DE-ESCALATION SERIES FOR CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OWNERS AND OPERATORS

ASSESS

How To Navigate the Risk When Someone is Escalating

The assessment process **determines whether an emergency response is needed, if de-escalation is possible, or if a more formal assessment is needed.**

Begin with Awareness to Enable Assessment

- Awareness of precipitating events or stressors
- Awareness of your response and ability to manage your emotions
- Awareness of the situation to determine if you should engage, whether a simple "hello" will deter a threat or a more purposeful action to de-escalate the situation is required, or immediate notification to law enforcement or security is necessary

When observing activity or behaviors that raise reasonable suspicions or concerns, individuals should assess the situation to protect personal safety and the safety of those around them.

WHAT DOES AN ESCALATING PERSON LOOK LIKE?

Early Warning Signs

- Changes in a co-worker's baseline behavior
- Pacing, ruminating, agitated gestures, or uncontrolled and disorganized behaviors
- Staring through you
- Blocking other's movement
- Finger pointing
- Change in mood
- Distractions from work or an inability to focus
- Inappropriate responses to environmental stressors

Signs of Imminent Danger

- Intensity in appearance with heightened senses
- Flushed, tightened jaw, clenched fists, shaking, flaring nostrils
- Rapid breathing, raised voice, nervous laughter
- Poised to strike or lunge
- Standing in a position to attack or defend
- Personal space violation
- An unauthorized person trying to enter a restricted area
- Someone impersonating an authorized person
- Someone trying to avoid security systems or personnel
- Someone abandoning an object or package and then leaving the area

Barriers to Assessment and to De-Escalation

- Lack of empathy
- Reacting with defensiveness or anger
- Lack of respect for or shaming others
- Blaming, criticizing, preaching, labeling, or lecturing
- Lack of commitment to obligations, being preoccupied, or in a hurry
- Ordering or engaging in a power struggle
- Language or cultural differences

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ASSESS YOURSELF

- Start by trusting your instincts; if the situation is beyond your abilities to engage, seek help
- De-escalate yourself first – remain calm or act calm if you aren't
- Control your breathing
- Relax your body and avoid gestures or postures that could be interpreted as aggressive or defensive
- Reassure yourself with positive self-talk – "You can do this" or "I can handle this"
- Project confidence and remain centered and self-assured

ASSESS THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE ENVIRONMENT

*For situations where the individual is unknown, assess if the individual presents a potential threat — the **Power of Hello** offers a means to navigate the risk.*

- Does the person appear to be legitimately patronizing the business or service?
- Is the person's clothing consistent with the weather or the situation?
- Is the person avoiding security?
- Is the person asking questions about business functions or employee information? (e.g., "Who is closing?" or "How many people work here?" etc.)
- Is the person's behavior making you feel threatened?
- How is the person reacting to you or others when approached?

Assess if the environment is conducive to de-escalation:

- Is someone present who is agitating the person?
- Is there someone or something that is aggravating the situation?
- Is it crowded or lacking personal space?
- Are there environmental barriers to de-escalation (i.e., noise, weather, other distractions)?

FORMAL THREAT ASSESSMENTS

In some circumstances, a more formal threat assessment process is necessary.

Threat assessment requires the organization to gather and analyze information about an employee or team member who may cause harm.

- A primary purpose is to inform decision-making on how to manage a person of concern, with the goal to prevent an incident.
- A thorough assessment by the organization's multi-disciplinary threat management team may include an interview with the person of concern and any witnesses - co-workers, associates, friends, family, or others - who can offer firsthand knowledge of the person's behaviors, history, or stressors.

Threat assessment for both emergency and non-urgent situations asks key questions:

- Is there evidence to suggest the person of concern poses a threat?
- What type of threat does the person of concern pose?
- Is the person of concern moving toward committing a malicious act?

HELPFUL LINKS

Power of Hello:
cisa.gov/employee-vigilance-power-hello

CISA Insider Threat Mitigation Guide:
cisa.gov/publication/insider-threat-mitigation-resources

cisa.gov Central@cisa.gov

These assessment techniques are options for consideration. This is not intended to mandate policy or direct any action.

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DE-ESCALATION

How You Can Help Defuse Potentially Violent Situations

De-Escalation

> *"The use of communication or other techniques during an encounter to stabilize, slow, or reduce the intensity of a potentially violent situation without using physical force, or with a reduction in force."*
>
> – Department of Homeland Security Policy Statement 044-05

De-Escalation is a method to prevent potential violence.
Individuals are encouraged to use purposeful actions, verbal communications, and body language to calm a potentially dangerous situation.

Your safety and the safety of others is the highest priority.
Maintain a safe distance and avoid being alone with an individual who is combative or potentially violent. If there is a risk of imminent violence, remove yourself from the situation and seek safety.

Know your limits.
Keep in mind that some individuals may be more adept in applying these techniques. Know your own vulnerabilities and tendencies and recognize that sometimes the best intervention is knowing when to seek additional help.

Obtain Help.
If you feel the individual or situation is escalating and violence may occur, call for help from your security staff or local law enforcement and move yourself to a safe location.

TIPS

- Be aware of your non-verbal communications. Ensure your tone, facial expressions, body language, and gestures relay calm and empathy.
- Remain respectful and courteous. Address the individual with civility and use phrases such as "please" and "thank you."

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PURPOSEFUL ACTIONS

Remain Calm: A purposeful demonstration of calmness and composure can enable de-escalation.

Change the Setting: If possible, remove people from the area. This could involve parties to the conflict and onlookers.

Respect Personal Space: Maintain a safe distance and avoid touching the other person.

Listen: Give your full attention, nod, ask questions, and avoid changing the subject or interrupting.

Empathize: Present genuine concern and a willingness to understand without judging.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Tone + Volume + Rate of speech + Inflection of voice = Verbal De-Escalation

Tone: Speak calmly to demonstrate empathy.

Volume: Monitor your volume and avoid raising your voice.

Rate of Speech: Slower can be more soothing.

Inflection: Be aware of emphasizing words or syllables as that can negatively affect the situation.

Instead Of:	Say...
"Calm down."	*"I can see that you are upset..."*
"I can't help you."	*"I want to help, what can I do?"*
"I know how you feel."	*"I understand that you feel..."*
"Come with me."	*"May I speak with you?"*

BODY LANGUAGE

Instead Of:	Try...
Standing rigidly directly in front of the person	Keeping a relaxed and alert stance off to the side of the person
Pointing your finger	Keeping your hands down, open, and visible at all times
Excessive gesturing or pacing	Using slow, deliberate movements
Faking a smile	Maintaining a neutral and attentive facial expression

HELPFUL LINKS

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RECOGNIZE

How You Can Notice the Warning Signs of Violence

Co-workers, friends, and family are often best positioned to **recognize the warning signs** in someone who may be on a path to violence.

People who resort to violence are often driven by a combination of predispositions, personal or professional stressors, and assorted resentments.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- A person's behaviors and communications are often disclosed through nonverbal means. Pay attention to what people are saying through facial expressions, emotions, and body language.
- Individuals are unique and will likely not discuss intentions or needs in a uniform manner. Behaviors that some people find troubling or threatening may very well be someone's way of asking for help.
- People have bad days. They can become sad, argumentative, or angry; this does not mean there is intent to cause harm.
- Confirmation of a threat requires a solid understanding of context and a holistic assessment of the person's circumstances and stressors.
- When you report, you create an opportunity to prevent potentially violent situations.

When you notice the warning signs, you can help prevent violence in two primary ways. One applies to urgent situations when violence may be occurring or is imminent. The other enables you to help people by reporting your observations.

Clearly communicate the threat while seeking safety

If you recognize that a hostile act is occurring or is imminent, remove yourself from the situation and seek safety while communicating the threat and suggested response in a loud, clear voice (e.g., "Gun!" "Run!" "Bomb!" "Get Out!").

Inform others

If you recognize a warning sign and there is no imminent threat, inform others of what you have seen or know. Tell a supervisor, manager, security guard, or other employee or team member.

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STRESSORS

Situations that cause strain or tension.

These can be positive or negative developments in a person's personal or professional life.

Examples include:

- Financial strain
- Illness or death among family or friends
- Addiction (drugs, alcohol, gambling, etc.)
- Break-up or divorce
- Employment actions (promotion, demotion, termination, etc.)
- Conflict with peers, co-workers, or managers
- Legal problems
- Transfer or relocation

CHANGES

Variation in baseline behavior.

Baseline behavior is an individual's normal mood and typical responses to everyday activities. Those most familiar with an individual will be able to notice a change in baseline behaviors.

Examples include:

- A person who is usually moody or socially isolated becoming excessively outgoing
- An outgoing person suddenly becoming socially isolated
- A normally hard worker that no longer cares about work performance
- Someone who develops beliefs or ideas that promote violence

BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

Observable behaviors by peers.

Organizational members typically have some degree of familiarity with each other and are frequently able to spot changes in a peer's behavior.

Examples include:

- Disgruntlement toward peers
- Unwillingness to comply with established rules or policies
- Stalking, harassing, or bullying
- Making inappropriate statements or jokes
- Threats of violence, either verbally or written
- Fascination with previous incidents of workplace violence
- New or increased interest in weapons
- Asking about security outside of assigned roles and responsibilities

Observable physical behaviors.

It is difficult to determine a stranger's intent due to lack of familiarity. Individuals will have to rely on physical indicators of aggression to determine if a stranger is potentially hostile.

Examples include:

- Argumentative or uncooperative behaviors
- Clenched jaw and/or balled fists
- Pacing or restlessness
- Trembling or shaking
- Violating others' personal space
- Making specific threats to inflict harm to themselves or others
- Displaying or making threats to use a weapon

HELPFUL LINKS

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REPORT

How To Engage Your Organization and Community

Reporting is critical to the prevention of workplace and community violence. Threats that are not known cannot be managed.

Reporting behaviors that raise concerns or an incident that is escalating plays an essential role in protecting yourself and others from a potentially violent situation by:

Alerting first responders to provide appropriate intervention in cases of an imminent or credible threat

Engaging your organization to enable assessment and management of a potential evolving threat

When making a report, the goals are to prevent violence and to get help for the individual of concern. Reporting is not intended to be punitive, to get someone in trouble, to send someone to jail, to cost someone a job, or to damage someone's reputation. Engagement following a report can discourage or stop someone from making a mistake and acting on violent ideas.

There are two types of reporting:

Calling 9-1-1	Organizational Reporting
*For **immediate** threats*	*To enable assessment and management of an **evolving** threat*

- In either case – ensure your personal safety before making a report

Calling 9-1-1

If the person of concern is directly threatening you or others, if a weapon of any kind is involved, or you feel that the threat of violence is imminent, move to a safe location and call **9-1-1.**

The 9-1-1 call taker will need specific information to provide an appropriate response:

- Your name
- The location of the incident
- The location of the person of concern
- Your exact location
- A description of the situation
- Is the incident still in progress?
- A physical description of the person of concern
- The type and number of weapons, if any
- The number of potential victims

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ORGANIZATIONAL REPORTING

Reporting can be an intimidating task.
Some individuals fear there will be negative consequences from getting involved. Others question if they may get it wrong or unintentionally cause harm to someone. To mitigate these challenges, organizations should consider creating systems which encourage reporting through a culture of shared responsibility, making sure that people know that reporting is confidential and designed to help them and the person of concern.

Key points to include in a report:

- The exact nature and context of the concerning behavior, comments, and/or perceived threat.
- Who or what is/was the intended target.
- Is the person of concern under any new or significant stress?
- The specific words or actions perceived as threatening.
  - *Did the person of concern express a planned course of action?*
    - Does the plan make sense?
    - Is it realistic and specific?
  - *Does the person of concern have the means, knowledge, and ability to carry out a plan?*
  - *Has the person of concern engaged in violent behaviors before?*
    - Developing an idea or plan
    - Approaching, visiting, and/or following a target
    - Attempting to circumvent security or protective measures
- Any available background.
  - *Are the person of concern's actions consistent with the concerning statements?*
  - *Are those who know the person of concern worried that they might act based on inappropriate ideas?*
  - *Are there any personal or professional stressors that may have contributed to the incident?*
  - *Are there factors in the person of concern's life and/or environment which might increase or decrease the likelihood of violent action?*
  - *Does the person of concern have known problems with peers, supervisors, management, or leadership?*
  - *Is there evidence of substance abuse, mental illness, or depression?*
  - *Is there evidence that the person of concern is experiencing desperation and/or despair?*

The answers to these questions can contribute to a threat assessment by a multi-disciplinary threat management team and should provide or corroborate evidence as to whether a person is progressing toward a malicious act.

HELPFUL LINKS

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