

Defusing Anger / Hostility

In this session you will be exposed to several defusing techniques found to be successful in a variety of settings. Many of these techniques are used by law enforcement or mental health staff to handle difficult situations when the use of force is not appropriate.

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Defusing Techniques

There are two key techniques in the defusing process:

- **Ventilation** - allowing the person to speak, express their opinion without comment or challenge. The purpose is to allow the person to "blow off steam."
- **Active listening** - includes validation, verification and reflective questioning.

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Ventilation

- Allow the person to express their opinion
- Set limits regarding personal attacks or insults
- Don't allow personal attacks on others

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Active Listening

- **Validation** - let the person know that you understand they are in distress or angry

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Active listening

- **Verification**-the listener tells the person that he/she understands or is trying to understand their problem and why they are angry.

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Active listening

- **Reflective listening** - the listener asks the person questions about what he/she said in order to have them slow down and focus on the problem.

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Points to remember

- If you commit to this process don't allow distractions to interfere with what you are trying to do.

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Points to remember

- Don't argue with the person.

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Points to remember

- Stop immediately if things start to become threatening.

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Points to remember

- Never make promises you can't keep.

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Points to remember

- Never make threats.

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Anger and Aggression

- Persons who are easily angered or who demonstrate aggression in their talk or actions usually have a method prompting their behavior.

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Anger and Aggression

This behavior usually results because:

- They have achieved control of their environment with these behaviors in the past

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Anger and Aggression

- They are easily threatened and lack the emotional resources to deal with frustration in appropriate ways.

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Anger and Aggression

- Anger usually results from feelings or the perception of endangerment. The body reacts in this state with the fight or flight response.

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Anger and Aggression

- **Anger** may have allowed them to escape things they didn't want to do.

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Anger and Aggression

Anger is accompanied by the release of hormones that produce a short-lived energy burst, which:

- raises blood pressure
- stresses the heart
- affects breathing, muscle tone and mood.

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Anger and Aggression

When the body reacts in this manner on a regular basis, the subject becomes 3 times more likely to suffer a heart attack.

(Based on a study conducted at the Harvard Medical School in 1996.)

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Anger and Aggression

- For some, anger becomes an enjoyable experience and they seem to relish the physical symptoms

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Anger and Aggression

- An angry person with a rush of hormones pushed into his/her blood stream can hardly be called upon to employ a rational thought process to gain emotional control.

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Anger and Aggression

- Some persons lack simple answers to questions regarding their health, safety, emotional or spiritual situation. Providing answers, direction or resources is usually all they will need to get back on track.

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Anger and aggression

Current research in substance abuse treatment and corrections seems to indicate that the best results in correcting or retraining persons who are easily angered or aggressive comes from programs utilizing **Cognitive Restructuring**.

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Cognitive Restructuring

... a combination of education and mild confrontation of the person's antisocial belief system. Programs run for several months and cover very specific areas touching on social norms and reactions.

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Other tactics in reducing anger:

- Delay
- Distraction
- Relaxation
- Incompatible response

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Delay

- Yields good results as opposed to venting anger in an aggressive manner.

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Delay

- Studies with college students as subjects resulted in increased aggressiveness after subjects were allowed to vent their anger on a punching bag.

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Delay

- A simple *delay* of action for several minutes will accomplish the same results with less residual aggression.

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Distraction

- *Distractions* can change the focus and break the rhythm of the angry person, thereby giving you an opportunity to move away from the topic creating the anger.

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Relaxation

- *Relaxation* techniques may work in certain circumstances but are difficult to employ if an individual is highly upset.

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Incompatible response

The angry person makes the following statement:

“This @\$#@%&+ place is going to make me explode.”

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Incompatible response

Staff:

“John, did you know that we will be showing the Lions game tonight?”

The purpose here is to change the subject so dramatically that the person has to stop and think about what you said.

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Voice rate, tone and volume.

How we speak can increase or decrease the level of agitation in some individuals.

- **Speaking slowly and clearly** will give the impression that you are in control.

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Voice rate, tone and volume.

- If a condescending or caustic tone is used, anger is the most likely response.

“Are you deaf? How many times have I told you that tomorrow the doors close at 6:00am?”

“After you’re little *incident* yesterday do you think we should let you stay here again?”

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Voice rate, tone and volume.

- **Volume** can be an excellent tool to calm a situation.

A coworker of mine had a voice so soft I could hardly hear what she was saying. You had to focus on her every word.

She had a calming effect on her clients when they were angry.

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Conclusions

The information we have presented indicates that a variety of methods should be employed to de-escalate an individual who is upset or angry. Most people develop their own methods based on personal experience and what they feel comfortable with in a variety of situations.

Good luck!

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