

De-escalation Tip sheet

This tip sheet can serve as a guide for providers for De-escalating incidents. Remember, state agencies often rely on this information when reviewing critical incidents. The success of good de-escalation is that an incident was avoided, although even with the best intentions at times restraints will still occur. One of the most effective ways for de-escalating an incident is ensuring that the youth has a restrictive procedures plan, staff are aware of the plan and using the information from the plan during the incident. Although current regulations maintain that only youth who have been restrained 4 times in a 3 month period of time require a restrictive procedures plan, best practice indicates that all youth should have a plan, even if it is never used.

In addition to the restrictive procedure plan, or in lieu of a restrictive procedures plan, staff should consider the following questions prior to going “hands-on.”

- Was the situation isolated?
- Was active/reflective listening used?
- Did staff speak calmly/respectfully?
- Did staff demonstrate understanding before making requests?
- Did staff suggest positive outcomes?
- Did staff give space?
- Did staff give youth time?
- Did staff recognize that a known trigger wasn't responded to?
- What else can we try?

Staff members can also use non-verbal techniques that include:

- Planned ignoring – simply ignoring the event can often de-escalate an incident since the youth doesn't have an active audience
- Staff's presence / proximity - walking away, backing up, giving space, or having a staff that the youth is comfortable with help out are all examples of positive staff presence.
- Eye contact; expression; body language; gestures
- Touch prompt (slight pat on shoulder of upper arm; staff should use discretion based on relationship with youth, if a youth doesn't like to be touched, this would not be an effective tool).

Pitfalls that are potentially counter-productive to de-escalation include:

- Reciting program rules to the youth (staff informs the youth that he or she is breaking the rules, thus they should calm down), wait until the youth is calm or a more appropriate teachable moment presents itself to positively explain rules.
- Informing the youth of consequences they are or will receive for escalating, telling a youth that they will have to do more chores since they misbehaved, for

example, can lead a youth to think calming down doesn't really matter since they are already in trouble to begin with.

- Accusing the youth; using "you" and "why" messages, for example, you are acting like a baby, or why are you acting like a jerk. Often times responding with understanding works better, "I know you are angry, let's calm down and talk about why you are so mad?"
- Antagonizing or ridiculing the youth
- Being judgmental
- Being sarcastic/cynical
- Using closed communication, saying this is non negotiable rather than suggesting that the youth can talk with them about why they are mad.
- Counter aggression – responding to the youth's aggression with aggression

In addition to the tips above, the major vendors of safe crisis management include strategies and techniques to de-escalate a situation. If one technique is not successful, staff can and should use another technique. Since every restraint event is unique, the key to de-escalation is knowing what triggers may result in a behavioral crisis for that individual youth.

Even with the best de-escalation techniques, emergency situations can occur where de-escalation may not work. When this happens there are tips while youth are in a restraint that can calm the youth and end the restraint event quicker. When these situations occur it is crucial to debrief after the event to prevent future events from occurring. This debriefing should include a discussion about de-escalation approaches used, why de-escalation was not effective and lessons learned for de-escalation strategies particular to that youth for the future (these lessons should also be added to that youth's restrictive procedures plan).

Tips for ending a restraint sooner:

- De-escalating the youth and not agitating them (if youth's anger is focused on an individual staff, he/she should leave the area). The staff should not feel that they have lost face because they needed to restrain the youth. Everyone can learn from a restraint event.
- Talking softly and positively. For example: "I know you are mad, we want to make sure you are safe then we want to hear from you so we can learn from this."
- Removing staff (that aren't needed) or kids from area. Audiences can sometimes make restraint events longer.

When a youth is ready for holds to be removed, the following is an effective process:

- One person should speak to the youth as calmly as possible without provoking an escalation.
- Release of holds should be gradual, with staff member stating expectations and what will happen prior to each movement in a positive way.

- Staff should offer words of encouragement and support to youth with each successful release/movement.
- Youth should be encouraged to move to a seated or standing position (staff should not release holds and leave a youth on the floor).

For assistance related to de-escalation please contact your OCYF or OMHSAS Regional Office or the Bureau of Program Integrity:

Office of Children Youth and Families

Western Region: 412-565-2339

Central Region: 717-772-7702

Northeast Region: 560-963-4376

Southeast Region: 215-560-2249

Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services:

Western Region: 412-565-5226

Central Region: 717-705-8395

Northeast Region: 570-963-4335

Southeast Region: 610-313-5844

DPW, Bureau of Program Integrity: 717-772-4615