



ATW HEALTH SOLUTIONS™

# De-escalation Techniques

A GUIDE FOR EFFECTIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict is inevitable in human interaction. How we manage it can make all the difference in maintaining safety and fostering positive relationships. De-escalation techniques are invaluable tools in defusing tense situations and promoting constructive dialogue. This guide outlines strategies for de-escalation, focusing on effective communication and situational awareness.

## SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

**Words to Avoid:** Language plays a crucial role in de-escalation. Avoid using inflammatory or confrontational words that may provoke further agitation. Instead, choose neutral and non-threatening language.

**Body Language:** Pay attention to your body language, as it can convey respect and openness or hostility and defensiveness. Exhibiting relaxed body language can convey that one is receptive to communication and open to dialogue. Maintain an open posture (avoid crossing your arms, relax your shoulders, sit or stand with a relaxed posture), make eye contact (if culturally appropriate), and use non-verbal cues such as nodding to show understanding.

**Environment:** Consider how the physical environment may impact the individual's comfort and sense of safety. Minimize distractions and create a calm, private space for interaction.

- **The scenario:** In a health clinic, a patient experiencing severe abdominal pain is in the waiting area and has been for over an hour.
- **The trigger:** Their loved one keeps checking with registration, but the clinic is particularly busy, and, from

## INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

**IS:** ◀ ▶ **IS NOT:**

Being considerate of and respecting others



A reflection of your brand and its values



A continuous learning process



Fluid and always changing



Developed through conversations and dialogue



Recognizing that words can affect how people feel



✗ Avoiding discussing certain issues out of the fear you may "offend" someone

✗ Ignoring differences between people (e.g. "I don't see color")

✗ Something that can be done perfectly

✗ Limited to the written word

✗ A strict set of guidelines about what to say

✗ Just a trend

Source: <https://knockri.com/blog/diversityandinclusion/inclusive-language/>

their point of view, action needs to be taken to prioritize the patient's care. Out of frustration, they begin to get loud and disruptive. The registrar is caught off guard and stands behind the desk, arms crossed, eyebrows furrowed, listening to their complaints.

- **The intervention:** The registration supervisor witnesses the interaction and considers the situation and the environment—busy room, uncomfortable chairs, bright lights, highly public—they realize they need to de-escalate the situation. The supervisor moves from behind the registration desk and approaches the patient and their loved one with open arms and a sincere look. They say, “We recognize you’re in a lot of pain, and you’ve been waiting for a while. We want to assure you the doctors and nurses are working hard and will get to you as soon as possible. In the meantime, we want to make you more comfortable. A patient consultation room is available, which will provide you with some privacy and a more comfortable environment. Would you like to wait there instead? I can come to the room every 15 minutes to update you.”
- **The effect:** This approach defuses the situation and makes the patient and their loved one feel heard and understood.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

**Active Listening:** Demonstrate a genuine interest in the individual’s perspective by actively listening to their concerns without interruption. Paraphrase their statements to ensure understanding and validate their feelings.

**Empathy:** Show empathy by acknowledging the person’s emotions and validating their experiences, even if you disagree with their viewpoint. Expressing empathy can help build trust and rapport.

**Clarification:** Avoid making assumptions and seek clarification when needed. Taking the time to clarify what you heard helps prevent misunderstandings and calmly and respectfully addresses any misconceptions or misinformation.

- **The scenario:** A patient expresses frustration about their treatment plan, feeling overwhelmed by the amount of medication prescribed.
- **The trigger:** They angrily declare that they aren’t going to be able to take their medication.
- **The intervention:** The provider listens without interruption, keeping eye contact to show they are listening. Instead of sidestepping their statement or getting into a potentially combative conversation, they respond with empathy, acknowledging the patient’s emotions and validating their feelings by saying, “I understand that managing multiple medications can feel overwhelming. Let’s work together to create a manageable plan for you.”

## WHAT IS INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?

Inclusive language does not reinforce discriminatory biases or contribute to the concept of “normal” vs. “other”

### Principles & Actions to Guide Language Use

**People-first language:** Put the person before their characteristics

**INSTEAD OF** “impaired/disabled person”

**USE** “person with an impairment/a disability”

**Active voice:** Empower the person (subject of the sentence) to perform the action (verb)

**INSTEAD OF** “The rice was sold by her.”

**USE** “She sold the rice.”

**Self-identification:** Ask the person how they prefer to identify themselves and use that terminology

**USE** an individual’s preferred pronouns, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.

**Proper nouns:** Be specific when naming people, places, and things to avoid over-generalizing when possible

**INSTEAD OF** “indigenous group”

**USE** the name of the group

**Gender neutral:** Avoid using gender in describing a person’s role that might be based in stereotypes or assumption

**INSTEAD OF** “woman/female farmer” or “farmer and mother of two”

**USE** “farmer”

*Note: Avoid using “female” as a noun (as in referring to woman as “females”)*

**Be aware. Be respectful. Use words that promote the acceptance and value of all people. Communicate in a way that is accessible and thoughtful. Use words that include and empower all members of your audience.**

Source: <https://www.acdivoca.org/2021/01/why-inclusive-language-matters-to-global-development/>

- **The effect:** By expressing empathy, the healthcare provider builds trust and rapport, empowering the patient to participate in their care decisions and opening a two-way dialogue. To avoid assumptions, the provider asks clarifying questions about the barriers the patient faces and why they can’t take their medication as prescribed. Through this conversation, the provider uncovers that the patient’s work schedule is unpredictable and does not allow them to take medication reliably. Armed with this information, the provider works with the patient to help them understand how they can still succeed with taking their new medicines.

## PRIORITIZATION AND SUPPORT

**Avoid Overreacting:** In a healthcare setting, it's essential to keep calm and prioritize concerns effectively. Take a moment to assess what information or actions are crucial and which are less urgent. Try not to rush the individual and maintain a neutral demeanor.

**Set Boundaries:** Always prioritize the establishment of mutual boundaries between healthcare providers and patients. This involves fostering an environment where both parties feel respected and understood. Clear communication lays the foundation for a respectful and safe interaction, promoting trust and cooperation throughout the healthcare encounter.

**Seek Support:** Understanding your organization's policies and available resources can guide you in accessing appropriate support systems. Recognize when it's necessary to disengage from the situation and seek help if you feel unable to manage it effectively on your own, promoting a proactive approach to ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all.

- **The scenario:** A patient presents to the emergency department with a behavioral health issue and is escorted to an examination room. The patient is agitated but cooperative.
- **The trigger:** After reviewing their history, the nurse discovers that the patient takes medication for high blood pressure. The nurse asks the patient if they have taken their medication for the day. The patient says no. The nurse exits the room and returns with the medication. The patient refuses the medication. The nurse persists, and the patient becomes uncooperative. Voices are raised, and a combative conversation ensues, heightening the patient's agitation and attracting the attention of those nearby.

- **The intervention:** The ED supervisor intervenes. They calmly ask the patient what's wrong. The patient indicates they don't want to take the medication because they don't believe it's blood pressure medication. They think the nurse is trying to make them take some other kind of medication. The ED supervisor listens intently, without interrupting, and assures the patient that the medication is, in fact, blood pressure medication but says that they don't have to take it. They also set some boundaries with the patient. They say, "As healthcare providers, we are concerned about your well-being. Our job is to make sure you are informed about your health status and your treatment options so that you can make the best decision for yourself. We also strive to promote mutual respect. I respect you and I want to validate your frustration with this experience. At the same time, I have to maintain a healing environment for all patients and families; so, I have to ask you to lower your voice so we can have a respectful conversation."

- **The effect:** The ED supervisor calms the patient and helps them understand that the nurse is trying to help them. The ED supervisor then takes the nurse aside to counsel them on prioritizing the patient's concerns—the patient is in the ED because of a behavioral health issue, which takes priority over their blood pressure issue. They tell the nurse to seek support earlier in the interaction. The patient's and the nurse's safety are of utmost importance, and seeking guidance from others early in a potentially combative interaction is a proactive approach to ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all.

