak calmly at an average volume.



- 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 should be respected. We automatically treat them and all clients with dignity and respect.

- Respond selectively. Answer only informational questions no matter how rudely asked, (e.g. “Why do I fill out these g-d forms”?) This is a real information-seeking question.
- Do not answer abusive questions (e.g. “Why are all counselors’ assholes”?). This sort of question should get no response whatsoever.



- Be honest. Lying to a person to calm them down may lead to future escalation if they become aware of the dishonesty. However, do not volunteer information which may further upset the person.

- Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, but respectful tone. Give choices, where possible, in which both alternatives are safe ones (e.g. “Would you like to continue our meeting calmly or would you prefer to stop now and come back tomorrow when things can be more relaxed.”).
- Represent external controls as institutional rather than personal.

- Empathize with feelings but not with the behavior (e.g. “I understand that you have every right to feel angry, but it is not okay for you to threaten me or my staff.”).





- Trust your instincts. If you assess or feel that de-escalation is not working, **STOP!** Get help.
- It's important to remember your responsibility to the safety of others in the area, and also to keep yourself safe. **RETREAT!**



## Summary of Key Points

# Four Pillars of Companionship

- Focus on building a solid relationship with each person you work with and strengthening the Four Pillars of Companionship.
- When the four pillars of companionship are present in person's life, opportunities for conflict are greatly reduced and escalation is no longer necessary to get their needs met.



Safe



Loved



Loving



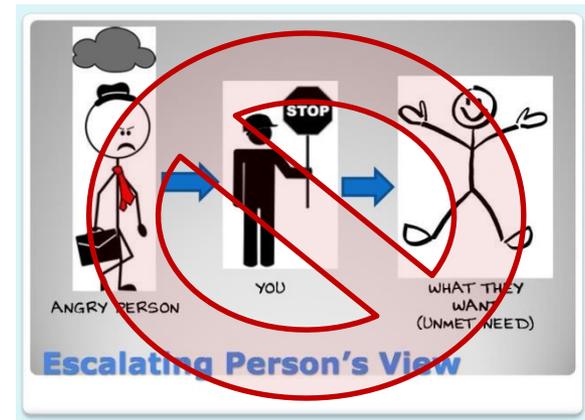
Engaged

# How do they see you?

- People are doing the best they can to get their needs met. They need to view you as someone who will help them move toward that goal.



THIS!



NOT THIS

*We are not creatures of circumstance:  
we are creators of circumstance  
-- Benjamin Disraeli*

# HOW DO YOU SEE YOU?

- DE-ESCALATE YOURSELF FIRST!
  - Breathe
  - Act Calm
  - Relax muscles
  - Reassure yourself
  - Positive self talk
  - Focus on Success
  - Ask for help
  - Stay in safety zone
  - Use natural barriers



# Assessment *before* action

- Listen!
  - Physically attend to the person
  - Listen to what they really saying
  - Restate / clarify / reflect
  - Validate feelings



# Strategies

- Align with the person
- Redirect Attention
- Communicate Clearly
- Trust your instincts
- Change the environment
- Be honest & Be respectful





For completing CEI's  
**De-Escalation**  
training requirement.

You must complete the final exam  
to receive credit .