



Department of
Veterans Services

De-Escalation Best Practices

TDVS Customer Service Academy

De-Escalation

USING COMMUNICATION OR OTHER TECHNIQUES
DURING AN ENCOUNTER TO STABLIZE, SLOW, OR REDUCE
THE INTENSITY OF A POTENTIALLY
VIOLENT OR CHAOTIC SITUATION WITHOUT USING
USING FORCE

-DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Advanced De-Escalation Technique

The Three Step Process of De-Escalation

1. Verbally Engage
2. Establish a Collaborative Relationship
3. Verbally De-Escalate

The Three Goals during the De-Escalation Process

1. Safety
2. Control
3. Avoid Threat Intervention

Advanced De-Escalation Technique

10 De-Escalation Tips

1. Respect Personal Space

Be aware of your position, posture, and proximity when interacting with a person in distress. A good rule of thumb is to stay two arms length (Or about 6 feet) away from the person. Allowing personal space shows respect, keeps you safer, and tends to decrease a person's anxiety. If you must enter someone's personal space to provide care, explain what you're doing so the person feels less confused and frightened.

Advanced De-Escalation Technique

10 De-Escalation Tips

2. Stay Calm and Professional

- Neutral Tone of voice
- Body Language: Should be congruent with words, otherwise it seems insincere.
 - Stand at an angle to person
 - No clinched fists
 - Hands Visible
 - Avoid excessive eye contact
 - Avoid arm folding or turning away
- Avoid possible triggers (Loud sounds, sudden movements, reaching into drawers, etc.)
- DO NOT provoke an upset individual and NEVER use humiliation.

Advanced De-Escalation Technique

10 De-Escalation Tips

3. Establish Verbal Contact

- If possible, only one person needs to communicate with the person to establish a **collaborative relationship**. Ideally, it should be the person who first established contact with the individual.

4. Be Concise and keep it simple

- Short sentences
- Give time to process
- Repetition may be needed

Advanced De-Escalation Technique

10 De-Escalation Tips

5. Identify Wants and Feelings

- Start by saying, “I am here to help. Is there anything you need that I might be able to help with?” You may be able to give them some of what they want.
- Be aware of strong feelings (fear, anger, distress, etc.) and adjust your expectations accordingly. Minimize talking if tension is high.
- Free Information-Things a person inadvertently says, body language, or past encounters.

Advanced De-Escalation Technique

10 De-Escalation Tips

6. Listen Closely to what the person is saying

- Active Listening- Confirm verbally that you hear what they are saying ("Tell me if I have this right") ("Let's talk about what you would like to achieve").
- Do not make any judgements based on your own experiences.
- Behavior is communication- seek to understand.

Advanced De-Escalation Technique

10 De-Escalation Tips

7. Agree or Agree to Disagree

- You may agree with the situation that has made the person angry and just need to come to a solution. Example: Claim did not get submitted. Help them complete forms and submit the claim.
- "Fogging" is empathetic behavior in which one finds something of the person's position upon which to agree. Example: You can agree that you can see how they could believe that, or you can agree that there are probably other people in similar circumstance that would feel the same way.
- Sometimes you can only agree to disagree. Let them know that you have never encountered the same situation, but you will still try your best to help them find a solution.

Advanced De-Escalation Technique

10 De-Escalation Tips

8. Set Clear Limits

- Establish basic working conditions- Acceptable behavior and consequences in violations.
- Must be reasonable and done in a respectful manner
- Coach person on how to stay in control

Advanced De-Escalation Technique

10 De-Escalation Tips

9. Offer Choices and Optimism

- Give them some of the power. Offer choices- Do they want to sit or stand, do they want the door open or closed, etc.).
- Broach the subject of any follow-up treatment needed after this visit.
- Be optimistic and provide hope, but do not give promises.

10. Debrief the person and staff

Vignette I

Someone calls very upset and asks why they were denied eligibility for burial at a Tennessee State Cemetery. You ask them about their service history. They tell you they served in the Naval Reserves for 7 years but had to get out because they were having health issues not related to service.

De-Escalation for Vignette I

- I can see how you would be upset. (Calm tone of voice, Neutral facial expression, Validating their feelings)
- I appreciate your service and can see that it means a lot to you. (Establishing collaborative relationship and Acknowledging their feelings)
- What did you do in the Reserves? Were you ever injured while on drill weekend or ADT? Were you ever deployed? (If yes to either question, refer them to a VSO to see if they may be eligible for VA Benefits, and have them complete another burial pre-registration with their LOD or Deployment DD214 attached.)

De-Escalation for Vignette I

- I am sorry, but the length of your service does not meet the eligibility requirements for burial in a State or National Cemetery.
(Apologize while managing expectations)
- However, your service does make you eligible for the VA home loan. Can I get you some information on that
(Offering them a compromise and choices)?
- Again, thank you for your service. If I can answer any additional questions in the future, give me a call. Give them your phone number and email.
(Ending the interaction with a plan in place).

Vignette II

- Veteran's daughter comes in very upset that "WE" have cut off her father's VA Benefits and wants it fixed immediately. He is in an Assisted Living Memory Care unit for Alzheimer's Disease, and they are demanding payment. How do we proceed?

De-Escalation Process for Vignette II

- Maintaining a neutral position, talk to the daughter in a calm voice. Be aware of your distance, body language and facial expressions.
- Establish a collaborative relationship with daughter- Let her know you can see why she is so upset and that you are sorry the situation has occurred.

(Validate her feelings)

- Briefly explain to the daughter your role and that you are not employed by the VA but will be able to look into the VA system to see what is going on.

(Managing expectations)

- Explain that you need to go to your computer. Ask if she would like to come, and/or if she would like to sit or stand.

(Give her some control)

De-Escalation Process for Vignette II

- While looking into the system, ask non accusatory questions to gather information.
(Active Listening)
- When the problem is found, communicate to the daughter in layman's terms what has happened and the steps you can take to "possibly" get the benefits resumed.
(This will be a compromise because it will not be an immediate fix)
- If the daughter remains upset, an extra step can be taken by offering to contact the Assisted Living to let them know what happened.
(Maintaining the collaborative relationship)
- When everything possible has been done, review the outcome of her visit and send her off with a business card so she can call you to check on the progress.
(Debrief and leaving with a plan in place)

De-Escalation Vignette III

A Veteran's brother is walking around the cemetery and spots you working. He comes up to you and is very upset because your cemetery is behind schedule on burials. They have family coming in from out of town for the Veteran's funeral and it is posing an inconvenience for them.

De-Escalation for Vignette III

- I completely understand why you would be upset, and I apologize that your family is being inconvenienced.
(Acknowledge their feelings while remaining calm)
- We appreciate your brother's service and understand the importance of laying him to rest as soon as possible (Establishing collaborative relationship and validating their feelings).
- We do realize this is a problem and to resolve this issue, we have rented an additional piece of equipment and are now scheduling 8 burials per day to work toward catching up on internment services. We are doing everything possible to provide services in a timely manner and appreciate your understanding. (Explanation of current processes in place).

De-Escalation for Vignette III

- We complete all services in the order they were scheduled, so we are unable to move up the date of your family member's internment service. However, we are working as fast as we can.
(Apology and Managing expectations)
- I did want to check to see if you have looked into any potential VA Burial or Survivor benefits? If not, I can connect you with one of our field offices for further assistance on that.
(Offering them additional resources and assistance)
- Again, thank you for your patience and understanding. If I can answer any additional questions in the future, please do not hesitate to reach out again. Here is my contact information.
(Ending the interaction with a plan in place)

Vignette IV

- A Veteran calls upset because they submitted their application for Property Tax Exemption in January and still has not received a response. The Veteran believes that we are responsible for the processing of the application. It is now May, and the Veteran wants to know what is causing the delay.

De-Escalation Process for Vignette IV

- Acknowledge the Veteran's frustration. Explain that you understand why they would be upset (validation). Maintain a calm, stable tone when speaking to the Veteran.
- Explain the function and scope of the department so the Veteran understands that we provide information on this benefit, but do not oversee it.
 - We are a state agency (Tennessee Department of Veterans Services - TDVS) created to assist Veterans and eligible dependents with filing for federal benefits for review and administration from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- Provide the correct department's information.
 - The Comptroller's Office actually has a division for Property Assessments. You can call them to find out the status of your application and seek additional assistance. Would you like their phone number?

De-Escalation Process for Vignette IV

- If the Veteran is still upset, you can offer to contact the Comptroller's office on their behalf and gather the necessary information.
 - I would be happy to reach out to the Comptroller's office on your behalf. I will need your name, address, county, phone number, and email address.
- Follow up with the Veteran through an email with a summary of your conversation, actions taken, and contact information if they need any additional assistance.

De-Escalation Vignette V

- Spouse comes to the office to see if the Veteran's headstone has arrived yet, OR a Veteran comes in to check the status of a claim that he said was filed 6 months ago. You check on the status of the headstone or claim and find that it was never ordered or the claim was not submitted.
- What do you do??

De-Escalation Vignette V

Tell the Truth and sincerely apologize!!

- Then tell the spouse you will get it ordered today and will personally call them when it arrives. Or, tell the Veteran his claim was not submitted, but you will submit it today.
- We all make mistakes. It is hard to admit our mistakes, but it is better to own them and attempt to fix them, than lying to try to hide them. The person still may not be happy with you, but at least they will respect that you admitted to the mistake and that you are taking steps to make it right.

Making mistakes is how we learn. Do not be hard on yourself!