



# A Brief Guide to De-Escalation Strategies

## PURPOSE

The information below provides a brief overview of conflict situations that museum professionals may encounter working in a visitor-based industry, and de-escalation strategies to resolve these situations. This document is designed to prepare you for a worst-case scenario. Most situations can be resolved before they reach a point of concern.

This document is adapted from resources prepared by the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology.

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## CONFLICT

Conflict exists when one person has a need that is not being met. The most negligent, unprofessional words anyone can ever say are, "It will never happen here."

In a visitor-based industry, you are bound to encounter conflict at some point. Some examples are sold-out programs or products, complaints about other visitors, or refusal to follow COVID-19 restrictions and safety protocols.

Always try to remember that visitors are people who also have feelings and emotions, likes and dislikes.

## UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE

Various types of violence

- Psychological Violence
- Physical Violence
- Behaviours / Concerns
- Threats
- Assault

### The Basics

- Anyone is capable of acts of violence
- Danger associated with violence is situational
- A threat of harm should **NEVER** be dismissed or discounted
- People who act always have an advantage over people who react

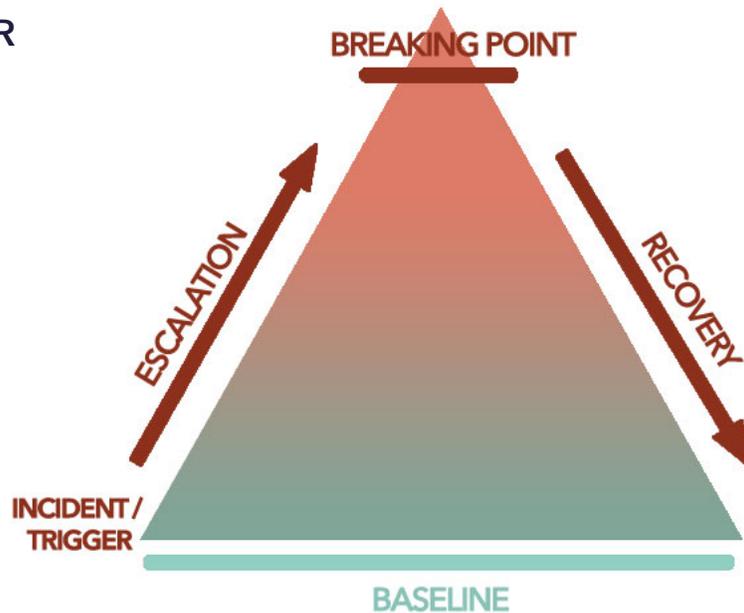
### Reasons People Commit Violence

- They are trying to control others
- They have feelings of anger or frustration due to feeling out of control
- They are retaliating against someone who has wronged them

## UNDERSTANDING ANGER

### Anger Escalation Scale

- Incident / Trigger
- Escalation
- Breaking Point
- Recovery



**Remember, it is not the person that is the problem, it is their behaviour.**

We need to find a way to change or lead that behaviour by de-escalating it.

### DE-ESCALATING CONFLICT: WARNING SIGNS

- Physical signs: Red-faced, clenched fists or jaw, rapid breathing, trembling
- Heightened anxiety / Hypervigilant: Pacing, restlessness, repetitive movements, excessive sweating
- Physical intimidation: Slamming doors, pounding tables, making threatening movements
- Verbal intimidation: Swearing, sneering, taunting, raised voice
- Threatening: Verbal threat of assault

### THE BIG QUESTION

**How do we interrupt the escalation before it hits a breaking point?**

## DEFUSING PROCESS

- Awareness
- Containment
- Problem Solving
- Breaking Point / Disengagement
- Closing
- Documentation

### Awareness

- Check in with yourself and breathe. How are you feeling?
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Keep at a safe distance with social distancing and observe the individual's verbal and physical behavior. Do not be afraid to back up or ask the individual to step back if they are too close. Never enter an enclosed area with an individual you do not know well enough to trust.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Evaluate their needs while being a great listener, acknowledge their problem.
- Let them speak!

### Containment

- Keep your body language non-threatening with a frontal turn. Stand straight and try to have your arms in a natural state, not crossed or with your hands in your pockets.
- Use effective listening skills, 80% listening / 20% responding.
- Show interest and try to understand their conflict.
- Be empathetic and non-judgemental, ask open-ended questions.
- Keep a measured tone, volume, and rate of voice.
- Avoid confrontational language:
  - Confrontational: *I can't..., we don't..., you must...*
  - More cooperative: *I don't think I can..., we usually don't..., you might try...*
  - Most cooperative: *What I can do is..., what we do is..., let's try...*
- Switch tactics.
- Use the referral technique. Refer the individual to a person of authority, such as a supervisor or manager, if available.
- Tap out. Create a signal with your colleagues so they know when you might need support. Alternatively, if your colleague is the one engaged in the situation, keep an eye on them, note if they may need you step in, and "tap them out".
- Change venues. Move outside or to another area of the facility—but always within eyesight of your colleagues.
- Offer options. Work to address the issue, but be ready to disengage if you find it too difficult to slow down the aggressor.

## Problem Solving

Identify options within your organization's means that could help de-escalate the situation:

- Ask them to return later.
- Offer a refund.
- Show them where they can make a complaint.
- Give out your manager's business card.
- Offer a mask if they do not have one.

## Breaking Point / Disengagement

We are trying to prevent someone from reaching this point and end the conflict.

- The first step is referring the individual to a supervisor or manager, if available.
- If the conflict is between two visitors, try to separate them, and work to de-escalate the aggressor.
- Consider if you need the visitor to leave the facility and / or if the RCMP should be called.
- If you cannot find resolution, politely disengage and end the conversation (breathe). Calmly observe the individual and wait for the RCMP (or local authorities) to arrive so they can take over.

## Closing

If you have reached this stage, the tension from the beginning of the interaction has probably dissipated.

Thank the individual for understanding and follow through with any of the alternative options you were able to offer (refunds, mask, etc.).

## Documentation

For your safety, document all incidents. Your organization should have a system for reporting incidents such as this, such as either a formal form or a simple e-mail to your employer.

When documenting an incident, it is important to include the following details:

- Personnel involved
- Where it happened
- Primary witnesses
- Date and signature
- All the *facts* of the incident (do not include emotionally driven descriptors)

## CONTACT US

If you have any questions, please contact [advisory@museums.ab.ca](mailto:advisory@museums.ab.ca).