

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DE-ESCALATING CONFLICTS



Why is this important:

Verbal de-escalation techniques for defusing or talking down an explosive situation can help everyone to keep calm and professional. In fact, de-escalating conflicts is part of keeping everyone safe. The first and only objective in de-escalation is to reduce the level of anger so that discussion becomes possible. You, as a jobsite leader, need quick, actionable steps to calm tense situations and maintain a safe work environment. This worksheet can prepare you for that, and it is a good tool to use in combination with the Respect Works Active Listening Worksheet.

How to use this worksheet:

Keep in mind that to practice these techniques you need to be centered and calm. The more you practice them the more prepared you will feel to handle different verbal or physical conflicts. Only attempt to use these techniques if no weapon is present. Review the actionable steps below. Reflect on past situations where these actions could apply. At the end of this document, you have two real-life scenarios with some useful phrases. They will help you build your confidence and vocabulary towards managing conflicts.

RECOGNIZING EARLY WARNING SIGNS

OBSERVE THESE SIGNS

- Raised voices, aggressive gestures
- Visible frustration or anger
- Physical signs: clenched fists, pacing, glaring



YOUR ACTIONS

- Pause and assess before reacting
- Ensure your own tone and body language remain calm

SAFE CONFLICT MEDIATION

ENSURE SAFETY FIRST

- Maintain a safe distance (two arm lengths)
- Position yourself with an exit route
- Remove anything that could be used aggressively



YOUR ACTIONS

- Scan the environment for hazards
- Signal for backup if needed
- Do not point or shake your finger
- DO NOT smile. This could look like mockery or anxiety

USE CALM COMMUNICATION

STAY CALM

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Keep voice low and steady
- Avoid sarcasm or blame
- Avoid interrupting
- Do not maintain constant eye contact



YOUR ACTIONS

- Use the person's name to personalize
- Let them vent briefly without judgment
- Repeat key point to show understanding
- Do not be defensive

EMOTIONALLY MANAGE THE SITUATION

OFFER SOLUTIONS

- Suggest options instead of demands
- Offer to talk with someone else
- Focus on shared goals: safety, deadlines, teamwork



YOUR ACTIONS

- If aggression escalates or safety is at risk:
- Remove yourself and others from the area
- Contact a supervisor, site safety or HR if needed

Trust your instincts. If you assess or feel that de-escalation is not working, stop! You will know within two or three minutes if it is beginning to work.

Notes:



REAL JOBSITE SCENARIOS

SCENARIO 1



Two workers argue loudly about using the only scissor lift.

Actions you can take:

- You can approach them calmly, keeping distance.
- You can say: “I can see this is important to both of you. Let’s step aside and talk.”
- Listen to each side, validate their concerns equally.
- Offer a solution: “We’ll rotate shifts today so both of you get a turn.”

SCENARIO 2



Crew member curses at co-workers after being told to work overtime, blaming them.

Actions you can take:

- Keeping voice low, say: “I hear you’re frustrated about the change.”
- Ask: “What’s the main concern—time or workload?”
- Offer options: “We can split the overtime or see if someone can swap.”

USEFUL PHRASES AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- “Let’s take a minute to figure this out.”
- “I understand you’re frustrated because....”
- “What do you need right now?”
- “Here are two ways we can handle this—what works best for you?”

Notes:

This tool is based on a combination of several existing de-escalation trainings. Please note that current evidence is inconclusive on the effectiveness of de-escalation training alone. However, multimodal approaches combining multi-respectful workplace elements over a period of time are reported to be more effective.

