

# Tips on Preventing or De-Escalating Workplace Violence

## General goals to keep in mind:

When we are faced with a possible threat in a workplace environment, it's helpful to keep the following things in mind as goals:

- **Reduce the intensity** of the conflicts and/or emotions.
- **Decrease the duration** of the conflict.
- **Satisfy needs** while preserving dignity & control. These needs are often times emotional – the need to be seen and to be heard.
- **Respond with compassion and respectfulness**

## Understand your verbal and non-verbal cues

It is important to remember that we are communicating all the time, in a number of different ways, verbally and non-verbally. Having an awareness of your communication style and response style may help to de-escalate a situation rather than add 'fuel' to an already intensifying situation.

## Be aware of your:

- Speech (both words and tone)
- Silence
- Eye contact (or lack of eye contact)
- Facial expression
- Body movements/gestures
- Body contact

## What to do and what not to do

Here are **two key steps** to take in response to a threatening situation that make use of the goals outlined above, i.e. reducing the intensity and duration of the event, while responding with compassion and respectfulness and, if possible, satisfying needs.

### Step one: General response to disruptive behavior when no threats or weapons are present

1. Respond quietly and calmly – try to diffuse the situation.
2. Do not take the behavior personally.
3. Ask questions and show respectful concern. Your interest will demonstrate aggression is not necessary.
4. Consider offering an apology – even if you did nothing wrong – to calm the situation.  
“I am sorry that happened; how can we solve this?”
5. Communicate clearly and summarize what the individual is saying. Your summary of the situation reflects your interest and attention.
6. Focus on areas of agreement to help resolve the situation.

## Step two: If step one is not effective and the individual SEEMS DANGEROUS:

7. Signal for assistance using a pre-arranged “distress” signal to another staff member who should be a short distance away at all times – your co-worker should alert your supervisor and security. Do not mention security or the police if you fear an angry or violent response.
8. If the situation escalates, find a way to excuse yourself. If possible, leave the area without turning your back and get help. Say something like, “You’ve raised some tough questions. Let me contact my supervisor to see what we can do.”

## Specific situations – Preventing or de-escalating violence in a retail or customer-driven environment:

- **If someone is shoplifting:** Follow company policy. If they come back, get help from security. **Do not deal with it yourself.**
- **If someone shoves you:** Say to them, “I’m sure you didn’t mean to hurt me just now. But you did. I don’t like being treated that way.” Move away from the person.
- **If someone calls you a name or harasses you:** Say to them, “I’m happy to help you as a customer in our store. However, I don’t like being called names. Thank you for respecting my job as I try to help you.”
- **If someone is talking to themselves and/or picking at sores on their body:** Monitor but **don’t do anything.**
- **If someone is talking loudly and appears agitated:** Get help. In the meantime, say softly and slowly, “I’m not sure what you are looking for right now and I’d like to help. Could we walk over there where I can try to assist you?”
- **If someone is being rude:** Say, “We try to treat you and all of our customers with respect and dignity. We hope that you’ll treat us with respect also. I’m happy to help you if I can.”
- **If someone is angry and yelling:** Say, “I’m sorry that things aren’t going well. If you could talk a little quieter so that I can understand you better, I’ll certainly try to help.”

## Your EAP is here for you.

We’re available to talk 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This material was developed exclusively at the private expense of New Directions Behavioral Health, L.L.C. and constitutes limited rights data/restricted special works consistent with the provisions of the United States Postal Service (USPS) Supplying Principles and Practices. Use of this material is authorized in connection with EAP services provided by New Directions under contract no. 2BMICS-18-0013 and conveys no additional rights.