



## Safe Campus Preventing Violence Escalation

### **Observations and Action Steps**

- Develop unit procedure
- Be aware of the actions of the individual
- Stand up in cases where personal safety is at risk
- Through your body language communicate the message that you are calm and confident
- Be aware of escalation warning signs
- Maintain eye contact with the individual and those around you
- Listen and assess the situation
- Try to be of assistance
- Signal to a coworker
- Coworker move to the area to show support
- Be prepared to disengage and leave the area, if necessary
- Support staff be prepared to contact 911, if necessary.

### Assessing Anger

- Clenched fists, quick choppy gestures, crossed arms , loud or yelling, muttering, incoherent, paranoid
- Blaming, accusations, profanities, not listening, impatient, irrational, threatening

### Communicating & Defusing

- remain calm
- stand if they are standing
- stand at an angle
- maintain space and barriers, if possible, between you
- relaxed posture
- slow movements
- listen attentively
- don't interrupt
- maintain eye contact
- nod when appropriate
- be respectful
- calm voice
- determine source of problem
- do not challenge
- do not accuse
- do not threaten
- seek support

# Managing and Diffusing Conflict

This 10 point summary is designed to assist in managing conflict under conditions of escalated anxiety and, for positive outcomes, to maintain a safe, respectful customer service environment.

**1. Remain Calm**

Remaining calm in situations of high emotion is difficult and requires some knowledge of human reactions as well as training and experience; however a calm approach is essential for the individual that is managing stress in an escalated environment.

**2. Timing / Location & Privacy**

As a supervisor, manager, counsellor or customer service representative you may not be able to control the time or location of emotional outbursts however, you will need to regain control of the environment if you are to be effective in the management and resolution of problems leading to this situation.

**3. Do Not Become Argumentative**

Do not escalate the situation. For the inexperienced the first reaction to conflict is to go on the offensive; however this will only increase stress and anxiety. A mature consistent approach to understanding the problem is required. You need to know how the other person feels and, under conditions of escalated anxiety, their approach may not be entirely rational. At this point it is of no use to state what you think about the situation as they won't be in a mind frame to listen. They need a period of time to vent and it is after this point that you may be able to have a more constructive discussion.

**4. Listen Actively**

Rather than jump into the situation with your opinion or attempt to overpower the aggressor of the conflict, it is much better to listen to what is being said. Try to listen actively—show interest—and avoid developing your response while the issue is being aired. The person in conflict wants to get their story to you. Don't interrupt. Let them talk. Eventually they will have said most of what is intended and appreciate that you are taking the time to listen. This, in itself, will help to diffuse the situation and you will learn from their words the essence of their concerns.

**5. Seek Clarification**

To get control of the situation you need to not only understand the issues but show empathy to the aggressor. An example of what you might say is, "What you just said is not clear to me.....could you please rephrase that?" Getting the person to repeat their comments allows you to become more familiar with the issue and begins to put you in control of the situation.

**6. Paraphrase**

By showing interest in understanding the issue—the aggression will begin to diffuse. You may wish to paraphrase the circumstances being explained by saying, "If I understand correctly, it sounds like you mean....."

**7. Summarize**

By the time you get to his point the aggressor should understand that you care about their feelings in this case and have some understanding of the issue being raised. You could say, "What has been discussed up to this point is....." The situation can be turned around from what started as argumentative into what now could be considered a discussion, problem solving, and searching for resolution.

**8. Non Threatening Body Language**

Not only should you avoid any physical contact with the aggressor but you must emanate positive body language. If the individual in conflict has the impression, from your body language, that you are indifferent to the situation, the aggressor will only become more aggravated. Your words, actions and body language must correspond and send a positive and consistent message.

**9. Set An Appointment**

If the timing, location or environment is wrong for successful conflict management some of your considerations should include: listen attentively and show interest but at your first reasonable opportunity indicate the situation needs your undivided attention and you will need to set some time aside so you are able to more clearly understand the matter. Set an appointment for a time that is convenient for both of you, at a more suitable location and environment.

**10. Facilitator**

If the conflict is of a personal nature, or there is a safety concern, any involvement that could make matters worse should be avoided. Very little is accomplished during high levels of agitation where emotion, not logic, prevails. A support person nearby, over hearing the emotion of escalated comments could step into the area nearby to provide a neutralizing balance to discussion without becoming directly involved. Employees in a workplace setting could be reminded of personal expectations of respect and to not become involved in disruptive behaviour. Some "time out" by distancing in time and space often helps as a cooling down period. As an alternative to personal involvement it may be beneficial to get someone else, possibly a person in authority, to facilitate the situation on their behalf; someone such as a supervisor, human resources professional, human rights coordinator or union representative, depending on the situation.