



NAEMT Mental Health Resilience Officer Course

De-escalation Techniques

De-escalation techniques are used to reduce the possibility of violence within people who are experiencing severe anger or agitation. As an MHRO, you might engage with a colleague who is experiencing severe anger or agitation as a result of a difficult call, a work-related incident, or a family incident. You can apply several important communication techniques to help de-escalate a colleague.

- Use a calm and nonaggressive tone of voice.
- Identify yourself, and let the person know you are there to help.
- Speak slowly.
- Use short, direct, and clear sentences.
- Turn down your radio to avoid agitating the person.
- Look at the person but avoid frequent direct eye contact.
- Avoid touching the person without their permission.
- Tell the person you want to partner with them to help, and they can make decisions with you. In cases where the person does not have the capacity to make decisions, expressing that you want to partner with them to help is still appropriate. Avoid language that makes anyone feel forced or coerced.
- Avoid abrupt physical movements.
- Do not argue with or challenge the person.
- Avoid telling someone to "calm down" or threatening them if their behavior does not stop. The person may feel that they cannot control their behavior, and this tactic may escalate agitation and promote further risk.
- Avoid laughing or using facial expressions that may indicate sarcasm, such as eye rolling or smirking.
- Be honest. If a someone asks a question, answer as directly as possible.
- Avoid judgmental and blaming words and statements such as, *"If you didn't drink this would not happen,"* or *"You are crazy right now."*
- Give people physical space if they are agitated. Avoid physical confrontation until you are able to de-escalate.
- Consider how you would want to be communicated with if this were you having the mental health emergency.
- Always be a compassionate listener.



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The following communication techniques are important to practice:

- Paraphrase - Using fewer words to repeat back what you have heard the person say.
- Summarize - Sum up what the person has said to you after listening for a period of time.
- Reflective listening - Restate what you hear and see, with a focus on how the person is feeling.
- Open-ended questions - Clarify what the person is thinking or feeling by asking questions that require more than a yes-or-no answer.
- I statements - Start your sentences with "I" to take ownership of what you have said and avoid putting the person on the defensive. Example, *"I heard you say that you are scared of going to the addiction treatment center. I can understand why you would feel scared. I am here to help you feel less scared and I am going to be with you the entire way there."*