

HOW TO DE-ESCALATE

De-escalation may have different goals: ensuring physical safety of everyone, reducing the likelihood of violence, keeping a relaxed environment, or reducing violence such that a fight can be worked out. Every situation is unique: there is no formula for reacting to a hostile situation. When entering an action, it is best to think through possible difficult situations and be prepared ahead of time.

Below are some behaviors that are successful in hostile situations to de-escalate the situation.

1. REMAIN CALM

Avoid panicking and hectic reactions. Try not to provoke reflex reactions. Find out about your own means to develop inner strength and calmness and to maintain it in threatening situations. When faced with a violent situation take your time to become conscious of yourself. Breathe.

2. BECOME ACTIVE

Do not become paralyzed by fear. It is better to do something small to change the situation than contemplate big actions that you might not be able to do. Very often there are technical possibilities for de-escalation or to prevent more violence (e.g., emergency brakes in trains).

3. TRY TO ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION WITH THE AGGRESSOR

If someone is being aggressive, keep an open body language and communication with them. Look for common ground that moves away from the current situation (e.g. introduce yourself).

4. LOOK FOR HELP: ENLIST ALLIES

You are likely not alone. But do not appeal to a large crowd of people for help. Make eye contact with one person and ask them for help. Others will feel encouraged by your direct demand for help. Trust your gut in selecting someone to individually ask. And, if that person does not work, try the next person until you find an ally.

5. WALK AWAY

If after trying different ways, you cannot find a successful way to de-escalate the situation, it is perfectly okay to walk away. It is better that you are safe and nobody is hurt, then someone does something they later will regret.

*Originally written by Hagen Berndt (Kurve-Wustrow) as an adaptation of Milan's list of rules.
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