

De-Escalate with Confidence: Guidelines for Managing Emotional Situations



OMSSA EXCHANGE

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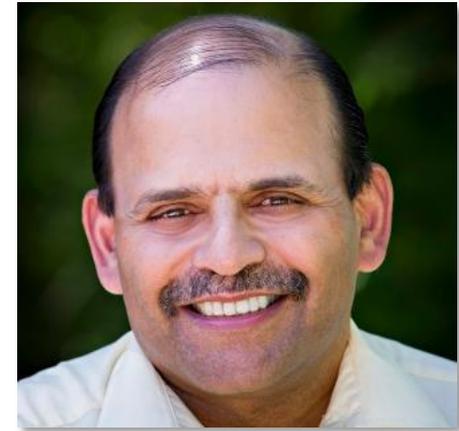
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ONTARIO MUNICIPAL SOCIAL
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About SHARAD KERUR

- 30+ years association / non-profit work experience
 - Association of Municipalities of Ontario (senior director)
 - Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (executive director)
- Professionally trained mediator (Harvard, York U., St. Stephens)
- Certified Conflict Management Coach
- Certified Conflict Dynamics Profile practitioner
- Certified Workplace Fairness Analyst
- Educator in conflict resolution, mediation and difficult conversations
- Founder and CEO of Resolution Pathways



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QUESTION

1. What interested you about this session?
2. What situations of escalated behaviours you have encountered?



How we hope de-escalation techniques will work



Crises don't just happen

- A precipitating event has occurred - their normal coping mechanism is not working
- There is an escalation of **emotion**, imbalance, powerlessness, and a decrease in control
- The person is not acting and responding from a **rational / thinking** standpoint.
- **Key Causes:**
 - Incompatible goals
 - Identity and Moral Issues
 - Past Grievances and Injustice
 - Struggles with Systems

ESCALATION in Action

The Central Park birdwatching incident was a confrontation on May 25, 2020, between Amy Cooper, a white woman walking her dog, and Christian Cooper (no relation), a black man birdwatcher, in a section of New York City's Central Park known as the Ramble.

Disclaimer:
Video may be disturbing to some. Used here only for education training purposes.



Ask yourself:

- What did you observe?
- Did you find yourself making a judgment?
- What might be the consequences of judgments when attempting to de-escalate?

5 changes that occur as matters escalate

1. A move from light tactics to heavy tactics.

- Light tactics - persuasive arguments, promises, and efforts to please the other side
- Heavy tactics - threats, power plays, violence

2. Conflict grows in size

- numbers of issues expands - parties devote more resources to the struggle

3. Issues move from specific to general - relationship deteriorates

- development of extreme positions, and perception that other side is "evil."

4. Number of parties grows from one to many

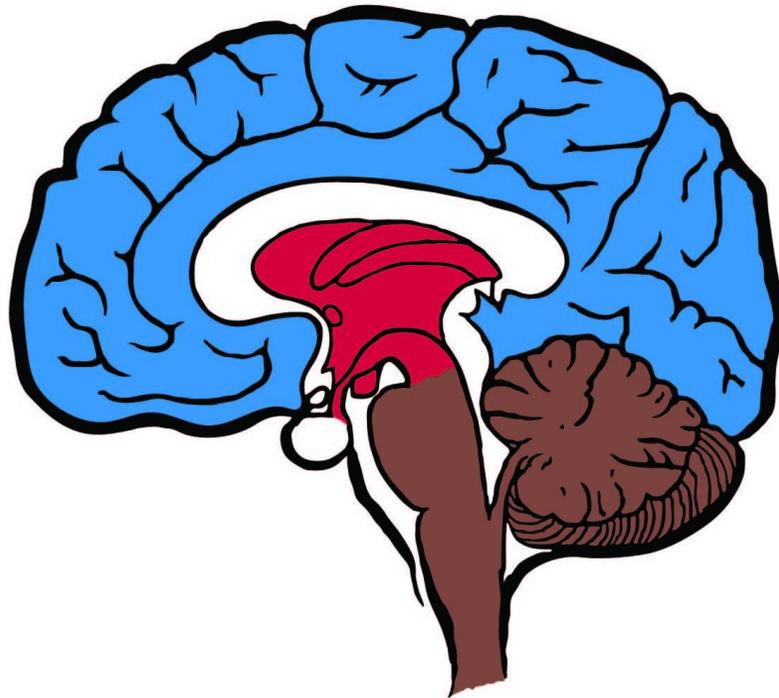
- more and more people and groups get drawn into the conflict

5. Goal changes from "doing well" → winning → hurting the other

What we will talk about

- A neuroscience primer
- Attributions of blame
- Triggers
- Identity
- What we can learn from hostage negotiators and crisis intervention teams
- Key Skills and a Process

A Neuroscience Primer: Our 3 Brains at Work



- Reptilian Brain (controls the body's vital functions such as heart rate, breathing, body temperature and balance)
- Limbic System (controls emotions)
- Neocortex (controls logic, thinking, reasoning)

Our Brain at Work (efficient – not effective)

RED Brain



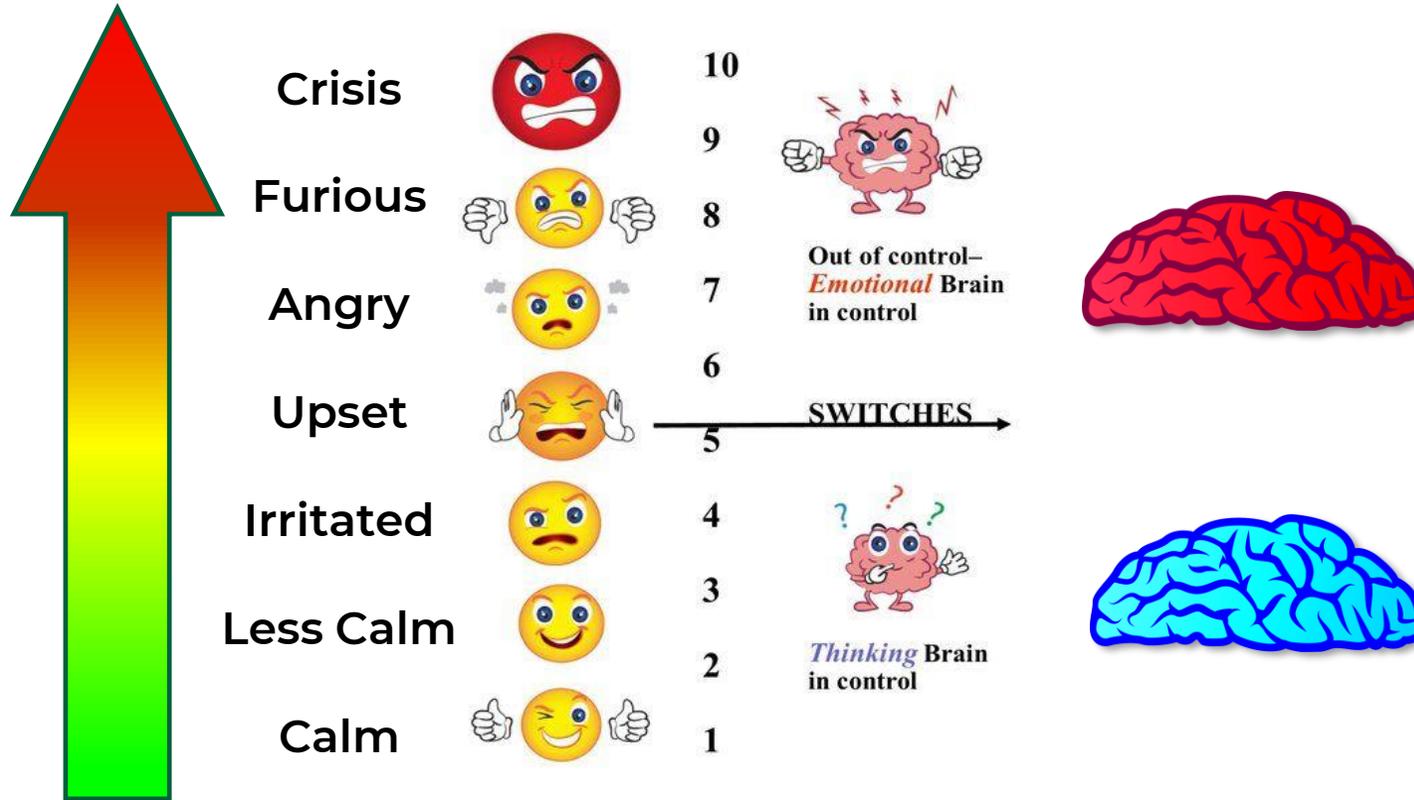
- All creatures have one
- Keeps us safe – where emotions reside
- Always active – always on high alert
- Treat vs. Threat (fight / flee) switches
- Very quick to jump in
- **Gets us into trouble**

BLUE Brain



- Only humans have one
- Thinking brain
- Calmer side – ability to reason, use logic
- Hides behind **RED** brain for protection
- Slower to re-act
- **Gets us out of trouble**

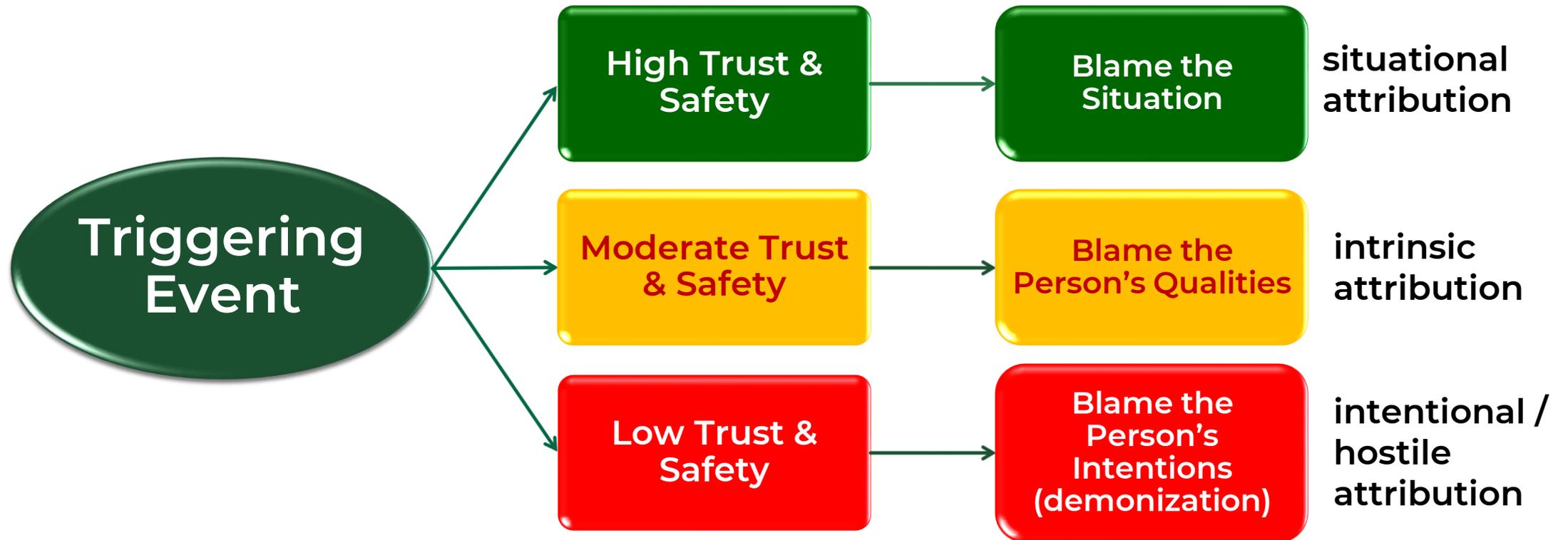
What Happens We Get Angry? (The Anger Thermometer)



Our goal:
Shift
from **RED** Brain
to **BLUE** brain

1. Shift Ourselves first
2. Shift the other person next

“Attributions of blame” are based on feelings of Trust and Safety



Understanding “TRIGGERS”

Something that was:

1. **SAID or DONE** (or not said or not done)
2. that **CHALLENGED, THREATENED or UNDERMINED ...**
3. a **VALUE, a NEED** or an aspect of our **IDENTITY**

Conflict occurs when we perceive that one or more of our values, needs and/ or aspects of our identity are being challenged, threatened or undermined by another person.

Cinnie Noble
Conflict Management Coaching: The Cinergy™ Model

#kindlequotes

Identity

- How I see myself
 - My competence
 - Whether I'm a good person
 - My worthiness
- Can knock us off balance when threatened

When these get “stepped on” or ignored, resistance is increased and behaviours get escalated.

Autonomy	freedom to make decisions our own
Affiliation	sense of connectedness
Appreciation	desire to feel understood and valued
Role	desire for a role we like, that we're good at and that is valued
Status	our standing in comparison to others
Fairness	how we are treated

Shifting from **RED** to **BLUE**

It's not a
light switch

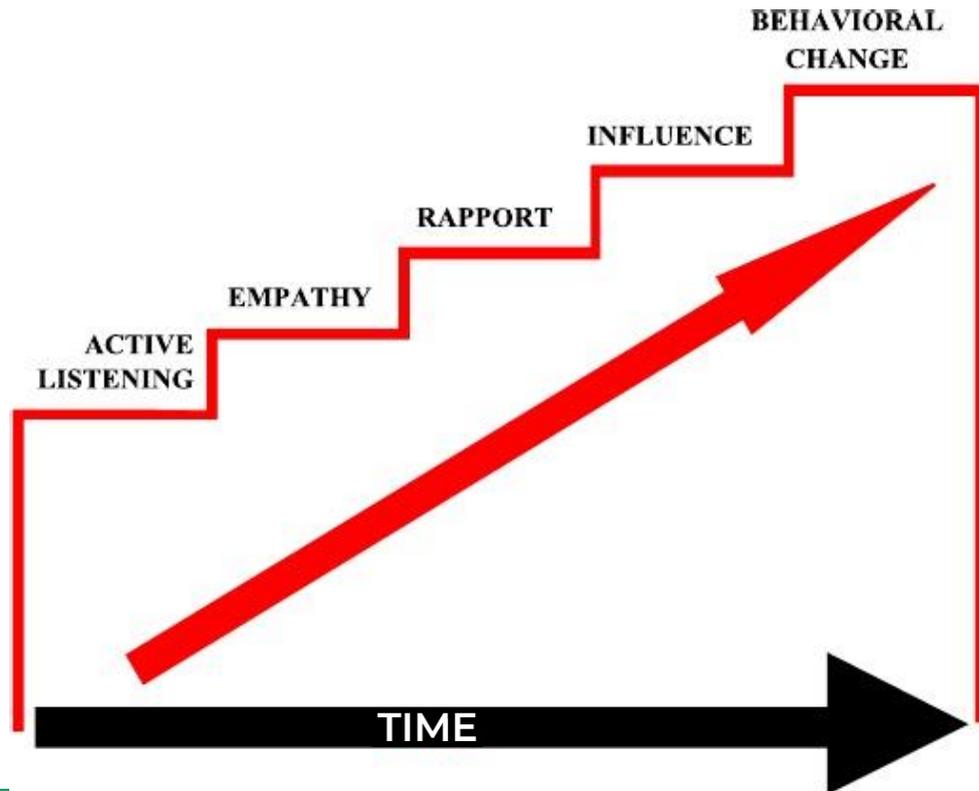


It's a
dimmer switch

There is a
process we
can follow



What can we learn from hostage negotiators and crisis intervention police teams?



- The FBI’s “Behavioral Change Stairway Model”
- listening and empathy are major first steps to de-escalate and building rapport
- it takes time and patience and should not be rushed
- the skills needed can be learned by anyone
- <https://bit.ly/3kjpCFB>

In a escalated situation there are 2 people involved **YOU and the Other person**

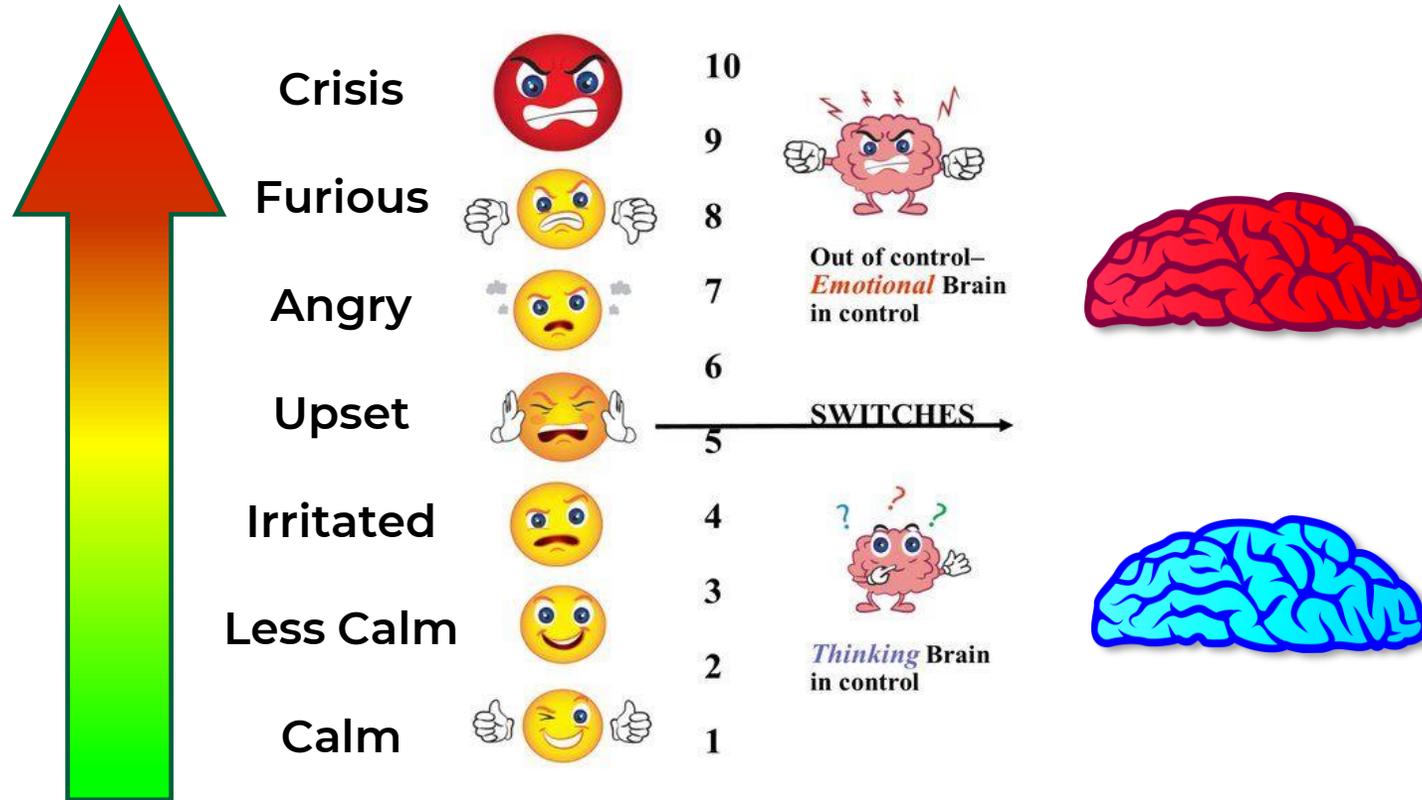
And the most important person to get under control first is

YOU

Your **RED** brain
will likely fire as a
means of
protection

- if it is telling you to flee and you do not feel confident or feel you are in danger then give in to it – seek a way out – defer the situation to someone else
- If it is telling you to fight – avoid the urge
- your primary objective is not to solve anything but to prevent the situation from getting worse – **your RED brain engaged with their RED brain will only make things worse**

Recall: The Anger Thermometer



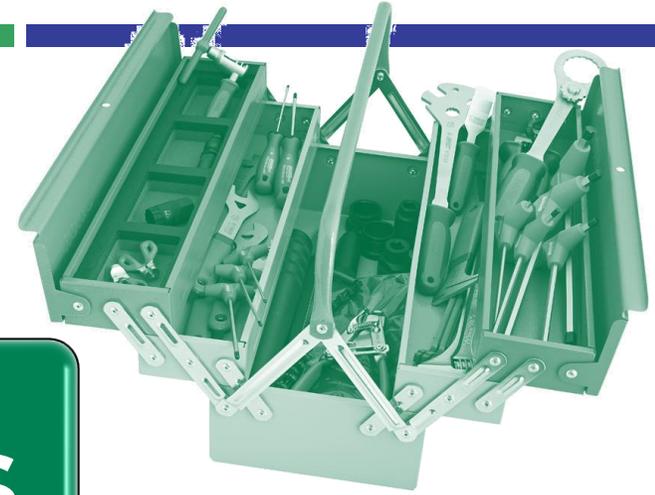
De-escalation Skills

Mindset

Non-
verbals

Verbals

Setting
Boundaries
(if necessary)



Your best skills at a glance

- Proper mindset
- Silence (and observing)
- Being curious (not judgmental)
- Acknowledgement
- (at the correct time) offering choices and asking open-ended questions
- Empathy & rapport building

Mindset

- Control yourself first – shift from your own **RED** brain
- Don't take it personally – stay calm and centred
- Use deep breathing to slow heart rate
- Suspend your judgement, follow Miller's law:
 - George A. Miller (1920–2012), Professor of Psychology at Princeton University:
 - *“that in order to understand what someone is telling you, it is necessary to assume the person is being truthful, then imagine what could be true about it”*
 - *“Go to the balcony”* if you need to (William Ury)
 - Inward detachment while outwardly remaining focused

Non-Verbals

- During “venting” listen carefully and in **TOTAL** silence (no “uh-huh’s” or “Mmm-Hmm’s”)
 - Good eye contact and non-verbal gestures will signal that you are listening
- Model good body language
 - Maintain eye contact
 - Head nodding
 - Moderate hand gestures
- Respect personal space
 - Minimum 2 to 3 feet distance
 - (If they “get in your face” – subtly take a step back – if it continues you may need to set boundaries)

Verbals (at the appropriate time)

DO:

- Share your name with them: *“Hi, I’m _____”*
- Use a calm, gentle, soft tone of voice
- Acknowledge and label their emotion
- Find something you can agree on with them:
 - **something that is true** (*“You’ve been waiting for over an hour. That does feel like a long time.”*)
 - **something in principle** (*“I definitely agree that everyone should be treated with respect.”*)
 - **something with the odds of what the person is saying** (*“I agree that other people would also say the rules are unfair.”*)

DON'T:

- Don't say *“calm down”* or *“stop being angry”*
- Don't provide excuses even if it is true (*“It's been a crazy busy day”* or *“We're really short staffed today”*)
- Don't make promises you can't keep

Setting Boundaries (if necessary)

- If they are invading your personal space, take a step backwards
- if it continues or behavior is belligerent, abusive, or disruptive, you will need to give clear, simple, and enforceable limits
- To get their attention:
 - prepare a specific phrase (*“Excuse me ... sorry to interrupt but ...”*)
 - wait for a break
 - raise your hand
- be gentle and soft in tone & voice
- be aware that this may inadvertently reactivate their **RED** brain
 - Shift back towards a **BLUE** brain by using an open-ended question - e.g. *“What’s the most important thing I should know right now?”*

(at the right time) Offering Positive Choices

- Offer choices for when emotions are lowering
- Ensure you control the choices offered
- Make the choices positive ones

(at the right time) Ask Open-Ended Questions

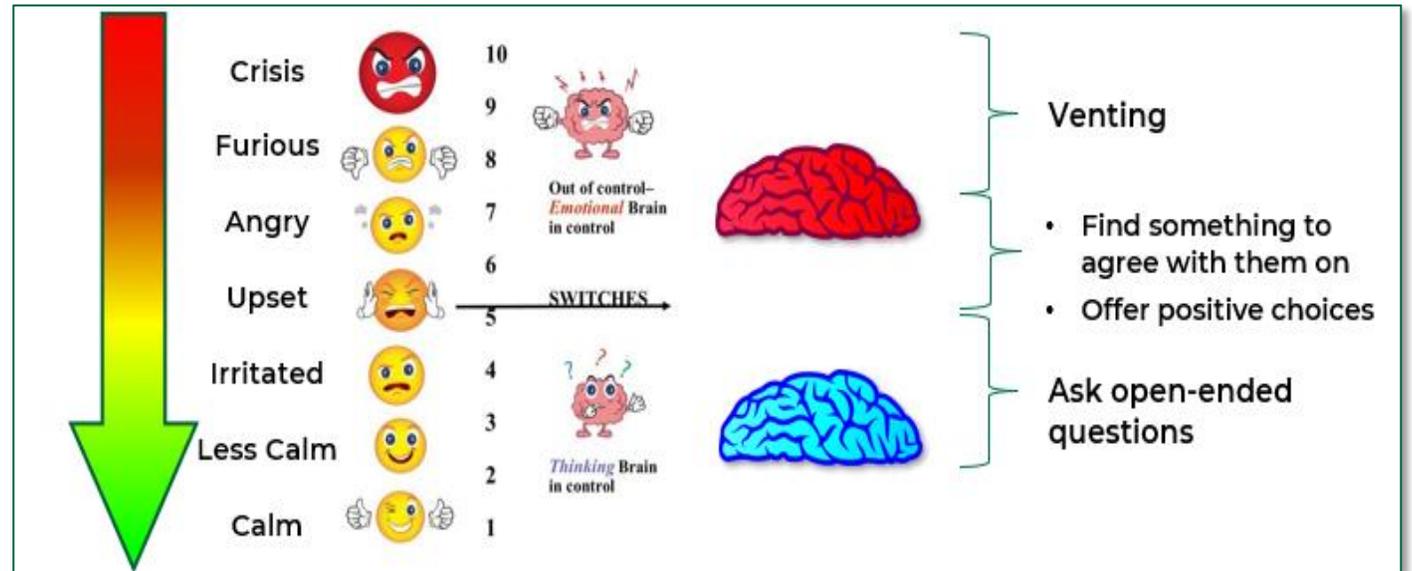
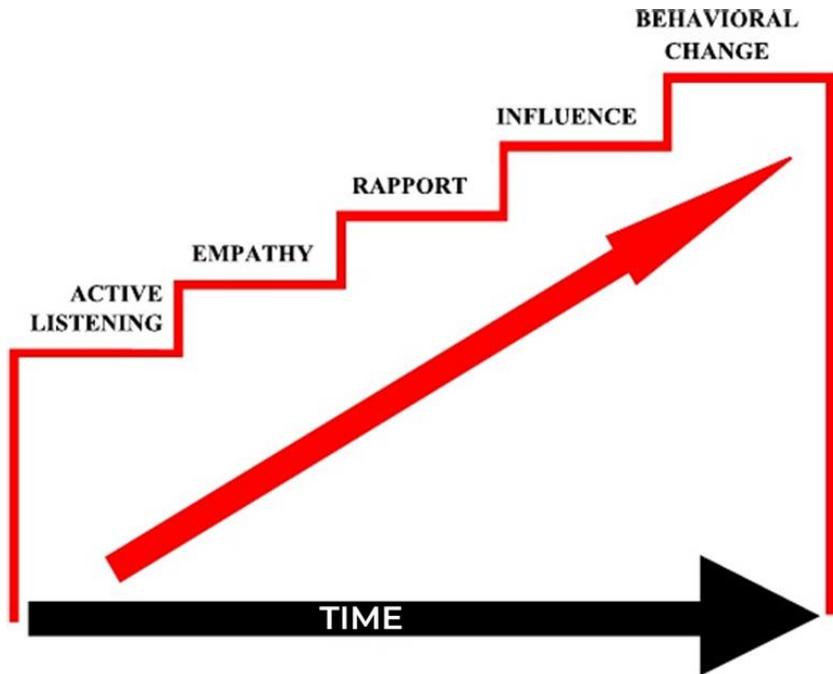
- Best open-ended questions begin with “WHAT” or “HOW” (avoid using “WHY”)
- Save open-ended questions when emotions have been significantly lowered
- Open-ended questions require thinking and when one is thinking emotions get lowered even more

“Empathy” is the key to De-escalation

- Empathy means seeing the pictures in their head by:
 - Not being judgmental
 - Looking at things from their perspective / perceptions
 - Focusing more on what they are feeling and less on what they are saying
- Listening with empathy is the best skill you will ever learn to move a tense situation to a better place

Empathy IS NOT the same as sympathy

Your “fridge” magnet SUMMARY



DE-ESCALATION in Action

*Source: PBS documentary on the
Memphis Crisis Intervention Team*



2 approaches to de-escalation



- **Proactive**

- Getting ahead of it before it happens
- Recognizing triggers, frames and traps
- De-escalation training, policies, protocols and on-staff experts

- **Reactive**

- Dealing with it once you are in the middle of it
- Taking certain actions to de-escalate the situation
- De-escalation training

Proactive Measures – Questions to Ask and Answer

- Where escalation “hotspots” are likely to occur in the organization?
- What training do people at those hotspots have to adequately manage escalated situations?
- Should managing escalated situations always be the responsibility of front-line staff?
 - If yes - what training have they received? Are there self-care supports for them?
 - If no - should there be an on-call, expert, de-escalation team available?
- Does the organization have de-escalation policies, procedures and protocols? If so, have these been reviewed lately? Have they been communicated?

A Final Thought ...

People will **forget** what you **said**.

People will **forget** what you **did**.

But people will **remember** how you made them **feel**.

- Maya Angelou (adaptation)

Thank you



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