

## **De-Escalation Tips for HR: Managing Defensive or Emotional Employees**

Supporting employees through difficult conversations requires calm, professionalism, and clear strategies to prevent escalation while maintaining a safe and respectful workplace.

### **Before the Conversation**

- Prepare by reviewing facts and documented behaviors.
- Plan a private, neutral location for discussion.
- Anticipate possible emotional reactions and plan responses.
- Familiarize yourself with company policies, FMLA, ADA, and available resources.

### **During the Conversation**

- Stay Calm: Maintain neutral tone, body language, and pacing.
- Listen Actively: Allow the employee to speak, acknowledge feelings without agreeing or disagreeing.
- Focus on Behaviors: Address specific performance or attendance issues rather than personal assumptions.
- Use “I” Statements: e.g., “I’ve observed that deadlines have been missed, and I’d like to understand what’s going on.”
- Pause When Needed: If emotions rise, take a short break and resume calmly.

### **Handling Defensive or Emotional Responses**

- Avoid arguing or confronting emotional outbursts.
- Reaffirm confidentiality and your role as a support resource.
- Redirect to documented facts: “I understand your perspective. Let’s focus on the behaviors and what support is available.”
- Offer options, not ultimatums (EAP, treatment referrals, HR support).
- Maintain professional boundaries and avoid personal judgment.

### **After the Conversation**

- Document the discussion factually (date, behaviors, support offered).
- Follow up as agreed and provide ongoing support.
- Reassess workplace needs and next steps if performance concerns persist.
- Connect employees with professional resources when appropriate.