



CPI'S TOP 10

DE-ESCALATION TIPS



CAN THESE TIPS HELP ME?

Whether you work in education, healthcare, human services, business, or any field, you might deal with angry, hostile, or noncompliant behavior every day. Your response to defensive behavior is often the key to avoiding a physical confrontation with someone who has lost control of their behavior.

These Top 10 De-Escalation Tips will help you respond to difficult behavior in the safest, most effective way possible.



TIP 1

BE EMPATHIC AND NONJUDGMENTAL.

When someone says or does something you perceive as weird or irrational, *try not to judge or discount their feelings*. Whether or not you think those feelings are justified, *they're real to the other person*. Pay attention to them.

Keep in mind that whatever the person is going through, it may be the most important thing in their life at the moment.

TIP 2

RESPECT PERSONAL SPACE.

If possible, *stand 1.5 to three feet away from a person who's escalating*. Allowing personal space tends to *decrease a person's anxiety* and can help you *prevent acting-out behavior*.

If you must enter someone's personal space to provide care, explain your actions so the person feels less confused and frightened.





TIP 3

USE NONTHREATENING NONVERBALS.

The more a person loses control, *the less they hear your words*—and the more they react to your nonverbal communication. Be mindful of your *gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice*.

Keeping your tone and body language neutral will go a long way toward defusing a situation.

TIP 4

AVOID OVERREACTING.

Remain *calm, rational, and professional*. While you can't control the person's behavior, *how you respond to their behavior* will have a direct effect on whether the situation escalates or defuses.

Positive thoughts like “I can handle this” and “I know what to do” will help you maintain your own rationality and calm the person down.

TIP 5

FOCUS ON FEELINGS.

Facts are important, but *how a person feels is the heart of the matter*. Yet some people have trouble identifying how they feel about what's happening to them.

Watch and listen carefully for the person's real message.

Try saying something like "That must be scary." Supportive words like these will let the person know that you understand what's happening—and you may get a positive response.

TIP 6

IGNORE CHALLENGING QUESTIONS.

Answering challenging questions often results in a power struggle. When a person challenges your authority, *redirect their attention to the issue at hand*.

Ignore the challenge, but not the person. Bring their focus back to how you can work together to solve the problem.





TIP 7

SET LIMITS.

If a person's behavior is belligerent, defensive, or disruptive, give them *clear, simple, and enforceable limits*. Offer concise and respectful choices and consequences.

A person who's upset may not be able to focus on everything you say. Be clear, speak simply, and offer the positive choice first.

TIP 8

CHOOSE WISELY WHAT YOU INSIST UPON.

It's important to be thoughtful in deciding *which rules are negotiable and which are not*. For example, if a person doesn't want to shower in the morning, can you *allow them to choose* the time of day that feels best for them?

If you can offer a person options and flexibility, you may be able to avoid unnecessary altercations.



TIP 9

ALLOW SILENCE FOR REFLECTION.

We've all experienced awkward silences. While it may seem counterintuitive to let moments of silence occur, sometimes it's the best choice. It can *give a person a chance to reflect on what's happening*, and how he or she needs to proceed.

Believe it or not, silence can be a powerful communication tool.

TIP 10

ALLOW TIME FOR DECISIONS.

When a person is upset, they may not be able to think clearly. Give them a few moments to *think through what you've said*.

A person's stress rises when they feel rushed. Allowing time brings calm.