

Deescalation Techniques: Compassionate Conflict Management


FACILITATED BY DR. MICHELLE DUSSEAU
FACC SUMMER CONFERENCE AND ACADEMY
JUNE 9, 2026

1

Learning Objectives:
By the end of this training, participants should be able to

Recognize	early signs of escalation
Apply	in-the-moment de-escalation techniques
Use	language that reduces defensiveness and builds cooperation
Maintain	professionalism and boundaries during difficult interactions

2



What escalation is and why it happens


3

**Triggers:
Why people escalate**

- ♥ Window of Tolerance: Optimal zone for thinking, learning, and engaging.
- Hyperarousal: Fight/flight response—anxiety, anger, panic.
- Hypoarousal: Freeze/shutdown—numbness, disconnection, depression.



4




How Trauma Manifests

- Raised voice
- Rapid
- Speech
- Refusal to listen
- Repetition
- Personal Attacks

5

The First 10 Seconds



When Escalation Starts:

- Lower voice
- Slow Pace
- Acknowledge Emotion before Facts

Sample Scripts

- I can hear that this is really frustrating.
- Can we take a moment so I can understand?
- I want to help, walk me through what is going on.

University of Central Florida | Continuing Education Page 6

6

Context Examples

- ▶ "A citizen angry about fees or delays"
- ▶ "A resident escalating during a public meeting"
- ▶ "Someone recording you and trying to provoke a reaction"
- ▶ "Repeat callers who are already frustrated"
- ▶ What else?

7

Language to maintain boundaries

- "I want to help, and I can do that best if we keep this respectful."
- "I'm happy to continue, but I need us to lower the tone."
- "If this continues, we may need to pause."

8

Don't take the bait

Escalation Pattern

- Emotion → Reaction → Escalation loop

Your role: Interrupt the loop

- Don't match tone
- Don't defend immediately
- Don't correct too early

Remember that you do not have to attend every argument that you are invited to!

9

Managing the interaction

- **Stay** → Person is upset but responsive
- **Redirect** → Conversation is looping or off track
- **End** → Behavior is abusive, unsafe, or non-productive

Example language:

- Stay: "Tell me more about what happened..."
- Redirect: "Let's focus on what we can solve today..."
- End: "We may need to pause and revisit this when we can move forward productively."

10

Communication and De-Escalation

- 1 Stay Centered and Create Safety
- 2 Use Non-Threatening Communication
- 3 Listen Actively and Validate Emotions
- 4 Offer Options and Consider Triggers
- 5 Use Silence and Know when to Exit

11

This might sound familiar...

12



13

Practicing Trauma Informed, Emotionally Intelligent, De-escalating Communication

Reframe the phrase:

- Calm down!
- What's wrong with you?
- That's not my problem.
- You're overreacting.
- You're not making any sense!

14

Distance Zones


- Personal: Touch to 18 inches
- Relational: 18 inches to 4 feet
- Professional: 4-8 feet
- Public: 8 feet to "reach"

15

Referral Pathways

- Supervisor Escalation
- Security Protocols
- Documentation Practices
- When to disengage/ close interaction

16



Be aware of Implicit Bias

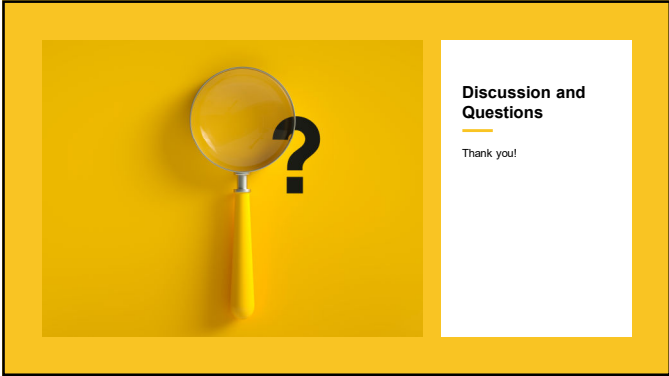
- In high stress moments, we fill gaps quickly, and sometimes inaccurately.

17

- L.E.A.P (listen, empathize, agree, partner).
- C.A.L.M. (clarify, acknowledge, listen, manage)
- S.T.A.R (situation, task, action, result)

Some Easy to Remember (but harder to do) Conflict Models.

18



19
