



# The Art of Defusing Conflict:

## De-Escalation Techniques for Transit Operators



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# Course Overview

- Teach transit operators techniques for de-escalating situations
- Learn the verbal and physical cues for situational awareness
- Discuss agency's policies and procedures with regard to fare disputes and other types of passengers
- Discuss relevant state laws and regulations in place to help protect you from assault



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# Course Objectives

By the end of this course you will be able to:

- Define the terms “conflict” and “de-escalation”
- Identify situations that can cause passenger frustrations and recognize ways to reduce stressors
- Demonstrate techniques to defuse stressful situations to achieve positive outcomes
- Interpret state laws and agency policies with regard to difficult passengers and situations



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# Customer Types

- Who are your customers ...
- Are customers any different in the North, South, East, West...
- Are customers different on the various lines of service...
- What's unique about your customers?



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# 7 Basic Desires of a Transit Customer

1. Reliability
2. Safety and Security
3. Conveniences and Accessibility
4. Clean and Comfortable
5. Simplicity
6. Affordable
7. Friendly and/or Empathetic



# Making a First Impression

Based on:

- Appearance
- Body language
- Demeanor
- Mannerism



Greet passengers with a warm and confident smile

The way we present ourselves may be as successful as our verbal communication methods to defuse any potential conflict

If you smile at someone, they will likely smile back



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# Discussion

How can the satisfied customer have a positive effect on the operator, the customers, and on the transit agency and its public image?

For the operator:

- Job security and satisfaction
- Pleasant working environment

For the customer:

- Loyalty to the transit service
- Reliability for safe and convenient commute

For the transit agency:

- Long term customer loyalty
- Increased ridership



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# Discussion

How can an angry/unsatisfied customer have a negative effect on the operator, the customers, and on the transit agency and its public image?

For the operator:

- Create conflict

- Negative impact on health (mental, emotional, and physical)

For the customer:

- Frustration

- Loss of reliable transportation

For the transit agency:

- Negative reputation

- Customer complaints



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# Just the Facts

Transit workers are at an increased risk for workplace violence because:

- Work alone
- Direct contact with the public
- Mobile workplace
- Work in a variety of settings
- Deliver passengers
- Handle fares
- Work at night



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# Just the Facts

TCRP surveyed 66 transit agencies and found...

- Most assaults occur in the evening, late night, or early morning
- Verbal assault (e.g., threats, intimidation, harassment) are the most commonly reported forms of assault followed by spitting then projectiles
- Fare enforcement & alcohol or drugs are common factors in assaults



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# Assaults in the News (2019)

Angry passenger assaulted operator after being told he would need to wait and de-board at the next stop (*RTD - Jun*)

Operator assaulted in street after colliding with auto (*FRTA - Oct*)

Two women assault operator after arguing over fare (*RTA - Oct*)

Intoxicated man spit on and physically assaulted operator after being nudged awake (*MTA - Nov*)



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# What is Conflict?

**Conflict** is a disagreement in which the people involved see a threat to their needs, interests, or concerns.

Damaging effects in terms of:

- What is said
- Actions taken
- Injury suffered

Potential conflict is everywhere

When handled properly, negative effects can or may be minimized

Be prepared



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# Discussion

Let's identify some situations which cause conflict.

## Examples include:

Spitting

Attitude

Profanity

Fare disputes

Delays in service/Traffic

Poor hygiene

Supervisor conflict



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# Triggering Events

- Triggering event: an incident which is perceived as a threat by the individual

## Two types of triggering events:

- Fear inducing event: an event where the individual feels threatened or is about to lose something of value
- Frustrating event: an event where the person feels their needs are not being met



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# What is De-escalation?

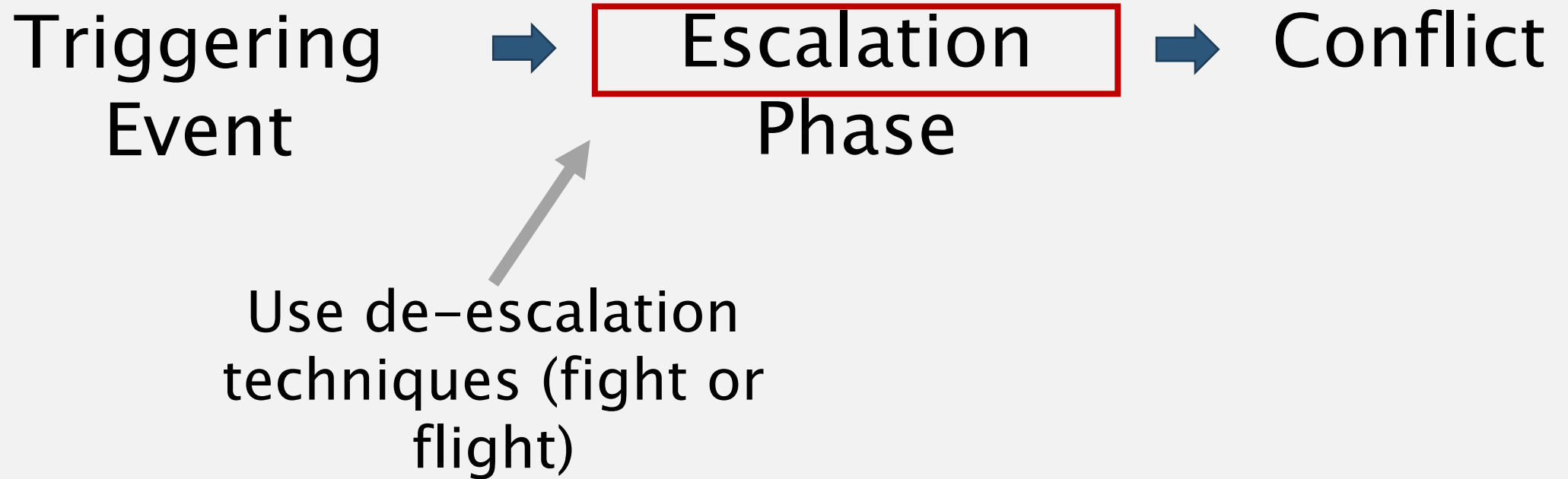
De-escalation is when we use communication skills to calm a person who is angry, out of control, or disturbed

If you take proper charge of the situation, it reduces the possibility for violence



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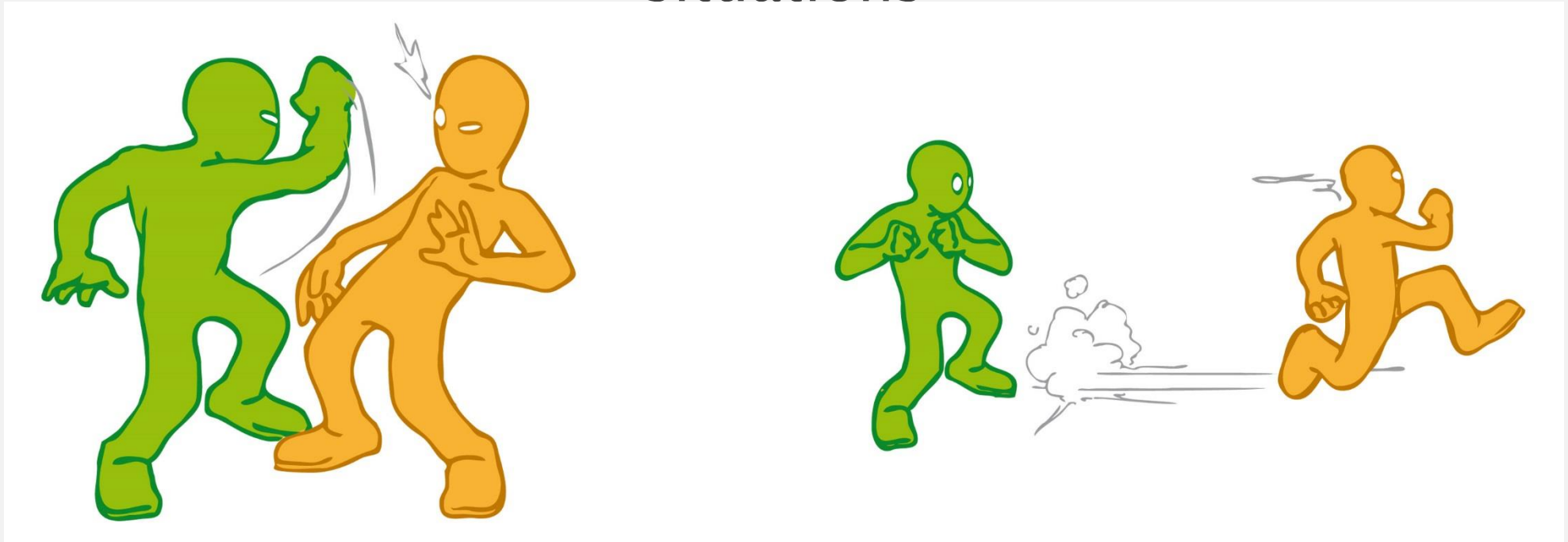
# De-escalation Process



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# Fight vs Flight

Fight or flee the threat – natural response to stressful situations



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# Fight vs Flight

During acute stress your body releases adrenaline, giving your brain and body bursts of energy

Causes increased heart rate, breath rate, and blood pressure

Changes in the body can be helpful, and make you more effective in coping with the danger



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# Types of Stress

Acute stress: most common form of stress that comes from events that happen in our daily lives

Chronic stress: comes when a person never sees a way out of a miserable situation

Stressor: events that provoke stress



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# Effects of Stress

Physically

Emotionally

Mentally

Continued stress can lead to headaches, an upset stomach, high blood pressure, chest pain, problems with sleeping, and depression



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# Ways to Reduce Stress



Take a break



Exercise



Smile and laugh



Get social support



Breath deeply

# Influences of Stress

Stress can affect your ability to use de-escalation techniques

Stress felt by others can escalation situations

Understanding how stress affects you and others and using the proper skills can prevent a situation from spiraling out of control

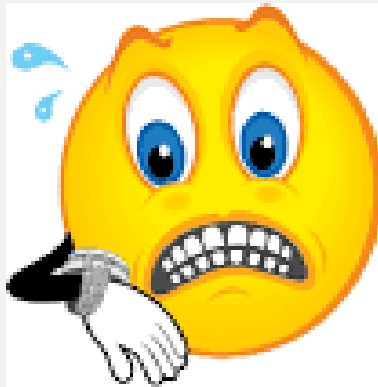
Let's look at some real life scenarios.



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# Scenario 1

- A passenger boards the bus and immediately states:
  - “You’re late, you’re always late!”



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# #1 - Self-Control

Changing the outcome of the situation

Recognize your trigger words

## Proactive vs reactive response

Proactive response: focusses on eliminating problems before they occur

Reactive response: depends on emotions, attitude, behavior

Responding with an attitude most likely increase the conflict



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# Scenario 2

- Operator prematurely engages the door on departure. Passenger's arm gets stuck in the door.



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# #2 - Prevent with “Post-vention”

Use what you learn during a prior event to prevent it from happening in the future

Experience from one bad situation can positively affect another negative situation



# Scenario 3

- A frustrated rider is looking for directions/connection information.



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# #3 - Listen

Try to understand what a person is communicating

Use active listening skills:

- Use “I” statements

- Ask open-ended questions

- Paraphrase the frustration

- Let them vent when appropriate

# Scenario 4

- A passenger on a 3-wheeled mobility device insists the operator uses their method of securement rather than typical procedure.



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# #4 - Adapt

Attempt to adapt, within protocol, in the moment of need for the person you're trying to support

Positive interactions

Explain what you CAN do rather than what you CANNOT do

# Scenario 5

- A passenger tries to board the bus with an iguana on his/her shoulder.



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# #5 - Think

Think before you react and speak

Take a few seconds before you respond; this can give you a chance to positively make a difference

Know your agencies policy

Use radio when appropriate for assistance and/or guidance



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# Self Control, Prevent, Listen, Adapt, and Think

- Self-control: When you maintain self-control you can help the chances of having a positive outcome
- Prevent: Use what you learned during a prior event to keep it from happening again
- Listen: Attempt to understand what a person is communicating by allowing them to vent
- Adapt: Responses need to adapt to the situation
- Think: If you can pause and think about a situation, you can help change the outcome



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# Recognizing the Warning Signs

# Situational Awareness

Recognize and “read” the indicators of possible difficult passengers

Evaluate the entire situation before you react

Be mindful of your own stress response

Maintain self control

Proactive response vs reactive response

Why was ‘situational awareness’ first understood and developed from fighter pilots?



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# Situational Awareness Cont.

- Learn to Predict Events – It's a mindset
- Identify Elements Around You – Actively add them up
- Trust Your Feelings – One of the best tools you have
- Limit Situational Overload – Prioritize to avoid over stimulation
- Avoid Complacency – Biggest factor of missing the cues
- Be Aware of Time – escalation speed varies
- Begin to Evaluate and Understand Situations –
- Actively Prevent Fatigue – Try your best to rest well
- Don't stop .....this is an ongoing process



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# Difficult and Disgruntled Passengers

heavy breathing



lowering of the body



evasive eye contact



clutched or fisted hands



raised or hidden hands



crossed arms



# Intoxicated Passengers

## Signs and symptoms

- Smell of alcohol
- Lack of coordination
- Inability to remain focused
- Inability to carry on a logical conversation
- Slurred speech
- Glazed eyes or dilated pupils
- Slow motor skills
- Trembling hands

Maintain self control and pay close attention



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# Passengers with Disabilities

Focus on the individual not the disability, “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person”

Speak directly to the person rather than their companion or interpreter

All assistive mobility devices are personal property or extensions of that person

Always ask before providing assistance  
Don't be afraid to ask a question  
regarding their specific needs





# Transient or Homeless Population

20% to 25% of the homeless population in the United States suffers from some form of severe mental illness

## Tips for communication:

- Maintain a calm and soft yet firm voice

- Avoid using your title or authority

- Do not offer lengthy explanations or excuses



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# Teenage Passengers



- Resolve issues differently with a teenager than with adults
  - Address them
  - Build a relationship
  - Paraphrase what they say to demonstrate active listening skills
- A technique that works with both adults and teenage passengers:
  - Put the most important information first
    - Instead of saying: “I will get you home soon if you sit down”
    - Try saying: “Please sit down and I will

# Elderly Passengers

## Tips for communicating

- Face the person and make eye contact
- Speak slowly, clearly, and in a steady tone of voice
- Repeat if necessary
- Use short phrases and common words
- Use gestures and body language to help clarify
- Allow more time for the person to process information and respond
- Watch tone of voice
- Acknowledge their feelings



# Words that could help to Defuse Conflict

- How can I assist you
- I can appreciate
- I'll do all that I can
- I understand

What works for you...



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# Missouri Statute Title XXXVIII § 565.002

- In 2017 Missouri reclassified employees of mass transit as ‘special victims’
  - Same category as law enforcement & emergency personnel
- Assaults against ‘special victims’ receives a higher classification of felony/misdemeanor, increasing the severity and punishment

Assault	Charge (Typical)	Charge (Special Victim)
1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	Class B Felony	Class A Felony
2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree	Class D Felony	Class B Felony
3 <sup>rd</sup> Degree	Class E Felony	Class D Felony
4 <sup>th</sup> Degree	Class C Misdemeanor	Class A Misdemeanor



# National Attention on Penalties

- There are 31 States who provide for specific penalties in connection with harming transit/school bus employees

The *Transit Worker and Pedestrian Protection Act* gives transit agencies two years to develop Bus Operations Safety Risk Reduction Programs in partnership with their transit workforce, and with oversight from the U.S. Department of Transportation. The bill authorizes \$25 million per year for 5 years to pay for the implementation of these safety improvements as part of their Bus Operations Safety Risk Reduction Programs:

- Assault mitigation infrastructure and technology, including barriers to prevent assault on bus drivers
- De-escalation training for bus drivers
- Modified bus specifications and retrofits to reduce visibility impairments
- Driver assistance technology that reduces accidents
- Installation of bus driver seating to reduce ergonomic injuries



# Employee Assistance Program

- Conversations are confidential
- Can help with both personal and professional issues
- Can help you cope with:
  - Crisis management
  - Emotional challenges
  - Legal issues
  - Financial issues



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# Discussion:

## Proactive Approaches and the Future of Transit Safety

- Police Presence
- Operator Partitions
- Training
- Violence prevention programs
- Cameras
- Automated announcements and campaigns
- Prosecution
- Interface with Safety Management Systems (SMS)
- Data interpretation
- Post assault programs



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# Questions or Comments





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