

10 TIPS FOR DE-ESCALATING CONFLICT



1. **Don't take the bait.** Escalating conflict is a choice; don't go there. Let go of your need to control or manage the other individual(s). Choose to [de-escalate](#).
2. **Manage yourself.** Attend to your [body language](#) – ensure it is open, relaxed, and non-threatening. Adjust your position to be at eye level with the other person or group.
3. **Speak softly and slowly.** Be factual and use “I messages” rather than “you” statements (e.g., “I’m finding this difficult” rather than “You always mess things up.”)
4. **Be respectful.** Acknowledge the other’s point of view and position. Affirm that you’re committed to working through the issue to the best possible solution.
5. **De-personalize.** Clearly [separate the problem](#) from the people involved. Name the problem, externalize it, and work together to resolve it (e.g., “We seem to have different ideas about . . . do you agree?”; “What do you think about . . .? How can we work on this together?”).
6. **Listen carefully.** Rather than rehearsing your counter-argument in your mind, engage yourself fully in understanding the other’s perspective, needs, and interests. Ask open-ended questions; use active listening techniques to clarify what you’ve heard.
7. **Be tentative.** Use language that indicates your openness to other perspectives (e.g., Maybe . . .; What if . . .?; It seems like . . .; Perhaps . . .; I wonder . . .; I’m confused about . . .)
8. **Be strategic.** Think clearly and stay focussed on goals. Look beyond the surface conflict for underlying issues. Recognize what is, and isn’t, in your control to change. Reflect on what you have to offer the other individual(s). Challenge your own “all or nothing” thinking and irrational beliefs about winning and losing. Choose your battles wisely.
9. **Focus on the future.** You have a much better chance of influencing the future than the past. Keep the conversation in the present (i.e., “I am . . .” rather than “You always . . .”). Look ahead to define a win-win solution. Work together to create a positive outcome.
10. **Take a break.** There are physiological changes in our body in the midst of conflict and it takes time for those “[freeze, flight, or fight](#)” responses to diminish. Sometimes the best way to de-escalate conflict is to first take care of the physical and emotional reactions. Breathe deeply to relax, take a walk, distract yourself with Sudoku or Solitaire . . . just give yourself the time and space necessary to come back to the problem with renewed energy and a clear head.

