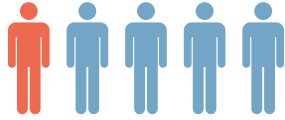


YOUR GUIDE TO

De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations



Did you know . . .



1 in 5 people have experienced violence at work.



Workplace violence has risen by 25% since 2015.



Workplace violence costs employers an estimated \$15.9 billion every year.

De-escalation training is critical for staying safe.

When things get heated, the question isn't *if*, but *how* you respond – it can mean the difference between staying safe or someone getting hurt.

When you know how to calm an angry or hostile person, you create a safer environment for everyone. You transform a potentially violent situation into an opportunity to build connection and trust.

But with the wrong approach, the risk of violence starts to boil.

This guide offers practical, trauma-informed strategies to respond safely and confidently when situations escalate.



Check out our full [**De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations**](#) workshop!



Rarely can a response make something better – what makes something better is connection.

– BRENÉ BROWN

What does being trauma-informed have to do with de-escalation?

You or someone you know has likely been impacted by trauma. In fact, 70% of people will experience a potentially traumatic incident at some point in their lives.

Trauma hinders our ability to regulate our emotions because it impacts our stress response. A threatening situation can trigger an involuntary stress response, causing us to react in ways that don't always make sense to those around us.

Taking a trauma-informed approach means responding to others with curiosity and compassion, especially when we don't understand their behaviour. When we know the reasons behind someone's anger, we can respond with tools and skills that prioritize safety, respect individual choice, and highlight strengths.



People who are regulated in their response always have an advantage over people who react.

What do you need to do to be trauma-informed?

At CTRI, our approach is grounded in the five principles of trauma-informed care. When these principles guide your response during high-stress situations, the outcome shifts.

- **Promote awareness:** Explore and better understand trauma through training and dialogue with others.
- **Shift attitudes:** Approach people with empathetic curiosity.
- **Foster safety:** Focus on both physical and psychological elements of safety.
- **Provide choice:** Ensure that there are meaningful opportunities for choice.
- **Highlight strengths:** Emphasize strengths to enhance resilience, connection, and understanding.

Essential Steps to Trauma-Informed De-escalation

Violence isn't always premeditated – it's often situational, reactive, and fueled by trauma or unmet needs.

No two situations are the same, but these steps act as a blueprint that you can apply to any potentially violent situation.



1. Do a quick self-check.

2. Consider where you are.

3. Check your surroundings.

- Are you alone?
- Where are the exits?
- Are you in danger of physical harm? Do you need to remove yourself and call for help?

4. Observe the person's behaviour. Watch how they move, and listen to what they're saying.

5. Choose an approach.

Are you ready to respond with a trauma-informed and open mindset?



DISENGAGEMENT

Disengagement and knowing your exit start right at the beginning. You can disengage at any point things feel unsafe.

The ideas below are helpful in removing yourself from an escalating situation.

- a) Politely end the conversation.**
- b) If the person doesn't leave, warn them that you will call for help, and be prepared to do it!**
- c) Leave the situation. Back away slowly without turning your back to them, and keep an open, nonthreatening posture.**
- d) Notify the appropriate people immediately.**



Connection

Your goal here is to help the person feel heard and understood. When you listen to what they have to say, you can build connection and understand their needs, so you can then problem-solve and de-escalate the situation with care and respect.

Here are some helpful practices for managing highly emotional situations:

- Seek to understand where they're coming from.
- Use effective listening skills.
- Show interest and try to find common ground.

Practical Tips for Connection

Rarely will the perfect response make something better – what does help is connection. Things like using each other's names, slowing down, offering the other person a drink, or finding common ground are great ways to build connection.

- **Match body language:** Align with their height and eye level.
- **Use names:** Know their name and share yours.
- **Shift the setting:** If it's safe, suggest moving or walking.
- **Communicate attentively:** Validate their feelings, provide gentle encouragement, and paraphrase to show understanding.



HOW DOES THIS IMPACT YOU?

Attempting any of these strategies while activated can have the opposite effect. That's why it's essential to know what activates you, and to keep your own regulation strategies top of mind.



Common De-escalation Pitfalls (And What to Do Instead)

What not to do:	What to do instead:
Take it personally	Stay grounded
Why are they coming at me like this?	Remind yourself: <i>This isn't about me. I can stay calm and present.</i>
Try to control the person	Offer choice
"You need to calm down."	Use collaborative language: "Would it help to step outside or take a break?"
Minimize their feelings	Validate their experience
"It's not that serious."	"It makes sense that you're feeling overwhelmed right now."
Match their intensity	Model calm regulation
Don't raise your voice or speed up your speech.	Lower your tone, speak slowly, and use open body language.
Rush the process	Create space
"Let's just fix this and move on."	Allow time for connection before diving into solutions.

Tools You Can Start Using Today

- [Workplace Violence Risk Assessment](#)
- [7 Tips for Defusing Potentially Violent Situations](#)
- [Styles of Anger Assessment](#)

This guide is just the beginning. [In our workshop](#), we dive into practical strategies for each stage, case studies, and advanced communication tools so you'll feel confident in any situation.