

De-Escalation is not about being passive. It is about maintaining control of interactions without increasing danger. Abusive individuals may use anger, charm, intimidation or victimhood strategically. Escalation often occurs when control feels threatened. The goal is safety, not dominance.

Maintaining calm presence

- Slow breaths before responding
- Lower vocal tone
- Reduce body tension
- Maintain a neutral expression

Tone modulation and pacing

Example: Instead of “You can’t talk to me like that.” Use: “I’m going to continue this conversation when we can speak respectfully.”

Non-confrontational Language

Shift the conversation from a personal challenge to procedural clarity.

Avoid: “Calm down”; “You’re being aggressive”; “That’s not true”

Use: “I want to make sure I understand your concern.” “Let’s focus on the steps required.” “Here’s what the policy requires.”

Strategic silence

Silence prevents impulsive reactions, disrupts escalation rhythm, and forces responsibility back to the speaker

Skills:

- Pause after emotional statements
- Avoid filling space with justification
- Let hostility dissipate

Boundary-setting statements

Examples: “I will not continue this conversation if threats are made.” “We can discuss the case, but not personal attacks.” “I am here to explain the process.”

Structured Communication Techniques

Abusive individuals often escalate when they feel loss of control. Clear procedural explanations reduce perceived threat.

Use structure

- What is happening?
- Why is it happening?
- What options exist?
- What happens next?

Predictability lowers volatility.

Transparency to reduce perceived threat

Avoid vague statements like:
“We’re taking action.”

Instead: “You will receive written notice within 10 days. It will explain your appeal rights.”

Separating emotion from policy

When confronted with anger.
Instead of “You shouldn’t be upset.”

Use: “I understand this is frustrating. The policy requires action when arrears reach this level.

Redirecting to process and accountability

When conversation shifts to blaming the CP, attacking the system, or personal grievances, redirect.

“Today’s discussion is about your payment obligation.” “Our role is to enforce the order that was issued. “

Responding to manipulation

Neutralize blame shifting. Do not defend the CP. Do not debate facts outside your scope.

Avoiding collusion

Collusion sounds like: “Yeah, that’s unfair.” Or “I get why you’re mad at her.”

Instead try: “My role is to enforce the court’s order.” Or, “The payment obligation comes from the court order.”

Do not validate harmful narratives.

Staying focused on behavior and obligations

Shift from identity to action.

Instead of “You’re being irresponsible.” Use: “Payments have not been received for three months.”

Facts reduce argument.

Handling emotional outbursts safely

- Lower your tone
- State a boundary
- Offer choice.

Try statements like:

“If the yelling continues, I will end this call. We can reschedule when you’re ready to discuss the case calmly.”

Handling threats

If threats occur:

- End contact
- Document immediately
- Follow agency safety protocol

Maintaining Authority Without Escalation

Authority comes from predictability. Inconsistency invites power struggle. If you say you will end the call, end it.

Using policy as anchor

Policy reduces personalization and becomes the external authority.

Use phrases like:

- “The statute requires...”
- “Federal guidelines mandate...”
- “Agency policy requires...”

Avoiding power struggles

Power struggle indicators include:

- Arguing over tone
- Defending personal credibility
- Responding emotionally

If you notice these:

- Repeat process
- Repeat options
- Repeat consequences

Knowing when to disengage

Disengage when:

- Threats escalate
- Manipulation intensifies
- Conversation becomes circular
- Staff feel dysregulated

Have questions or want more training?

Contact the SAVES Center at info@SavesCenter.org

Or visit the SAVES website at www.SAVESCenter.org

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