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DE-ESCALATION TRAINING ACTIVITY LEADER GUIDE

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Contents

(Hover over a question and use Ctrl + Click to take you to its answer; or scroll down.)

Thank You for Accelerating Peace! 1
De-Escalation Skills Training Purpose 1
Activity Leader Guide Purpose 2
Presentation Materials 2
After the Session 3
Presentation Content Structure 5
1. **Opening** (3 Minutes) 6
2. **Orientation** (14 Minutes) 6
3. **Lesson** (15 Minutes) 11
4. **Guided Practice** (15 Minutes) 14
5. **Applied Practice** (15 Minutes) 15
6. **Reflection** (10 Minutes) 17
7. **Call to Action** (15 Minutes) 18

Thank You for Accelerating Peace!

Thank you for bringing a group together to learn better ways to communicate constructively, solve conflicts, and get along with each other.

We call these better ways "essential peace skills." They are the basics for increasing peace in our relationships and communities. Everyone should know them. You are helping make that happen! We are grateful.

De-Escalation Skills Training Purpose

De-escalation means taking steps to calm down a heated situation before it turns into a bigger conflict. It's about helping people cool down their emotions, communicate more clearly, and work toward a peaceful solution.

De-escalation is useful in many everyday situations, such as:

- Calming an argument between friends, family members, or coworkers.

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- Preventing a verbal conflict from escalating into a physical confrontation.
- Reducing tension during a heated disagreement in a meeting or group discussion.
- Soothing someone who is upset or frustrated in a customer service setting.
- Helping yourself or others stay calm during emotionally charged events.

The purpose of this training is to help participants learn and practice basic de-escalation techniques they can use to calm tense situations, prevent conflicts from escalating, and promote peaceful outcomes in their daily lives.

At the end of the training, participants will be able:

- Recognize early signs of conflict escalation.
- Use calming communication techniques to reduce tension.
- Apply a simple step-by-step approach to de-escalating conflicts.
- Practice self-regulation strategies to stay calm during heated moments.

People who may find this training especially useful include:

- Community volunteers and neighborhood leaders.
- Customer service workers and retail staff.
- Teachers, school staff, and youth mentors.
- Caregivers and health care workers.
- Social service providers.
- Faith leaders and congregation members.
- Event organizers and group facilitators.
- Anyone who wants to strengthen their ability to manage conflicts peacefully in their everyday relationships.

Now's your time to confirm that de-escalation is what you want to teach others. If yes, then continue reading. If no, you have options! We have trainings available on other essential peace skills, a series of short practical peace solutions sessions, and an action planning activity which you could lead instead. Write us at **volunteering@peacethroughaction.org** if you want to switch your activity.

Activity Leader Guide Purpose

This guide gives instructions to activity leaders (that's you!) for presenting an essential peace skills training session on de-escalation.

This activity leader guide is a companion to our activity delivery guide and activity delivery worksheet posted here. Those materials give instructions for planning and preparing your session.

You will use both guides: the activity delivery guide and worksheet for setting up your session and this activity leader guide for presenting it.

Presentation Materials

Our Peace Accelerators activity leader package webpage and de-escalation training webpage have all the materials you will need or want to have available when leading your session.

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To make preparation easier for you, we divide the materials into two categories: materials to print and materials with print and digital versions.

Materials to Print

Please have printed copies of the following items available when leading this session:

- **Activity Leader Guide**—for leading your session. (*If you prefer to read the script from a device rather than a print copy, you may. We strongly recommend you have a print copy in case of technology or power failure.*) Print one copy.
- **Activity Summary**—takeaway for participants; includes QR codes for the post-session survey, email sign-up, media consent, and other follow-up actions. Make enough copies for the estimated number of participants.
- **Session Sign-In Sheet**—for participants who wish to share their contact information. Print five or more copies.

Materials with Print and Digital Versions

These materials support your leadership of the session and participant learning. You may print them if you want, or you may use the digital versions we provide. The digital versions are accessible by displaying content on a screen, summarizing content aloud, directing participants to scan QR codes, and/or sharing hyperlinks with participants.

Leader Materials – If you decide to print them, make one copy for you.

- **PowerPoint Presentation**—optional visual aid to help participants follow the session.
- **Session Information Form**—for the leader to report how your session went.

Participant Materials—If you decide to print them, make enough copies for the estimated number of participants.

- **Participant Materials**—Cool-Down Exercise worksheet, De-Escalation Scenarios.
- **Post-Session Survey**—measures effects of the session on participants.
- **Media Release Form**—collects participant consent to use names, images, and voices in publicity.
- **List of Sources**—resource for activity leaders to increase their knowledge of the subject; optional takeaway for participants.
- Do Something Information Webpages and Sheets for activity leaders and participants on these subjects: anger, bullying, toxic polarization.
- Choose Peace Practices Information Webpages and Sheets for activity leaders and participants on these subjects: constructive communication, upstander intervention.

After the Session

After your session concludes, please complete the following steps:

1. **Complete the Session Information Form** (within a few days)

This quick form helps Peace Through Action understand how the session went, how participants engaged, and what improvements may be helpful.

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Session Content

1. Opening (3 Minutes)

Greeting and Introduction (2 Minutes)

De-Escalation Essential Skills Training

Welcome participants. Thank them for attending.

Introduce yourself. If all session participants already know your name and role you may skip an introduction. But please do still identify yourself as a Peace Through Action volunteer.

Welcome! Thank you for choosing to make time to join this session on de-escalation. I'm looking forward to spending time together learning how we can increase peace in our relationships and communities.

I'm [state your first name and last name.] [State any role you hold that explains why you are leading this session.]

I'm leading this session as a volunteer with Peace Through Action USA.

Mission (1 Minute)

Our Mission

Peace Through Action helps everyday people, like us gathered now, do something to increase peace in our relationships and communities.

What We Do

They go about their mission work several ways, including by producing training like this and supporting volunteers like me to present them.

2. Orientation (14 Minutes)

Centering (2 Minutes)

Orientation

Quiet and focus participants. We suggest a few techniques. Or offer your own practice.

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By the end of this session, you will be able to recognize signs of escalation, use calming communication techniques, and take practical steps to reduce tension in conflicts.

Start with Curiosity (3 Minutes)

What Makes a Great De-Escalator?

Ask participants to reflect on qualities that help someone calm a tense situation.

What do you think makes someone good at calming people down?

There's no right or wrong answer – feel free to shout it out or raise your hand and share.

If available, write answers on a whiteboard, flip chart. Otherwise, repeat them verbally.

After some responses …

These are all great. You already have experience around this.

Present the Four Core Skills (5 Minutes)

Core De-Escalation Skills

Introduce participants to four key skills they can use to de-escalate tension.

Now let's walk through four core skills that are especially helpful when trying to de-escalate tension.

1.) **Active Listening** – Reflect back what you've heard to help the other person feel seen and heard.
2.) **Tone Modulation** – Speak with a calm, steady tone and volume. Even when things feel tense, your tone can be grounding.
3.) **Non-verbal Communication** – Your body language matters. Leaning in slightly, soft expressions, and avoiding distractions all help.

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4.) **Situational Awareness** – Read the room. Notice who's present, what's happening, and adapt your response accordingly.

Have you ever seen someone use one of these skills well? Feel free to share a quick example!

Pause for participant responses.

Stories and Application (5 Minutes)

Share short real-world examples and invite participants to connect with the skills.

Let me share two real-world examples where de-escalation skills made a big difference…

Customer Service

Story 1: Customer Service De-Escalation

You just witnessed a situation at a candy shop where a customer was furious because they got the wrong type of nuts. The store employee stayed completely calm, kept their voice steady, and said, "I hear you. You're upset about getting the wrong bag, and I want to make this right."

They didn't interrupt, didn't argue, and kept a relaxed body posture with a slight lean forward and soft voice. Within a minute or two, the customer was visibly calmer, and the issue was resolved with a smile.

That was a simple example of how active listening and tone modulation can completely change the energy of a situation.

Family Gathering

Story 2: Family Gathering Conflict

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- *Provide each group, or each participant within the group, a Cool Down Exercises worksheet.*

Now it's time to practice connecting real-world behaviors with ways to cool them down.

Each group has a worksheet. One column lists escalation behaviors. The other column lists de-escalation solutions.

As a group, read each escalation behavior. Then find the de-escalation solution you think would be most effective in responding to it.

Record the letter of the de-escalation solution next to the escalation behavior.

Once you've matched your behaviors and solutions, pick one pair you'd like to share back with the full group.

Give groups 8–10 minutes to work.

Now, let's hear a few of your matches. What escalation behavior did you pick, and what de-escalation solution did you match it with?"

Invite a few groups to share.

Debrief prompts:

What patterns did you notice while matching?

Which de-escalation solutions felt the most powerful to you?

Were there any situations where it was hard to find a match?

Take a break here (5 minutes)

5. Applied Practice (15 Minutes)

Application of Core Skills

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Applied Practice

Role Play: De-Escalation

Facilitate trio role-play exercises where participants practice de-escalation in realistic conflict scenarios.

Set-up:

- *Divide participants into groups of three.*
- *Assign each participant a role:*
    - *Escalator (plays the upset or angry person)*
    - *De-escalator (practices calming the situation)*
    - *Observer (watches and gives feedback)*
- *Provide each group with 3 scenario half-sheets. It's okay if the groups work with some of the same scenarios.*

Now we're going to dive into practicing de-escalation skills in real-life situations. I am passing out a set of conflict scenarios to each group.

Each group will have three roles.

One person will play the Escalator - someone who's upset or angry.

One person will be the De-escalator – who's trying to calm things down.

One person will be the Observer - watching how the situation unfolds and giving feedback afterward.

It's up to your group who wants to play which role.

Each round will last about 1–2 minutes. Then you'll rotate roles so that everyone gets a turn.

Observers, after each round, please share feedback to the other two people in your group using these questions:

- What did the de-escalator do that was helpful?

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- Can you think of one real-life situation coming up where you could apply a de-escalation skill?

Would anyone like to share your thoughts on either of these questions?

Invite 1–2 brief responses.

7. Call to Action (15 Minutes)

Session Summary (2 Minute)

Call to Action

Key Takeaways

As we get close to completing this training, I want to reinforce the four core skills that are especially helpful when trying to de-escalate tension.

1.) **Active Listening** – Reflect back what you've heard to help the other person feel seen and heard.
2.) **Tone Modulation** – Speak with a calm, steady tone and volume. Even when things feel tense, your tone can be grounding.
3.) **Non-verbal Communication** – Your body language matters. Leaning in slightly, soft expressions, and avoiding distractions all help.
4.) **Situational Awareness** – Read the room. Notice who's present, what's happening, and adapt your response accordingly.

Call to Action (1 minutes)

Distribute session summary sheets to participants.

Peace Through Action has prepared information for you to take with you. It has QR codes and weblinks to actions to continue what we started today. I'll go through those steps now because there's no time like the present.

Post-Session Survey (4 minutes)

Complete

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