**How to Handle an Agitated Person While Keeping Safe**

**When confronted by an agitated person at a pantry, your first and only objective is to reduce the level of anger so that discussion becomes possible. This is also called “De-escalation.”**

This guide pertains to situations when someone at the pantry is confronting you because she/he is frustrated, irritable, and/or angry. This guide is not to be used in extreme cases when physical violence is threatened. In those instances, do not engage further with the individual. Get help immediately and call 9-1-1.

**3 Things to Keep in Mind**

1. **Self-Control and Confidence**
   * Appear calm, centered and self-assured even when you don’t feel like it.
   * Look as non-threatening as possible.
   * Relax facial muscles and look confident. Anxiety can make the client feel anxious and unsafe which can escalate aggression.
   * Don’t be defensive or judgmental.
   * Do not smile. This can be perceived as mockery or anxiety.
   * Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for help. The agitated individual is very sensitive to feeling shamed and disrespected. Treat them with dignity and respect.
2. **Physical Stance**
   * Never turn your back for any reason
   * Always be at the same eye level.
   * Allow extra physical space between you – about four times your usual distance.
   * Do not approach a client head-on or from the back. Stand to the side of the person (L-shape) while maintaining distance of at least one leg length.
   * Do not touch – even if some touching is generally culturally appropriate and usual in your setting. Very angry people may misinterpret physical contact as hostile or threatening.
   * Keep hands out of your pockets, up and available to protect yourself.
3. **Communication**
   * Speak calmly at an average volume. Use a modulated, low monotonous tone of voice. Do not get loud or try to yell over a screaming person.

* Keep your answers short and clear.
* Restate what the person is trying to communicate with you
  + Respond selectively. DO NOT ANSWER abusive questions (e.g. “Why are all the volunteers always so (insult)?” These questions should get no response whatsoever. ANSWER informational questions even when asked rudely (e.g. “Can you enroll me now or what?!”)
  + Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, and always respectful tone. Give choices where possible in which both alternatives are safe ones.
  + Tap into the person’s thinking mode: Say “I can’t understand you when you are yelling. Help me understand what you are saying to me.”

*Adapted from “Verbal De-Escalation Techniques for Defusing or Talking Down an Explosive Situation” by Eva Skolnik-Acker, LICSW Retreived from:* [*http://www.pps.net/cms/lib8/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/178/bspverbal\_de-escalation.pdf*](http://www.pps.net/cms/lib8/OR01913224/Centricity/Domain/178/bspverbal_de-escalation.pdf)

For additional resources on de-escalation, please visit:

* CPI’s Top 10 De-Escalation Tips <http://jpschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Nonviolent-Crisis-Intervention-pdf.pdf>
* [www.in.gov/dcs/files/**Verbal**\_**De**-**escalation**.**ppt**x](http://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Verbal_De-escalation.pptx)