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## CHOOSE DE-ESCALATION

### What is de-escalation?

De-escalation refers to the intentional use of communication and behavior techniques to reduce emotional intensity, restore calm, and prevent conflict from escalating.

Whether used in personal relationships, workplaces, schools, or public settings, de-escalation helps defuse tension before it boils over into aggression or harm.<sup>1</sup>

Though widely recognized in law enforcement and behavioral health fields, the roots of de-escalation stretch far deeper. The practice draws from traditional practices of nonviolence, trauma-informed care, and compassionate communication.<sup>2</sup> These methods have long been used in grassroots peacebuilding, caregiving, and educational spaces to help individuals feel heard and safe in moments of distress.

### How do people learn de-escalation?

Some people learn de-escalation through lived experience, especially in roles that involve caregiving, youth work, service provision, or mediation. Others pursue it through more intentional channels such as attending community trainings, workplace workshops, online programs, or roleplay-based learning spaces.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the path, one of the clearest takeaways from de-escalation education is the value and significance of showing up in tense moments with presence, attunement, and intention.

Organizations such as the Crisis Prevention Institute, Right To Be, and the Greater Good Science Center offer resources and trainings that build core skills in emotional regulation, nonviolent communication, and trauma-informed engagement. These programs often emphasize the importance of practice. De-escalation is more than a mere knowledge set, and instead encompasses a relational, situation-specific art that deepens with time and practice.<sup>4</sup>

### How do people implement de-escalation?

De-escalation is a practice that can be used anywhere there is tension: in homes, workplaces, classrooms, community events, or public spaces. Anyone, regardless of professional training, can use de-escalation strategies to calm themselves or others.<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Nonviolent Communication. (2015). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (3rd ed.). Puddle Dancer Press.

<sup>2</sup> Noll, D. (2017). *De-Escalate: How to Calm an Angry Person in 90 Seconds or Less*. Touchstone.

<sup>3</sup> Right To Be. (n.d.). *Our Guide to Conflict De-Escalation*. <https://righttobe.org/guides/our-guide-to-conflict-de-escalation/>

<sup>4</sup> Crisis Prevention Institute. (n.d.). *Create a Safer Workplace with De-Escalation Training*. <https://www.crisisprevention.com/>

<sup>5</sup> Pollack Peacebuilding Systems. (n.d.). *7 De-Escalation Skills Essential for Defusing Conflict*. <https://pollackpeacebuilding.com/blog/de-escalation-skills/>

fact, some of the most powerful interventions happen informally, between friends, family members, coworkers, or strangers in moments of distress.

While institutions may implement formal de-escalation protocols, the heart of the practice lies in voluntary, human-centered responses to conflict, violence, and aggression. Someone noticing rising tension can model a slow breath, reflect back what they hear, or gently guide a conversation toward pause. These small, often quiet interventions can shift the emotional temperature in potent and meaningful ways.<sup>6</sup>

### For what types of circumstances is de-escalation suited?

De-escalation is well-suited for interrupting social distress between people and groups.

### Does de-escalation work for preventing or controlling social distress?

Evidence from fields like education, healthcare, and behavioral crisis response suggests that de-escalation significantly reduces incidences of physical conflict and improves safety and connection.<sup>7</sup> In educational settings, de-escalation training has been shown to decrease student outbursts and increase positive adult-student relationships.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, de-escalation has been shown to support clinical and caregiving contexts by reducing aggressive incidents and improving trust.

While more rigorous studies are ongoing, initial findings consistently support the use of de-escalation as a promising practice for preventing emotional harm and redirecting moment of conflict into opportunities for mutual understanding.<sup>9</sup>

### Where else might I go to learn more about de-escalation?

- [Greater Good Science Center](#)—Information on emotional intelligence and empathy
- [Right To Be](#)—Accessible guides and training on conflict de-escalation
- [Pollack Peacebuilding Systems](#)—Professional resources on mediation
- [Crisis Prevention Institute](#)—Trainings for workplace de-escalation
- [Program on Negotiation \(Harvard Law School\)](#)—Academic insights into negotiation

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<sup>6</sup> Rosenman, E. D., et al. (2017). Promoting Workplace Safety: Teaching Conflict Management and De-Escalation Skills in Graduate Medical Education. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, 9(5), 562–566. <https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-17-00006.1>

<sup>7</sup> Gillen, P. A., et al. (2017). Interventions for Prevention of Bullying in the Workplace. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 1(1), CD009778. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD009778.pub2>

<sup>8</sup> University of Colorado Boulder. (2025, April 9). *Understanding Strategies and Resources to De-escalate Conflict, Request Support*. CU Boulder Today.

<sup>9</sup> Winslade, J., & Monk, G. (2000). *Narrative Mediation: A New Approach to Conflict Resolution*. Jossey-Bass.