



Center For Religious Tolerance

De-escalation and other tips

The tenets of non-violent communication (NVC):

Listen, speak – observations, feelings, needs, requests.
Avoid using language of blaming, judgment, domination.

Three guiding principles for de-escalating every situation

NEEDS: Meet the needs of the person you're dealing with.

RESPECT: Reflect respect and dignity toward the person you're dealing with.

SAFETY: It is always the right response to maintain the safety of everyone involved.

Remember to

- (1) Remain in control of yourself
- (2) support others and
- (3) avoid "wrong responses" which can make the situation worse.

Five tips for principle-based de-escalation (vs. technique based)

1. Manage yourself first before managing others
 - a) *Your state of being is more important than what you say. If you respond to the situation, do not overreact. Use NVC in communicating.*
 - b) *Anticipate your brain's "alarm reaction" (freeze, flight, fight, fright)*
 - c) *The only thing you can manage to affect the outcome is yourself – actions, words*
 - d) *Relationships rule in de-escalation because they guide or set the scene for what will ensue*
 - e) *Consider how you are expected to respond in any situation. What are you allowed to do and prohibited from doing? Again, think NVC.*
2. One response does not fit all situations
 - a) *Again, think principles vs. technique*
 - b) *Escalation is not teaching/discussion time. Escalated persons are in "alarm reaction" mode too. If they cannot make sense out of what you are doing, that is a sign of their escalation. Ask yourself, What is going on? What is their motivation? Continue assessing the situation.*
 - c) *Use/say "breathe" instead of "calm down". "Calm down" creates a power struggle (see NVC language to avoid above.) Ask why they are upset. Your active listening signals to them that you are willing to support them.*

3. Stopping the conflict by force, does not eliminate the conflict (Might Is Not Right)
 - a) *Behavior is a form of communication. What is this person trying to gain? What is this person trying to avoid?*
 - b) *Physical intervention should only be used for the purpose of safety protection. (In the case of public protests/marches/assemblies, this is where law enforcement should intervene.)*
4. Proactive (“post-vention”) reflection prevents problems
 - a) *Assess what has occurred previously and decide what should happen next time.*
 - b) *You will have a better idea what to do if you’ve planned for it.*
 - c) *“Post-vention” – this reflective process after the fact – informs prevention.*
5. Inside-out change
 - a) *Related to the first point: Manage others by managing yourself.*
 - b) *Understanding that changing your approach, tone, actions in the moment can alter the course of the situation if it is not de-escalating.*

De-escalation and safety strategies for activists

- 1) Discuss the verbal abuse that may be hurled at you and how to take care of yourselves and each other in the moment and afterward.
- 2) Consider the use of posters, music or chanting to block and drown out the hate speech and protect fellow activists. You may want to have some chants or songs prepared ahead of time.
- 3) Use language verbally and on posters that makes use of NVC. Consider language that can disarm opposition by sharing common ground, ideals.
- 4) Have fun! Try to have an enjoyable experience that creates goodwill and solidarity.

For more in-depth information on de-escalation please see [De-escalate Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime: Unplug the Power Struggle with Principle-Based De-escalation.](#)