

De-escalation & Crisis Response Tips

For EAP Professionals & Supervisors – Bridging the Gaps

Introduction

Workplace crises or highly emotional situations can arise when employees face stress, conflict, or personal challenges. Proper **de-escalation and crisis response skills** are essential for EAP professionals and supervisors to maintain safety, provide support, and guide employees toward productive solutions.

This guide provides step-by-step strategies, sample scripts, and best practices for handling tense situations while fostering a safe and supportive work environment.

1. Principles of De-escalation

1. **Stay Calm:** Maintain a neutral tone and composed body language.
 2. **Assess the Situation:** Identify potential triggers, safety concerns, and urgency.
 3. **Empathize & Listen:** Validate feelings without judgment.
 4. **Set Boundaries:** Clearly communicate acceptable behavior.
 5. **Offer Options:** Provide constructive ways for the employee to express concerns or receive support.
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2. Early Warning Signs of Escalation

- Raised voice or hostile tone
 - Rapid speech or emotional outbursts
 - Physical agitation (pacing, clenched fists)
 - Withdrawal or avoidance
 - Threatening statements or aggression
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3. Step-by-Step De-escalation Approach

Step 1: Approach Calmly

- Maintain appropriate distance.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Avoid sudden movements or gestures that could escalate tension.

Script Example:

“I see that this is a stressful situation. Let’s take a moment to talk and find a solution together.”

Step 2: Listen Actively

- Let the employee express feelings without interruption.
- Use reflective statements to show understanding.
- Ask open-ended questions to gather information.

Script Example:

“It sounds like you’ve been feeling overwhelmed with recent deadlines. Can you tell me more about what’s been most challenging?”

Step 3: Validate & Normalize Feelings

- Acknowledge emotions without agreeing or disagreeing with the cause.
- Normalize common reactions to stress or frustration.

Script Example:

“It makes sense that you’re frustrated given the workload. Many people feel this way in similar situations.”

Step 4: Set Boundaries & Focus on Safety

- Clearly outline acceptable behavior while maintaining respect.
- Ensure physical and emotional safety for everyone involved.

Script Example:

“I want to make sure this conversation stays productive. Let’s focus on the issues and solutions rather than personal attacks.”

Step 5: Offer Support & Next Steps

- Connect the employee to resources (EAP, counseling, wellness programs).
- Create a plan for follow-up or check-ins.

Script Example:

“I can help connect you with support through our EAP. Let’s also schedule a follow-up to review progress and see how things are going.”

4. Crisis Response Guidelines

- **Immediate Threats:** If there's danger to the employee or others, contact security, law enforcement, or emergency services immediately.
- **High Emotional Distress:** Use short, calm statements and redirect focus to safe actions.
- **Substance-Related Crisis:** Do not confront aggressively—ensure safety and refer to medical or EAP support.

Checklist:

- Assess safety
- Keep calm and neutral
- Listen and validate
- Set clear boundaries
- Offer resources and follow-up
- Document all actions and observations

5. Documentation & Follow-Up

- Record the incident objectively using the **Behavior & Performance Tracker** or incident report forms.
 - Document employee statements, observed behaviors, actions taken, and follow-up plans.
 - Maintain confidentiality and share only with authorized personnel.
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Contact & Support

For further guidance or training:

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