

## 5 THINGS TO DO TO DEFUSE VIOLENCE



### SCENARIO:

You're informed that one of your employees, or a student, or a parent is "on the edge" and there is a definite potential for violence. The person is "in between"...past the PREVENTION stage, but has not YET committed violence. Even if law enforcement has been called, the person is in your close proximity and may need to be defused right now. Do you have the skills to communicate in a crisis? You need to ask yourself, "Is this a situation I can defuse?" If yes, proceed. If no, CALL 911! Refer to your school's disaster plan.

Remember; never ever deprive another human being of personal dignity, respect, or hope.

**1. Understand the mind-set of the potentially violent person.** The person posing danger is in crisis due to some "triggering" event and is operating outside the bounds of acceptable workplace behavior in both word and demeanor. Be aware of the INDIVIDUALITY OF EMOTION. Some people can be fired and get on with life without harming a soul yet another person can receive his first bad evaluation and go on a shooting rampage. Even if he's wrong, he is acting on perceptions that are REAL TO HIM. The person has a compelling need to communicate his grievance to someone now! DO NOT PUT IT OFF!

**2. Take the moral "high road".** Establish an atmosphere of cooperation. Do not display anger, fear or anxiety. Tell him that this is HIS time and you're willing respect that. Talk in a calm voice, lower and slower than your counterpart. YOU set the example. Understand that angry outbursts on the part of that person can have a positive affect. It allows him to vent negative feelings and thereafter begin to defuse. Be absolutely truthful in any discussion with the person. To lose credibility at this stage can be catastrophic.



**3. LISTEN to the aggrieved party and allow a total "airing" of the grievance without comment or judgement.** Offer the person a private place to talk. Ask the person to be seated but you take your seat first if possible. Ask the party if you can take a few "brief notes" to help you retain the information. Maintain eye



contact. It's a sign of respect and it indicates he's getting your FULL attention. His perceptions are his reality. Do not argue with his perceptions. Do not play down the importance of the person's concerns, however seemingly insignificant they are to you. If you talk at all, ask questions that call for long, narrative answers. This does two things, assures the aggrieved party that you want to hear ALL he has to say and, this assists in the defusing process. A person in crisis will only respond favorably to someone who is:

- Willing to listen
- Understanding
- Worthy of Respect
- Non-threatening

**4. Allow the aggrieved party to suggest a solution.** A person will more readily agree to a resolution that he or she helped formulate. Assure the person that you will act on any injustices he has suffered...then make ABSOLUTELY sure you do just that. It may surprise you that his suggestion may be very reasonable.

**5. Move toward a win-win resolution.** Saving face (dignity) is paramount. Even people facing severe disciplinary action may just want to be heard and "get on with life." As you make a concession, ask him to do likewise. Try to get "something for something". In the overwhelming number of cases, the person just wants fairness.

This list, "5 ways to defuse violence", surprises people with its simplicity. These are nothing more than the practical application of dignity and respect and can be used everywhere. Not only can these be employed by parents, teachers, and counselors, but can be used anywhere else human interaction takes place.