

De-Escalation Techniques for Municipal Employees

PRESENTED BY:

ALLONE HEALTH EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



MIIA

Nonprofit
Locally based
Member driven

Serving Massachusetts' communities since 1982



“We awaken in others the same attitude of mind we hold towards them.”

Elbert Hubbard



Focal points

- Welcome
- Municipal challenges (patrons/other)
- The role of the stress response
- De-escalation tips and strategies
- The Role of the Policy / Code of Conduct
- Wrap-up

But first

What are *your* big stressors as municipal employees and how has the pandemic impacted them?



Today's challenges

Patrons/customers

- Are always in **hurry**
- Seek instant gratification
- Have higher expectations
- Are short in **patience**
- Expect technology to solve all problems
- Feel **entitled** due to paying for services

Municipalities

- Budget cuts
- Staff **shortages**
- “Piling on” of job responsibilities
- Technology growth bringing higher **demands** for services
- Population growth bringing new customers
- Increased accountability

Causes of conflict

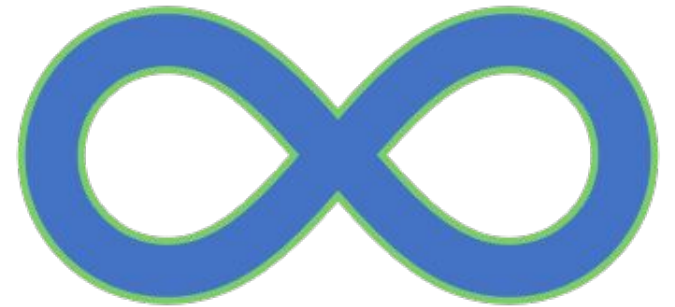
- Has there been a misunderstanding?
- Divergent expectations.
- Is someone feeling unheard or disrespected?
- Has someone been getting bounced around?
- Is someone having a bad day?
- Does someone like to 'stir the pot'?



What about the pandemic's effect ?

- Will I be safe?*
- Can I be the same employee under these new circumstances?*
- How will I adjust to these changes and uncertainties?*
- How might I manage a heated interaction?*
- How will this impact my relationship with patrons, co-workers?*

What else?



De-escalation principals to keep in mind

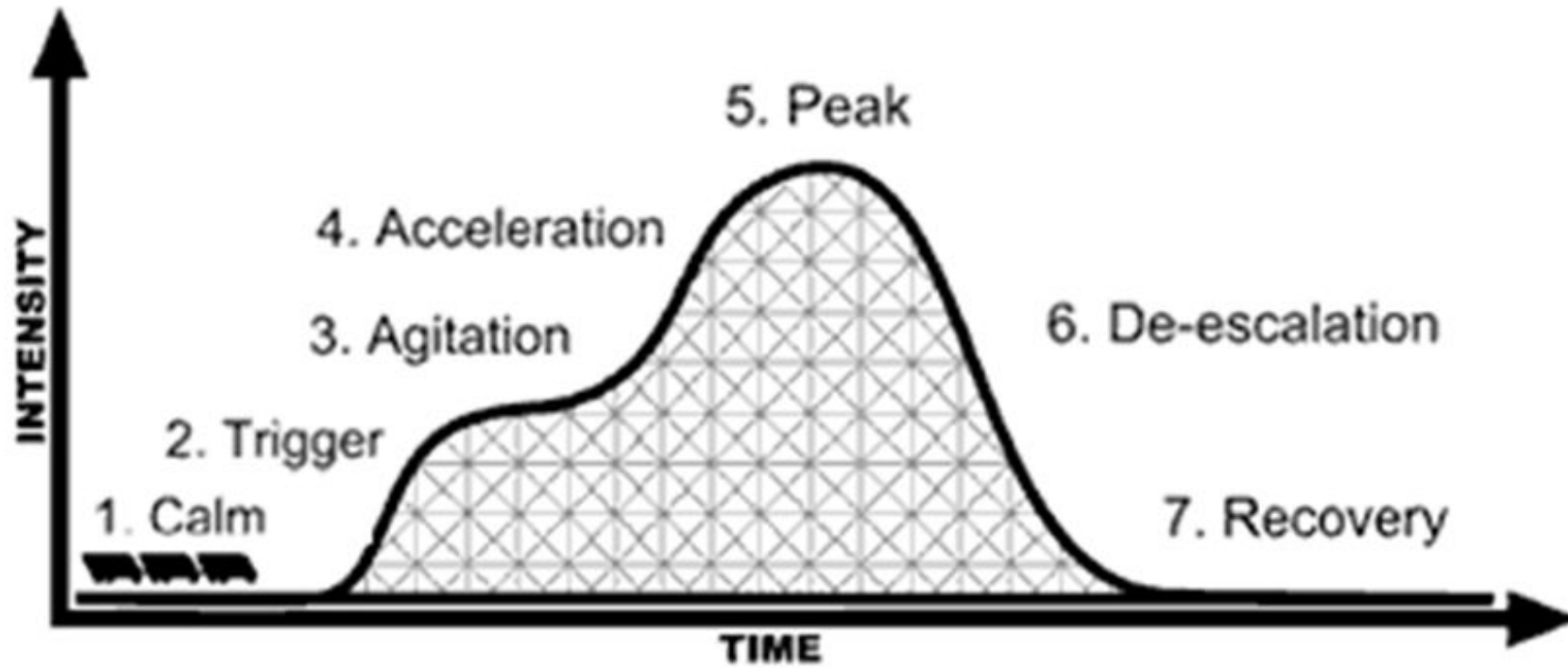
It's normal to feel defensive, annoyed sometimes.

We can't change people. We can only control ourselves.

We never really know what's going on with people.

We can do our best to keep our cool: stay professional and not get defensive.





The Stages of Escalation

What if


You've had a long day and are patiently handling a long line. Your next customer begins by saying, "*What the hell's taking so long here? I swear, like I've got nothing better to do!*"

What might you be feeling, how might you respond?

What if

You're in a tight office space and a landscaper working on town property closely approaches you with a question, for the second time, without a mask. They won't stop talking.

What are your thoughts and how do you respond?



Where to start: by knowing yourself

Reflections on your relationship to danger

How do you react to trouble? Fight, Flight, Freeze?
How does your body and identity impact what you bring into a situation?

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Reflections on you and your surroundings

How do different physical situations impact how you de-escalate?
How do you know that you are committed to de-escalating?

What's *your* style?





De-escalation best practices

- Stay positive
- Avoid power struggles
- Clarify: “*It sounds like you..*”
- Focus on the problem, not the personality
- Listen more than you talk, initially

Other defusing tips

Use their name

Use power words:
*“Let’s”, “We”,
“Together”*

Provide options

The calm,
compassionate
response: *“Let’s take
a walk together.”*

Be mindful of voice

Be mindful of tone

Seek team support

De-escalation Tips

What about body language?

POSTURE

NEUTRAL
FACE

VOICE

EYE
CONTACT

PAUSE

ALLOW FOR
EXIT

DON'T POINT
OR SHAKE
FINGERS

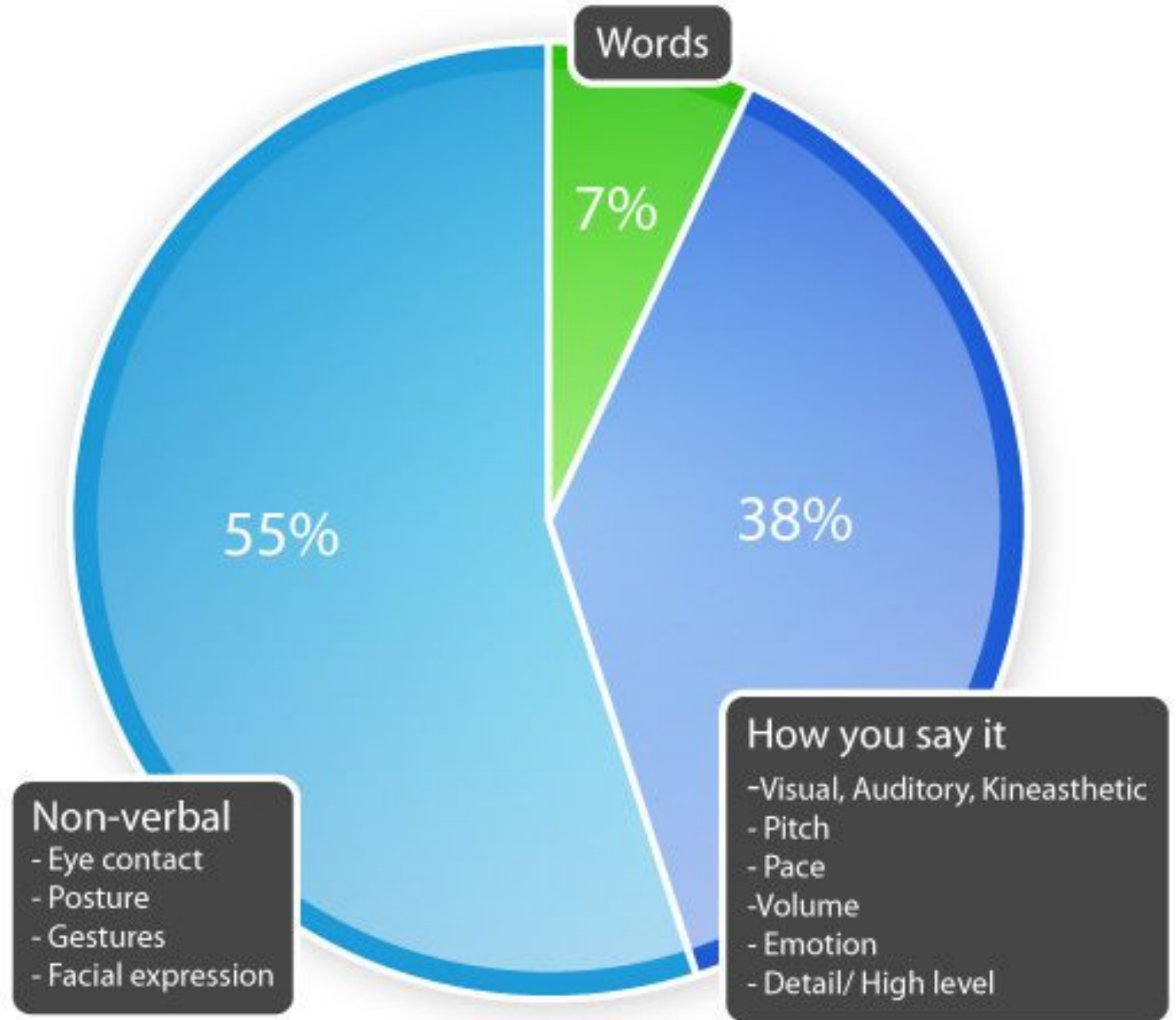
3 aspects of communication

Body language

Tone

Word choice

Which has the most influence?



What if

A well intended discussion amongst your team gets political and quickly turns ugly.

How do you feel, what do you do/say?

Setting limits



Boundaries



Assertive v. aggressive

What this all means for you

1

Expect tensions
and discomfort

2

Remember
people are
feeling raw

3

See challenges
as opportunities
for growth too

4

Decompress
after a
heated/difficult
interaction

1

Don't take it
personally (QTIP)

2

Empathize: "It
sounds really
frustrating."

3

*Find a reason to
care.*

The Big-3

A Visitors Code of Conduct

Staff need support with situations that go beyond the definition of dealing with a “difficult customer”.



Developing a Code of Conduct

Self-Assessment:

Do we need a policy?

Consult with Employee Assistance
Program

Drafting a Visitors Code of Conduct
Policy

The Policy

The City's employees *strive to provide a positive experience* for those visiting City facilities, by following the "Professional Standards of Conduct Policy."

In addition, the City supports a workplace that is *conducive to personal safety and security* and is *free from intimidation, threats or violent acts*.

VISITORS - CODE OF CONDUCT

The Town of Acton's employees strive to provide a positive experience for those visiting Town facilities, by following the "Professional Standards of Conduct Policy". In addition, the Town supports a workplace that is conducive to personal safety and security and is free from intimidation, threats or violent acts. The Town does not tolerate workplace violence, including the threat of violence by anyone who conducts business with the Town.

The Town will not tolerate harassing conduct that affects employment conditions, that interferes unreasonably with an individual's performance or that creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Complying with this Code of Conduct is required by all people doing business with Town employees.

Violators who do not comply with this policy may be asked to leave the premises.

Expected Conduct

- AVOID CAUSING DISTURBANCES OR DISRUPTIONS
- SHOW RESPECT FOR OTHERS, BUILDING FACILITIES AND PERSONAL PROPERTY OF OTHERS
- USE COMMON COURTESY WHEN INTERACTING WITH OTHERS
- DO NOT ENGAGE IN ANY LEWD OR OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOR
- ANY FORM OF VIOLENCE IS PROHIBITED
- SMOKING, DRINKING ALCOHOL OR APPEARING TO BE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ANY ILLEGAL SUBSTANCE IS PROHIBITED

Repeated violations may result in permanent suspension of facility privileges.

Thank you for your cooperation!



Steven L. Ledoux, Town Manager

Expected Conduct

Avoid causing *disturbances or disruptions*

Show *respect* for others, *building facilities* and *personal property* of others

Use *common courtesy* when interacting with others

Do not engage in any *lewd or offensive behavior*

Any form of *violence* is prohibited

Smoking, drinking alcohol or appearing to be under the influence of any illegal substance is prohibited

Repeated violations may result in permanent suspension of facility privileges

The Code of Conduct Allows for

A safe work environment

- An expectation of civil behavior
- Professional interaction between staff and customers

A welcoming City Hall experience leads to:

- Equal and fair treatment of all customers
- Efficient time management for staff

Upper Management support



Wrap-up

“People will forget what you said. They will forget what you did. But they will never forget how you made them feel.” Maya Angelou

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