

Dealing with Students of Concern

USING VERBAL
DE-ESCALATION

Have you ever been
concerned about a
student's behavior or felt
threatened?

How do you know when you are being personally or physically threatened?³

- You will know it when it happens to you.
- You will “feel” it.
- Trust your instincts
- Do not ignore the situation

Using Verbal De-escalation to Address a Personal Threat⁴

- What is “Verbal De-escalation?”
- Who needs Verbal De-escalation training?
- When might you need to use Verbal De-escalation?
- What will this class teach you?

What is Verbal De-escalation?

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- Verbal de-escalation is what we use during a situation in an attempt to prevent a conflict with another person.

Who Needs Verbal De-escalation⁶ Training?

- Everybody needs it!

This class will NOT teach you:

- How to break-up fights
- Techniques for use with out-of-control or violent students
- Or anything else that might get you hurt!

Physical Force

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- Use of physical force is NEVER recommended.

This class WILL teach you:

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- Verbal De-escalation tactics that are non-physical skills used to prevent a potentially dangerous situation from escalating into a physical confrontation or injury.
- Tactics have four main categories:
 - Tactics used to prevent a potentially dangerous situation from escalating.
 - Tactics used to de-escalate a threatening situation.
 - Tactics used during a confrontation to ensure your personal safety and others.

Verbal De-escalation Tactics

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- Some Tactics are:
 - Simply listening
 - Empathizing with the other person
 - Re-focusing the other person on something positive
 - Giving helpful choices
 - Distracting the other person
 - Motivating the other person (especially useful with students)
 - Setting limits

De-escalating Effectively

- To verbally de-escalate another person, you must open as many clear lines of communication as possible.
- Both you and the other person must listen to each other and have no barriers.
- Barriers to Communication are the things that keep the meaning of what is being said from being heard.
- Communication Barriers:
 - Pre-judging
 - Not Listening
 - Arguing
 - Criticizing
 - Name-Calling
 - Engaging in Power Struggles
 - Ordering
 - Threatening
 - Minimizing

De-escalating Positively

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- Use positive and helpful statements such as:
 - “I want to help you!”
 - “Please tell me more so I better understand how to help you.”
 - “Let’s call Mr. Smith ... I know he would be able to help with this...”
 - “Ms. Jones handles this for our district, let’s ask her what she thinks about this situation ... She is always willing to help!”
- Put yourself on his/her side of finding a solution to the problem.

Listening

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- Three Main Listening Skills:
 - Attending: Giving your physical (and mental) attention to another person.
 - Following: Making sure you are engaged by using eye contact. Use un-intrusive gestures (such as nodding of your head, saying okay or asking an infrequent question.)
 - Reflecting: Paraphrasing and reflecting, using the feelings of the other person. (empathy)
- Listen when you are “listening.”
 - No other activities when listening.
 - Multi-tasking is not good when you are listening.
- What is the difference between “hearing” and “listening”?

Be an empathic listener

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- Do NOT be judgmental.
- Do NOT ignore the person or pretend to be paying attention.
- Listen to what the person is really saying.
- Re-state the message.
- Clarify the message.
- Repeat the message.
- Be empathetic!
- Validate – “I understand why...” (Not in agreement with...)
- Try to establish rapport with the other person.

De-escalating Positively

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- Assume good faith intentions
- Act as an ally of the person with the concern (while still holding the needs of the rest of the group).
- Listen closely for the “piece of truth” in each person’s expression.
- Ask questions.
- Determine the source of the difficulty.
- Engage the people with concerns in helping solve the problem. (xxxxx)

Intro to Body Language

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- 80% -- 90% of our communication is non-verbal. It is very important to be able to identify exactly what we are communicating to others non-verbally.
- You may be trying to de-escalate the situation by talking to the other person, but your body language may be showing a willingness to get physical.
- It is also important that we recognize and understand the non-verbal cues from another person who has the potential of escalating.

Body Language

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- When people are angry, they sometimes do not “listen” to the words that are being said.
- Remember the difference between “hearing” and “listening.”
- Often, they do “see” and react to what you are “saying” with your body language.
- You must always be very careful with the message you are sending!

Body Language

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- Finger pointing may seem accusing or threatening.
- Shoulder shrugging may seem uncaring or unknowing.
- Rigid walking may seem unyielding or challenging.
- Jaw set with clenched teeth shows you are not open-minded to listening to his/her side of the story.
- Use slow and deliberate movements -- quick actions may surprise or scare the other person.

Body Language -- Eyes

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- One eyebrow raised = “sternness”
- Eyes open wide = “surprise”
- A hard stare = “threatening gesture”
- Closing eyes longer than normal = “I’m not listening” and/or “Change your message!” (This may be a warning that you are unintentionally escalating the situation!)

Personal Space

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- Invasion or encroachment of personal space tends to heighten or escalate anxiety.
- Note: Personal space is usually 1.5 to 3 feet – far enough away so you cannot be hit or kicked.
- Do not touch a hostile person – they might interpret that as an aggressive action.
- Keep your hands visible at all times – you do not want the other person to misinterpret your physical actions.

Challenging Posture

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- Challenging postures that tend to threaten another person and escalate any situation include:
- Face to face
- Nose to nose
- Toe to toe
- Eyeball to eyeball
- Touching
- Finger pointing

Protect yourself at all times

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- While de-escalating another person, you want to be in a non-threatening, non-challenging and self-protecting position.
- Slightly more than a leg's length away, on an angle and off to the side of the other person.
- Stay far enough away that the other person cannot hit, kick or grab you.

Use of your voice

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- Tone
- Volume
- Rate of speech
- Inflection of voice

Tone of your voice

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- A lowered voice level may set a tone of anger which could create fear or challenges.
- A raised voice may set a tone of anticipation or uncertainty which may promote excitement or disruption.
- Speak slowly – This is usually interpreted as soothing.
- A controlled voice is one of calm and firmness which promotes confidence in both parties.
- Humor may unintentionally offend someone and escalate the situation. – Use humor sparingly and always direct humor toward yourself. (Be very careful when attempting humor in this type of situation!)
- Always be respectful to the other person.
- Using “please” and “thank-you” – “Mr” or “Ms” indicates respect.

Tips

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- Remain calm -- Listen - really listen!
- Avoid overreaction.
- Validate! “I understand why you might be upset.” (This does not indicate that you agree with them.)
- Remove onlookers -- or relocate to a safer place. (Onlookers can become either “cheerleaders” or additional victims.) Send an onlooker for help.
- Watch for non-verbal clues or threats.
- Bring in another trained person to assist whenever possible.
- There is less chance of aggressive behavior if two people are talking to one person.

Call for Help!

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- Contact your Dean – if possible.
- Night Supervisor 1-408-590-5050
- Campus Police 1-408-270-6468
- San Jose Police 1-408-277-8911

There is safety in numbers.

It will be beneficial to have a witness, if the situation deteriorates and someone is injured.

Notification and Follow-up

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- Always report minor situations.
- Minor situations can be a “cry for help” and/or “warning signs” of bigger things to come!
- Minor situations can lead to major situations.
- After any confrontation, advise or direct the person to counseling, if possible.
- Always document every threatening event.
- Documentation will help all parties when evaluating re-occurring events.

Things NOT to do!

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- Avoid becoming emotionally involved -- control your emotions at all times.
- Avoid engaging in power struggles.
- Avoid becoming ridged in your process.
- Avoid telling the other person that you “know how he or she feels.”
- Avoid raising your voice, cussing, making threats, and giving ultimatums or demands.
- Avoid aggressive language, including body language.
- Do not attempt to intimidate a hostile person.

Let's do an Exercise!

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- Practice what we learned.
 - Scenario #1 – You are an angry person was suspended for fighting. You believe it was not your fault - “I was just defending myself.” The other person is the Instructor or Staff member. The employee is alone when the angry student approaches.
 - Scenario #2 – You are a first year female teacher working alone in your classroom after class. A football player, who just flunked your mid-term exam and became “ineligible,” comes in and threatens you.

Review

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- If you find yourself in a threatening situation, remember what we discussed today:
 - Listen -- Hear the real “message” and repeat it back with “understanding!”
 - Distract the other person, if possible.
 - Try to re-focus him/her on something positive.
 - Motivate him/her to seek help.
 - Empathize!
 - Give choices.
 - Set limits.

Not the End...

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After your personal safety is secured, there are several other steps that must be taken:

- Intervention must occur to end the situation, if that has not yet occurred. If deescalating does not work follow instructions for reporting disruptive students and information regarding dismissal at <http://www.sjcc.edu/current-students/student-life/student-code-of-conduct>.
- Contact your Dean, complete Disruptive Student Behavior Report and forward to Blank Balajadia in SC 115i or call 1-408-288-3160.
- The individual who threatened your personal safety must be dealt with appropriately; e.g. counseling, suspension, expulsion, etc.

...Just the Beginning!

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- Conduct a de-briefing session with involved staff.
- Steps must be taken to prevent other similar situations from occurring in the future. This may include the adoption of new policies and/or an action plan.
- Counseling is available through Health Services – call 1-408-298-2181 x 2112.

Thanks for Your Participation!

References:

http://treegroup.info/topics/facilitation_primer.pdf³³

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