VERBALLY DEFUSING POTENTIAL VIOLENCE

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The Assault Cycle

✓ The Triggering Event(s)
✓ Escalation
✓ Crisis Point
✓ Recovery
✓ Post-Crisis Depression

The Triggering Events
Occurrence perceived by the individual as a serious threat to him/her.

Two Types:
1. Fear Inducing Events - Give the person the perception he is under threat or about to lose something of value.
2. Frustrating Circumstances – Give the person the idea that his/her efforts or demands have been useless.

Escalation Phase
Person’s body and mind prepare for a fight. He/She may respond physically or taunt the perceived threat, if it is a person.

Crisis Point
Aggressor explodes into violent acts against the threat.

Recovery Phase
Aggressor’s body relaxes and mind decreases its vigilance. The confrontation is seen to be over, even if temporary.
Post-Crisis Phase
While aggressor tries to return to stable base level, he/she often experiences fatigue, depression, and guilt.

Steps in Verbally Defusing Potential Violence

I. Observe the Situation/Read the Clues

II. Determine Your Safety
   A. Is the person getting calmer or getting more upset
   B. Can you be with this person or group and be reasonably safe?
   C. Should you call security, the police, or should you escape?

III. Leader Behavior
   A. FACIAL FEATURES
      - Relaxed
      - Serious (not stern) looks
      - Good eye contact (not staring)
      - Attentive, focused on the person
   B. BODY STANCE
      - Standing diagonally, about 3-5 feet away
      - Hands down to the sides, palms facing person
      - Weight equally balanced on both feet
   C. VOICE TONE
      - Calm, quiet, remember to breathe
      - Slow paced
      - Sound confident that you can help them
   D. ATTITUDE
      - I have time for you
      - You are an important person
      - Together we can make things better
      - Let’s talk about it

E. WORDS BEING SAID
“I'd like to see if we can work this out”
“Please tell me more about what happened”
“Tell me about how you have been unfairly treated”
“Why do you say….”
“Let’s go to a place where we can talk more privately”
Listen to the story without changing the subject/interrupting
Clarify those things you don’t understand
Listen on two levels—the meaning of the words and the emotional meaning
Use their words or similar words when you talk about the situation
Use words that show you understand how he/she might be feeling (e.g. “You must have been feeling like what you said didn’t mean anything.”)
Be willing to hear a differing views or opinion. Look for the areas you can agree on

Setting Limits

“If you continue to yell, I will ask you to leave”
“I understand you are angry, but treating the staff this way is not acceptable”
“Take some time to cool off, and we will talk later this afternoon”

Refocusing

“Now that I have heard your complaint, I’d like to talk about what we can do to improve things”
“I don’t understand how swearing at me will improve things”
“I can't help you when you are yelling instead of telling me what’s wrong”
If you can’t help, take them to the person who can

Ending the Interaction

Complete the problem solving process.
Break it down into doable steps
Review any agreements and conclusions
Discuss future interactions/follow-up (if applicable)

Future Risk/Involving Others

Is potential danger gone?
♦ Do you need to report this? If so, to whom?

The Environment

Arrange the room and seating in a manner so that you:
♦ can get out of the door
♦ can place a desk/table between you and the other person
♦ don’t block the path to the door
♦ Remove any heavy, items that can be thrown
♦ Remove sharp objects

Safety Planning

♦ Alert others when talking to a potentially “dangerous” person
♦ Meet in an accessible (not isolated) room
♦ Plan an interruption to check safety
♦ Have a safety code to call another person if the situation escalates
♦ Meet in a public place, if it is safer
♦ Follow your company’s violence prevention plan
♦ Review the company plan yearly