



SUPPORTING THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF YOUR STAFF

DEALING WITH AGGRESSION: DIRECT SERVICE DELIVERY IN COVID-19 REALITY

The Canadian Red Cross has an internal security team as part of its Risk Department that conducts internal and external trainings, resources and supports to protect the safety and security of people doing humanitarian work domestically and internationally. This fact sheet has been adapted from an internal audience and shared with you, our partners, to support your work, especially in the response to COVID-19 and direct service delivery agencies. Given the stress of COVID-19, financial impacts, limited resources and restricted mobility we have noted an increase in aggression by clients and third parties. The objective of this fact sheet is to support de-escalation in an effort to ensure the safety and security of front-line personnel.

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WHAT ARE SOME FACTORS THAT CAN ESCALATE ANGER OR AGGRESSION?

There are many factors that can escalate anger or aggressiveness including but not limited to:



- General stress and impact resulting from COVID-19
- Insecurity or uncertainty about the future
- A lack of understanding about next steps and how to access resources
- Lack of choices or real/perceived lack of agency
- Perceived power imbalances
- Inconsistent messaging or perceived inconsistent messaging.

DE-ESCALATION

Remember when communicating with a person who is angry or frustrated it is important to: stay calm, give them your undivided attention and practice active listening. This means hearing not only the words that are being said but also listening for the complete message. Show empathy to the individual's situation and work together to problem solve and find a solution. Remember to set clear boundaries and expectations for a respectful conversation.



- ▶ Don't forget your language and behavior should align with your organizational principles and mandate.
- ▶ Follow your organization's relevant policies, and generally you should not tolerate bullying or harassing behavior. To ensure your own safety and security end conversations if you are feeling threatened.

TIPS FOR DE-ESCALATION

As every situation will be different, the tips below are meant to act as a guide and the application will vary depending on the circumstances and nature of the service delivery, including whether the conversation is in person or over the phone.



Context and setting.

Be mindful of the context and setting for the conversation. The person's immediate environment or use of substances such as alcohol, drugs or prescriptions could impact the conversation.



Body language and tone.

Be mindful of your own body language and tone of voice as these can either assist to de-escalate or increase tension. Try to maintain a calm and neutral tone of voice and a non-threatening/open posture (i.e. do not cross arms). Allow for physical space between you and the other person.

- Keep an open frame physically (avoid crossing your arms or taking what could be considered an aggressive stance with your body)
- Consider your eye contact and how your physical gestures could be construed
- Keep physical space, especially in the context of COVID-19 impacts
- Stand at an angle to protect your own safety and security
- Be mindful of your own triggers for anger and have a plan for dealing with triggers



Listen, acknowledge information and show empathy.

Provide the opportunity for the person to explain their situation and acknowledge, both verbally and physically when possible, the information that is being shared. Try to listen and not interrupt as this can increase frustration. Remember to speak clearly and slowly, especially if the language you're communicating in is not the person's first language.

Consider saying,

“Can you explain the situation and then we can work on a solution together?”

“Thank you for bringing this to my attention.”

“I can understand why this is distressing.”

- Try to use the other person's name and be prepared to repeat yourself.
- Ensure you give enough space for the person to speak and practice active listening.



Keep it factual and check your understanding.

Try to keep things factual and outline the situation to ensure you have a clear understanding of the issues.

Consider paraphrasing,

“Let me check if I understood all the facts properly.”

Let the person you're speaking to know what measures and actions you can take to support them, then outline clearly what things are beyond your control.



Find common ground and offer solutions.

Work together to find a solution on a common issue, concern or area of concern.

Consider saying,

“It sounds like we are both concerned about ...”

“Let's work together to find a solution.”

“Here are a couple of options... How does that sound to you?”



Plan ahead and have alternate strategies.

Have a plan in place for potential difficult or aggressive interactions. If in person, plan to work and meet in pairs and in an open and safe environment. You will have to balance the need to have a confidential conversation with ensuring a safe 2 meter distance or other protective measures.

Consider handing the conversation over to an alternate person or supervisor, if required, at times speaking with someone different can help de-escalate the situation.

Trust your instincts, if the de-escalation is not working or if you are concerned about your safety and security disengage – see the “Strategies for Disengaging” section.



Remember your own self-care.

Dealing with angry or upset individuals can be stressful and tiring. It is important to remember your own health; take breaks particularly after difficult interactions or phone calls. Engage in self-care activities, such as a short walk, look at a picture that brings back a fond memory or makes you laugh, talk to a friend, etc.

STRATEGIES FOR DISENGAGING

Sometimes you need to end an interaction with a client if a situation has escalated beyond your capacity to have a constructive conversation. Follow your organization's policies and procedures which may include referrals to a supervisor, a specialized workforce, or strictly disengaging.



When should you disengage?

- When the steps and methods set out in this fact sheet fail to reduce the aggression
- If the situation is making you fear for your safety
- If you are concerned about the safety of others
- Where a threat is made
- Where you are unable to keep 2 meters distance or abide by the applicable infection protection protocols of your organization
- Where the individual is too angry, and their anger is not sustainably de-escalating

Follow your organization's process or script for disengaging and/or declining service.



TAKE ALL THREATS SERIOUSLY AND REPORT IN ACCORDANCE WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION'S PROCEDURES.