Creating Community Safety
Tips on Verbal De-escalation

Most people at some point in their lives have de-escalated violence verbally. These tips build upon life skills, de-escalation experiences, and trainings that we have received from people in a wide range of professions. The skills to intervene in violence are the foundation for community safety work whether we’re working to increase safety at organizational events, demonstrations, within our offices, violence in public (i.e. bystander intervention), and from law enforcement. Verbal de-escalation has some core principles but also varies widely depending on the situation, people involved, relationships between those people, and how everyone is being perceived. This document is a guide for your principles and practice, but not every tip will work every time or work the same. Instead use these tips to guide your practice by using these tips in a variety of situations and incidents to build your instincts.

Choosing to Intervene: Before you decide whether or how to intervene it’s important to thoroughly assess the situation. Here are some questions to think about.

- **Assess** the risk to your personal safety.
- **Consider** your relationships to people involved and how you may be perceived by people involved.
- **Consent:** How do you know it’s ok to intervene?
- **Impact:** What are the costs or benefits of the situation? How will you make sure you don’t make things worse?

Verbal De-escalation Tactics:

- **Prevent:** Most conflicts have indicators – tension, individuals with a history of conflict, voices raising, or a crowd growing around people. Use all of your senses and previous knowledge to anticipate conflicts or violence and reduce potential conflicts, separate people, reassure people, or create conditions for increased safety.

- **Active Listening:** When people are in conflict or being aggressive to others they often do not feel seen or heard. Use your body and facial expressions to fully take in and listen to the person or people. Reflect back to the person what you’re hearing, “I hear that you feel…” Etc.
• **Empathize:** When a person feels validated it can reduce tension and increase their ability to follow directions, receive accountability, or negotiate a situation. Focus on speaking to the person from their perspective. Use phrases like, “I understand how that is hard,” “I agree with you that…,” “You’re right, that is a problem.”

• **Evade/Escape:** Sometimes the best way to de-escalate a situation is to evade or escape it, or to help a person who’s being targeted to get away. Evading can be moving yourselves and other affected people away from the incident to a safer space. Or if you’re witnessing harassment or violence one way you can help people escape by pretending to know them, “hey it’s so good to see you.” To start a conversation with the person to begin to see what sort of support they could use. Use additional tactics like distraction or gathering people to assist you in being able to move yourself or targeted individuals away from harm.

• **Distraction/Refocus:** Distraction can be a way to de-escalate a situation without having to be in close proximity. Loud noises from a distance, flickering lights on or off from a nearby building, can be ways of de-escalating from afar. Distraction up close can be about refocusing the person or conversation, ask them to take a walk with you. Or, propose an alternative plan or idea.

• **Gather People:** People act differently when there are other people observing. If you’re de-escalating a situation in an area where there are more people you can bring people towards the situation. You can also mention the incident. “Do you see what’s happening over there? This isn’t ok. That person looks like they need help.”

• **Use Humor:** Humor can lighten a situation and make people feel more connected and compassionate towards each other. Especially if you can make a person who is acting aggressively or causing harm to laugh. However, a note of caution, using humor to condescend or belittle someone can escalate a situation.

• **Give Choices:** When people are in the midst of causing harm or harassing people, they can be very sensitive to power dynamics, and can sometimes feel like they have limited choices. You can still give people choices that allow them to operate within conditions that create more safety for everyone. You can make statements like, “I need to ask you to either stop yelling, or move into the other room.”

• **Use Your Voice:** Your vocal tone, the pace that you’re speaking at, and volume can be used to convey a calming presence, respect, or power as needed. When a person is being aggressive or agitated, it can help to speak slightly slower or quieter than them while focusing on them. This will encourage them to work to listen which may make them more present and able to listen to your directions or the boundaries of others.
• **Body Language:** Similarly to using your voice posture, eye contact, and body language can convey a series of messages to another person. Having open arms and ensuring your hands are visible can de-escalate a situation. Slower movements can also work as well. In some instances, conveying authority by making yourself taller, speaking louder, putting your shoulders back, and pushing your chest up, can be helpful. For other situations a less powerful and more submissive stance including lowering shoulders, concave chest, eye contact that is focuses on the nose as opposed to the eyes, can increase a person’s sense of safety. Use your instincts and your previous experiences to know which to use. Sometimes you will use several different stances within one instance.

**Escalators**
- Aggressive body language
- Not listening
- Criticizing
- Name calling
- Engaging in power struggles
- Ordering
- Threatening
- Minimizing
- Arguing
- Invading personal space
- Assuming Identity/Categorizing People
- Trapping someone’s exit
- Shouting
- Interrupting
- Photographing/Filming People

These tips were written by Vision Change Win Consulting with adapted contributions from Jewish Voice for Peace’s “De-Escalation Manual.”
Creating Community Safety
Tips on Creating Office Safety Protocols

For organizations whose members or clients are members of marginalized or heavily criminalized communities, it’s essential to create and maintain safe office environments without law enforcement reliance or involvement. By marginalized and heavily criminalized communities, we’re thinking of communities who experience discrimination and oppression from the government and law enforcement/immigration enforcement violence including: communities of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming communities, people engaged in street economies such as sex work or drug sales, immigrants, people with disabilities, low-income communities, people living with HIV/AIDS, homeless communities, formerly incarcerated people, etc.

At any organization verbal conflict, physical fights, threats, or law enforcement violence or harassment can occur. This tip sheet is a starting point for organizations to think about how to create organizational safety protocols that do not rely upon law enforcement.

Organizational Safety Planning

- **Conduct an inventory.** There may be people in your organization with experience in verbal or physical de-escalation, self-defense, safety planning, know your rights trainings, copwatch, first aid, bystander response, and many other skills that are directly relevant to creating organizational safety. Conduct an inventory of your staff’s skillset to learn about their experience and also their comfortability with navigating incidents of harassment and violence that could occur at your organization.

- **Create safety guidelines and values.** Create and publicity share your guidelines and values around safety in your space. For example, what’s your position on banning people from your organization in the office? Or are staff expected to de-escalate and intervene in violence? What is your organization’s position on calling law enforcement for violence? How do you want to address suicidal people within your office space? What information do you keep in your office that could be used to target or create risk? What data/information do you collect and who has access to it?

- **Create safety protocols.** Based upon your inventory, guidelines, and values create some protocols on addressing violence in your space. Protocols should address topics including:
  - Types of harm and violence that the organization will intervene in
  - Supporters, organizations, allies that the organization can rely upon for additional help for various scenarios
  - Point people in charge of making decisions during an incident based on scenarios
Communication protocol for notifying people in the space about an incident (i.e. a code word, email that goes to all staff, or an announcement that occurs)

- Common scenarios that have occurred with sample responses.
- Identify gaps in skill set that might be needed based on scenario planning. For example, if a scenario requires dealing with a community member who is suicidal then a suicide intervention training may be helpful tool
- Determine exit strategy for scenarios that require getting folks in and out of the office.
- If your space uses intercoms or any video equipment to identify people as they come in and out of the space – consider any benefits/challenges to protocols this may offer.

- **Implementing safety protocols.** Once your protocol has been created regular trainings and scenarios practices should occur (at least 2x per year) so that staff can get experience in implementing the protocol. The protocol should be reviewed with new staff as a part of a new staff orientation process. And the protocol should be reviewed annually. Organizations can consider including the protocol in your policies and protocols manual.

**Law Enforcement Visits:** Whether it’s random, connected to the communities that you organize, or connected to political backlash, all organizations should have a plan in place to address law enforcement visits. There are various types of law enforcement visits including visits to investigate your organization or a member of your organization, general inquiries, emergency response, and visits to “support.” Protocols can differ based on the type of visit. Here are some general tips to guide you.

- **Physical Space.** An office space with a door that closes, and a staff member trained in de-escalating violence and navigating law enforcement near that door can make a huge difference. When possible consider spaces that make this possible.

- **Warrant.** You do not need to let law enforcement in without a warrant. Make sure that this warrant is signed by a judge, for the correct organization, and correct address. Ask to see the warrant before letting the officer inside. However, you do need to let officers inside if they come with paramedics or other emergency services.

- **Probable Cause.** Law enforcement can enter your space if they have reasonable suspicion of illegal activity happening inside. Keep this in mind as you craft your safety and de-escalation protocols.

- **Point Person.** There should be an organizational point person to navigate law enforcement. This person should be well aware of their legal rights and should be less vulnerable to arrest than other staff or community members, if possible. Vulnerability to arrest can include many factors including but not limited to: open cases, immigration concerns, having a criminal record, and identifying as a person of color, trans and gender non-conforming.

- **Careful about what you say.** Say as little as possible when dealing with law enforcement. Everything that you say can you be used in court. It’s helpful to have talking points for various scenarios that you can stick to, this will minimize sharing information that could be used against you later.
- **Videotaping the encounter.** Consider having staff who are not the point person video the encounter. Know that sometimes cameras can escalate and de-escalate law enforcement but can also deter illegal and violent behavior on behalf of law enforcement and support a future legal case.

- **Seek support if needed.** If and when possible notify your legal support (if you have it), a close organizational ally, etc. in the case you need further support or want someone to check in with later.

- **Get the officer’s Information.** Police officers legally are supposed to give you their names and badge numbers when asked. If they don’t offer it freely try to capture what you can remember including what precinct they are coming from and what they look like.

- **Documentation.** After the police leave, be sure to write down anything that was said or occurred. If there were several folks in the space when they were there, ask them to also write down their account of what happened as well.

These tips were written by Vision Change Win Consulting with adapted contributions from the ACLU’s “Know Your Right: Stops and Arrests – What to do When Encountering Law Enforcement.”
Office Safety Sample Inventory

1. Do you have self defense or martial arts experience?
   _____ No  _____Beginner  _____Intermediate  _____Expert  _____Trainer
   Explain: ____________________________________________________________

2. Do you have verbal de-escalation or bystander intervention experience?
   _____ No  _____Beginner  _____Intermediate  _____Expert  _____Trainer
   Explain: ____________________________________________________________

3. Do you have experience with physical de-escalation?
   _____ No  _____Beginner  _____Intermediate  _____Expert  _____Trainer
   Explain: ____________________________________________________________

4. Do you have experience with counselling or safety planning?
   _____ No  _____Beginner  _____Intermediate  _____Expert  _____Trainer
   Explain: ____________________________________________________________
5. Do you have experience with police negotiation, copwatch, or know your rights trainings?

_____ No  _____Beginner  _____Intermediate  _____Expert  _____Trainer

Explain:
_____________________________________________________________________________

6. Do you have experience assessing people for suicide or homicide risk?

_____ No  _____Beginner  _____Intermediate  _____Expert  _____Trainer

Explain:
_____________________________________________________________________________

7. Do you have experience with first aid, CPR, or other emergency medical support?

_____ No  _____Beginner  _____Intermediate  _____Expert  _____Trainer

Explain:
_____________________________________________________________________________

Beginner = less than one year, learning basic concepts
Intermediate = 2 – 3 years, comfortable with basic concepts
Expert = 5+ comfortable with basic, intermediate, and advanced concepts
Trainer = I have intermediate to expert experience and substantial experience developing curriculum and giving training on this subject
For organizations whose members or clients are members of marginalized or heavily criminalized communities, it’s essential to create and maintain safe office environments without law enforcement reliance or involvement. By marginalized and heavily criminalized communities, we’re thinking of communities who experience discrimination and oppression from the government and law enforcement/immigration enforcement violence including: communities of color, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming communities, people engaged in street economies, immigrants, people with disabilities, low-income communities, people living with HIV/AIDS, homeless communities, formerly incarcerated people, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are your organization values and how do they inform these safety protocols? (What’s your position on banning people from your organization in the office? Or are staff expected to de-escalate and intervene in violence? What is your organization’s position on calling law enforcement for violence? How do you want to address suicidal people within your office space? What information do you keep in your office that could be used?)</th>
<th>What skills do they staff currently have that can be used to navigate and address incidents around safety that may occur? What gaps exist and how will you address them? (see attached inventory assessment worksheet)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are factors that might make creating and implementing safety protocols challenging? (my office is isolated, there is no security in the building, we are renting a space, etc.)</td>
<td>What types of harm are you most concerned about that require developing a safety protocol? (Please see office safety tips handout for guidance)</td>
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At any organization verbal conflict, physical fights, threats, or law enforcement violence or harassment can occur. This worksheet is a starting point for organizations to create organizational safety protocols.

Please be advised that you may be inserting sensitive information in this worksheet that you might not want particular individuals to see. Therefore, it’s important to think through what you want to have a verbal discussion about, and what information is safe to have written.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creating Safety Protocols</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Your Scenario</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the situation occurring?</strong></td>
<td>There is an individual who keeps threatening to come to the office and harass our organization because they don’t agree with the work we organization does. We know their name and we found a picture of them on their FB page. We have an open office space and no security in our building.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What are warning signs that this situation is about to occur? (long term, short term)</strong></td>
<td>The harassing emails and phone calls have increased from a few times a year to almost weekly. They’ve gotten more specific recently about what they are planning to do once they arrive at the office.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Who is the point person/people who are responsible for engaging in the situation?</strong></td>
<td>In this order: Josephina, Director Maria, Communication Coordinator Joseph, Social Media Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How are the point people notified that they are needed?</strong></td>
<td>When the person who has threatened harm arrives (we’ll know because we have a pic), the first staff that sees them will say loudly “The water</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How will they engage in the situation? What strategies will they use? What strategies will you avoid, not use.</strong></td>
<td>The point person first available will engage the person by actively listening to them, and allowing them to vent so long as it doesn’t cause harm. If a solution is possible, the point will negotiate. If not, the point will team up with another point person and attempt to get the harasser to leave.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What are the desired outcomes of these intervention strategies?</strong></td>
<td>To have the harasser leave the office feeling heard and seen and not needing to harass or complain anymore. That the staff in the office remain safe and that law enforcement is not called in.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>While the point person(s) are intervening what are other staff doing? What should other staff not intervening NOT do?</strong></td>
<td>Remaining staff are in the office, and not engaging with this person. They are being cautious and observant and ready to call in further support if needed. If a client is in the office they are helping them to exit safely.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In the case, these interventions are not successful what will happen? (Call for support? Trigger an alarm? Call the police?) Be sure to define how you know an intervention is not successful.</strong></td>
<td>In the case an intervention is not successful, we will call for x organization to come to the office to support with further intervention strategies. The goal will be to get the harasser out of the office. We know they are needed when the point person, says “Please call x and let them know I’m going to be late for my meeting.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Is an exit plan required? If so what is the plan? Who will support the implementation of the exit strategy? After folks exit how will they check in?</strong></td>
<td>If the harasser refuses to leave and/or is escalating in violence, then 2-point people should remain and the 3rd point person should gather remaining folks in the office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Where will folks convene to check in?</strong></td>
<td>to exit quietly and wait in the parking lot. The 3rd person should and post themselves outside the office door to wait for further support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support: Who should be notified of what’s happening? What are/is their role and contact info?</strong></td>
<td>These 3 people should be notified if this scenario occurs: Board chair, 2 outside support people. We are letting the board chair know what’s happening, and asking the support people to be on standby in the case we need them to physically show up.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>If you decide to call upon law enforcement: What determining factors will initiate involving them? Who will be point to engage with them? What is the plan to reduce potential harm when engaging with law enforcement?</strong></td>
<td>We will only call law enforcement in the case physical violence occurs or the if we are being threatened with a weapon. Joseph will intervene with the police should we call them. To reduce harm, we will ask our support team to be physically present and release the rest of the staff to go home and wait for further instructions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Documents/other materials/information to consider having alongside this plan: name of legal support, management contact info, building floor plans, staff emergency contact info etc.</strong></td>
<td>Support team contact info, point people cell phone numbers, board chair cell phone numbers, information on the harasser that we gathered from social media.</td>
<td></td>
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Creating a Community Security Plan for Actions, Events, and Demonstrations

While the right to protest is legally protected, it’s important to ensure actions, demonstrations, and events are the safest possible for the communities you organize within. This document outlines some key considerations and structures for security plans that organizations can create to increase safety at actions and events that do not rely upon law enforcement.

What is a Security Team?

- A group of people who are not directly participating in the action, demonstration, or event who are entrusted to keep people safe, ensure the action or event gets carried out successfully, and work to prevent or reduce arrests and harassment.
- A group that serves as a buffer between attendees and counter protestors and/or police

Creating a Plan:

**Important Assumptions:**

- If you’re planning a demonstration or action (permitted or unpermitted) assume that there will be a police presence (whether seen or unseen), and that the police may be agitated, rude, violent, and could arrest people without cause.
- Assume that counter-demonstrators are a possibility. If you’re in an open carry state assume that armed counter demonstrators are also a possibility.
- Assume that your community members may also get agitated, angry, or aggressive towards police, each other, or counter protestors.

Do Your Research:

- Know the relevant laws connected to protests in your state and city. What materials are legal and or illegal (i.e. types of signs etc.)? How much space is needed if you march on the sidewalk? Are permits required? Are there size specifications or permits needed for amplified sound?
- If your action is a march, walk the route for your march at a similar time of day and day of the week for your planned protest. Observe and notice how populated the area is, police presence, and any other relevant details. Determine if there are other possible events occurring in the area on the planned day of your march that may have an impact.
- If you’re planning to do an action inside a private location that is not your office or a building that you have permission to do an action, review whether or not there are security guards, how many, and where do they tend to be located. Take note of entrances and exits, and whether special ID’s are needed to enter the building. Remember that security cannot arrest you, but can call the police to arrest you.
• For private event spaces – including your office, research whether or not the space has a contract with a private security company and what the security protocols are of this company. Especially for event spaces it helps to pre-negotiate with private security that your team will be the first folks to navigate and de-escalate safety issues. It is also important to negotiate that any decisions to call the police should be done with the consent of your team. If you are working with communities that are heavily surveilled, policed, criminalized, (i.e. communities of color, LGBTQ communities, undocumented communities, immigrant communities, Muslim and Arab communities, homeless communities, low-income communities) you should consider doing an anti-oppression training with the private security team to minimize unnecessary and/or oppressive conflicts that could lead to arrest.

Roles: There are several roles for a security team. Depending on the size of your team some roles can be consolidated.

• Marshals follow the direction of the tactical team and are often the first line of defense between the action/event participants and any threats or opposition
• Police negotiator a person designated to interface with the police, usually a member of the tactical team, makes decisions to carry out the event/action.
• Legal Observers individuals to observe, document, and ensure that the legal rights of protestors are being upheld.
• Security Coordinator a person who recruits the security team, trains the security team, creates the protocols with the program leads, decides the security formation, and often serves on the tactical team.
• Captains individuals who coordinate a small group of marshals. For large events captains can move a bit more freely than marshals (who are usually stationed in one area). Having captains can support decision-making.
• Runner/Mobile Captains people who are free to float through the march, action, demonstration etc. These people can act as the eyes and ears for the tactical team, can help communicate shifts and changes to captains and marshals as necessary, and can fill in gaps when they see them in the formation.
• Tactical Team: A small group of people including a program point person, security coordinator, and police negotiator that make day of decisions about the event, action, or demonstration including: whether individuals need to be removed from the event/action/demonstration, whether or not to change the route, how to navigate counter protestors, and how to navigate police or arrests. These individuals hold the organization’s mission and values central in addition to the goals of the event when making these decisions.
• Tactical team members must be able to: communicate clearly, make quick decisions, be comfortable with making unpopular decisions, remain calm during tense situations, have security experience, have one role during the event (i.e. press greeter + tactical = bad idea), and understand the community well and have trust from the community.
The Plan: Here are some key components of a security plan.

- History, Background information, and goals of the event/action/demonstration.
- Formation: Information on how security will be set up at the event/action demonstration. (i.e. will marshals be around the perimeter). Formations should be designed to create the most safety for participants and the most visibility for security.
- Scenarios: Any scenarios that security should expect based on your research
- Protocols: Information on how security should navigate the scenarios.

Training the Team: There should be at least one training for the security team to review the plan and practice the relevant scenarios and protocols.

Key training components are:
- Training on what security is and what the roles are
- Training on Verbal de-escalation tactics and security guidelines
- Time to practice the formation, scenarios, and protocols

These tips were written by Vision Change Win Consulting with adapted contributions from the Audre Lorde Project’s “Security Training for Participants” and “Build a Protocol Workshop.”