



THE FOOD
INDUSTRY
ASSOCIATION

FMI CRISIS MANAGEMENT GUIDE

De-Escalation

July 2020

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ABOUT FMI

As the food industry association, FMI works with and on behalf of the entire industry to advance a safer, healthier and more efficient consumer food supply chain. FMI brings together a wide range of members across the value chain—from retailers that sell to consumers, to producers that supply food and other products, as well as the wide variety of companies providing critical services—to amplify the collective work of the industry. www.fmi.org.

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What is workplace violence?

[The Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) (OSHA) defines workplace violence as “any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site.”

Workplace violence ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. It can affect and involve employees, clients, customers, and visitors. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI), of the 5,147 fatal workplace injuries that occurred in the United States in 2017, 458 were cases of intentional injury by another person. [\[More...\]](#)

What does it mean to de-escalate?

De-escalation is defined by Merriam-Webster as an intransitive verb “to decrease in extent, volume, or scope.” De-escalation is all about assisting and improving a challenging situation. What that might be really depends on the circumstances and the people involved. Your intervention might be something you do, something you say or choosing to do or say something or nothing. (<https://rightresponse.org/de-escalation-skills>)

There is no one-size-fits all solution to challenging or angry customers, but there are subtle ways to influence how they respond to your efforts.

Introduction

The following information in this document is meant for assisting key personnel to prepare for and respond to an event. The document’s goal is meant to act as a guideline and serve as a supplement to the many resources (below) and your partnership with local law enforcement agencies. You will want to customize this document to meet the specific needs of your organization, stores, and personnel. This document should not replace a custom plan developed by an individual organization.

Develop a simple and flexible plan

OSHA believes that by assessing their worksites, employers can identify methods for reducing the likelihood of occurring incidents. A well-written and implemented

workplace violence prevention program, combined with engineering controls, administrative controls and training can reduce the incidence of workplace violence in both the private sector and federal workplaces.

CDC (NIOSH) states, "The importance of management commitment of workplace violence prevention policies and programs cannot be overemphasized. Top management support helps ensure that adequate resources (including staffing) will be applied to the program; that the program will be launched from the top-down; and that the effort will likely be accepted throughout the organization and sustained." ([CDC Workplace Violence Prevention Strategies and Research Needs](#)).

Prepare

Verbal de-escalation is used during a potentially dangerous, or threatening, situation to prevent a person from causing harm to themselves or others.

Use of physical force is *never* recommended. Physical force would only be used as a last resort to prevent injury to yourself or another person. Use of physical force usually results in someone (even you) getting hurt.

Respond

First, calm yourself before interacting with the person.

- If you are upset, it's only going to escalate the situation. Calm down and then begin to look at the situation and how you can intervene safely.
- Take a deep breath.
- Use a low, dull tone of voice and do not get defensive even if the insults are directed at you.
- No person, group or set of conditions can guarantee that a conflict will proceed constructively.
- If de-escalation is not working, STOP!
- If the situation feels unsafe, leave and CALL FOR HELP.

Vivid Learning Systems Conflict De-Escalation Techniques
vividlearningsystems.com/safety-toolbox/conflict-de-escalation-techniques

Empathy

Practicing empathy is another method of de-escalation:

- Actively listen.
- Distract the other person.
- Re-focus the other person on something positive.
- Give options to addressing the chief concern.

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. Remember to be patient, calm and aware of the situational surroundings should a conflict arise in your workplace. Most importantly have a plan to protect yourself if the worst-case scenario unfolds; how do you escape, defend your life or protect other colleagues.

Non-verbal techniques

Vivid Learning states that 80-90% of our communication is non-verbal. It is important to be able to identify exactly what we are communicating to others nonverbally.

There are three primary listening skills:

- Attentive: Giving your physical (and mental) attention to another person.
- Reactive: Making sure you are engaged by using eye contact.
- Reflecting: Paraphrasing and reflecting, leveraging the feelings of the other person (empathy).

Be present: Don't engage in other activities, as multi-tasking is not perceived as authentic.

Maintain appropriate body language: 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 to recognize and understand non-verbal cues.

Control your decibel levels: A calmer 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.

Validate the person's feelings: "I understand why you might be upset." (This statement does not indicate that you agree with them.)

Control your environment: Relocate to a safer place. 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.

Customer Complaint Best Practices Pocket Card

1. Stay Calm	Prepare for the conversation by recognizing the need to be calm.
2. Identify your Role	I am ___, the store leader. I want to understand your concern and ensure a great outcome for you.
3. Recognize the Emotion (if necessary)	I can see ___ has upset you. I am sorry this happened.
4. Let them Explain	Please tell me in your own words what your biggest concern is.
5. Repeat and Empathize	I heard you say ___. Did I get that right? I can understand how that would make you upset.
6. Reverse Roles	Here is WHY we are doing this. What could we do to make you completely satisfied?
7. Explain what we CAN do	We could give you a free mask or even shop for you.
8. Thank the person	I want to sincerely thank you for helping us keep everyone safe. Would you like a mask or can we shop for you?

Resources

Occupational Safety and Health Administration Workplace Violence

<https://www.osha.gov/workplace-violence>

Merriam-Webster

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/de-escalate>

Right Response "Principle-Based De-escalation"

<https://rightresponse.org/de-escalation-skills>

CDC Workplace Safety and Health: Workplace Violence Preventions Strategies and Research Needs

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2006-144/pdfs/2006-144.pdf?id=10.26616/NIOSH PUB2006144>

Vivid Learning Systems

<https://vividlearningsystems.com/safety-toolbox/conflict-de-escalation-techniques>

Risk Management Services, Northeast Washington Educational Service District 101

<https://personnel.ky.gov/KEAP/Verbal%20De-escalation%20presentation.pdf>

Northgate Gonzalez "Dealing with an Angry Person: De-Escalation Techniques"

The Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries

<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cfoi.nr0.htm>