De-escalate Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime:

Unplug the Power Struggle with Principle-Based De-escalation

Imagine dealing with any situation. Learn 5 surprises and 3 Guiding Principles, that will allow you to remain in control at all times, support anyone, anywhere, with any issue, and avoid the wrong response which can make the situation worse.

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Preamble

Is it really possible to de-escalate anyone, anywhere, anytime? Yes! Imagine yourself dealing with any scenario with anyone, anywhere, with confidence and long-term foresight. This is possible with a Principle-Based approach to de-escalation.

While no single technique will work on every person, there is a small set of principles that do apply to everyone. These principles are universal so they *apply to any age person, any level of ability or disability, and any setting*. They may help you in your work or they may help you in your private life.

The guiding principles contained within this book are the result of a professional research and development program started in 1993, taking the best from today's current research in behavioral psychology, education, neuroscience, and conflict management. After having learned these principles people have enjoyed success within families, foster homes, schools, group homes, hospitals, camps, day care centers, juvenile detention, assisted living facilities and many other walks of life.

These principles have proven themselves to be applicable to the needs of people of any age, any setting and any type of disability including Autism, Alzheimer's disease (or dementia), developmental disabilities, mental health disorders and even teenagers!

If you are new to de-escalation, this book will introduce the guiding principles that form the basis for today's professional behavioral interventions and emergency response protocols. Knowledge of these principles is a must in order to master the art and science of de-escalation.

If you are experienced, this book will serve as a valuable affirmation or even help you fuse together varied, previous trainings into a consistent and potent practice. Here, we will review what you need to know about yourself and your role in order to remain in control during any situation.

Note that this book will attempt to broaden your horizons about what you think are de-escalation skills. There is no *"little black book"* of phrases that you can just conjure that will make people de-escalate. Every situation is different and everyone has different needs which may even change from day-to-day. This is why you need universal principles which apply to anyone.

Some of these principles embody everyday life and relationship skills. In crisis situations, it turns out, some of the most powerful de-escalation techniques that you can use are actually those critical relationship skills. So learning how to *"be"* in a crisis can be more important than what to *"say."*

Goals of this Book

You will learn to:

- **Remain in control at all times.**
- **Support anyone, anywhere, with any issue.**
- **Avoid the wrong response which can make the situation worse.**

There are some interesting surprises we'll expose along the way in regards to always having the right response.

What do I want from this book?

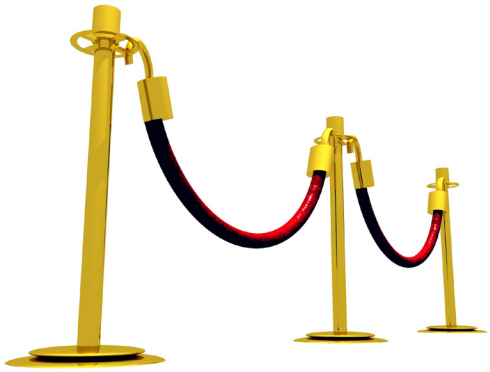
As with anything in life, **knowing what you want will get you further**. As you read this book, read with intention. Then, apply the new skills and see what happens. You will be amazed!

Imagine the last incident in which you were involved. Maybe it was a power struggle with your preschooler who wouldn't put away her toys. Maybe it was a fight with a coworker. What led up to this? What was your response? What did you assume was the other person's reason for being escalated?

Now, take a few minutes to **replay the incident** for yourself. Jot down new insights you may have about how you might act differently if you were faced with this situation again.

As you go through this book, *think about what you want to learn*. How might your work or your personal life be different if you were to be intentional about your skills in de-escalation?

Bank Branch Line Dance



Recently I was at my local bank branch, standing in line. When I got there I was the only one in line and stood at the pole position of the waiting lane made by those maze-like rope barriers. The two customers at the counter both required so much attention from the two tellers, that I had time to walk over to the seating area 10 feet away, bring the local newspaper back to the head of the lane and read all of it! By the time I finished the paper, the tellers were still occupied and there were presently 5 more customers lined up behind me.

And we were still waiting so I returned the newspaper back to the seating area six steps from the head of the lane. When I walked away, the woman who was standing right behind me immediately stepped up and filled the very impressions in the carpet where my feet had just been! So I thought to myself, "Maybe I should have told everyone that I would be right back in line. That's ok because surely everyone already saw that I was at the head of line when they came in. Right?"

To not cause a direct confrontation I went back to the line but stood just directly in front of her ahead of the rope stand. In short order, I started to hear grumbling from behind me. I tried to ignore it but when I heard the woman mutter, "Do you want a punch in the nose?" I decided I probably shouldn't have my back turned to her! I turned around to see that her eyes were wide open and her whole posture was tense like she was about to pounce. She did not have her hands up in an aggressive, striking position but she kept repeating, "Do you want a punch in the nose?!?"

I said to her, "Whoa! Maybe I should have said out loud that I would be right back, but that doesn't make it right for you to threaten to punch me in the nose." Of course, I just said that in my head.

Instead, I stopped myself to take the time to listen to her. I wondered, "What is she really thinking about this situation? What does she want?" And I listened for the next threats beyond, "do you want a punch in the nose?" But suddenly then, she didn't say anything else. That left us standing only about a foot apart from each other, face-to-face, waiting for her to make the next move.

I did nothing but listen so that I would have a better idea of what to do next, but she just stopped. Some might say that I just did nothing, but as a matter of fact, I did nothing on purpose. I was silent. I was listening. I was assessing what was happening. And I gave her the opportunity to get whatever she needed off her chest. She was indeed threatening me verbally, but she was not actually physically threatening me. She didn't have her hands up so she posed no imminent physical danger to me from which I needed to protect myself. She just stopped.

She said nothing else so I thought, "maybe this is as far as things go?" Rather than continue to stare at her in the face which could be taken as intimidation, I turned slowly away from her - not completely turning my back to her - but just enough that it looked like I wasn't staring her down. I only turned as much that I could still see her in case she decided to attack me.

This is when I noticed that all of the bank tellers and managers observing the scene had eyes wide open like deers in headlights! In fact all of the other customers standing behind this woman were also backing away from her looking completely freaked-out! And that was the end of the confrontation.

This story illustrates the challenge of responding in the moment but not over-reacting - especially in the face of being threatened. While this situation may not have been the best, we'll refer back to it periodically throughout the book to see what can be learned from it.

Cover That Alarm Reaction Button

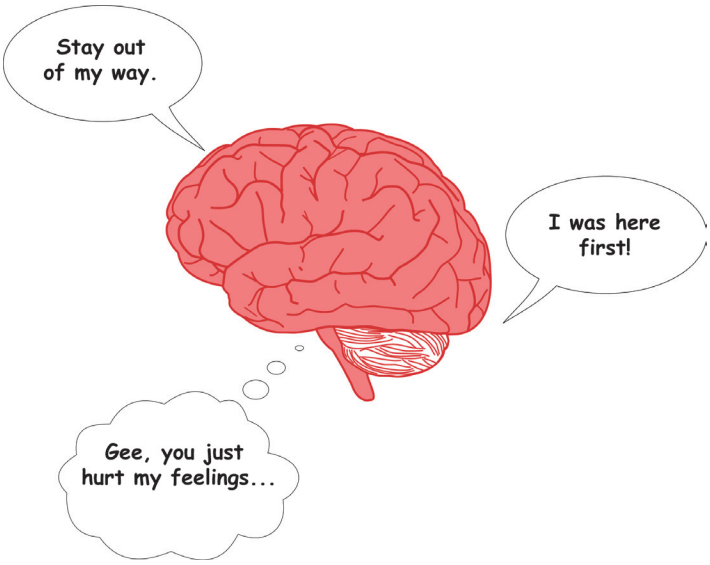
Says the one brain to the other, "don't be your biggest barrier." You actually have several brains in your head. There is the thinking brain. There is the brain that controls your bodily functions. There is the brain that controls your emotions. While these brains have specialized functions that serve the whole, sometimes those specialized functions are at odds with each other.

Can you recall a time driving on the highway when somebody cut you off or suddenly stopped in front of you? If it was a close call you probably found yourself trying to catch your breath while peeling your death-grip fingers from the steering wheel! Those sweaty hands and that warm, tingly sensation in your arms and chest were signs that you had an **Alarm Reaction** - that ancient survival mechanism programmed deep in your brain that instantly switches your body into *"Action-Hero Mode."* Adrenaline seems to always grab the spotlight in the starring role, but it is just one of some 1400 chemical reactions that are instantaneously activated throughout your body!

In an emergency situation in which you are threatened, acting quickly is imperative. You want to react! What if you had to actually think to yourself, "Oh dear, somebody is stopping in front of me. I should maybe … slow down … or … maybe change lanes…?" Having to think through the situation would likely fail to keep yourself safe. When your Alarm Reaction gets activated, your **survival brain** takes charge and intentionally shuts down your **thinking brain**. But, what happens when the outcome of a situation depends on you being able to *think your way out of a situation*?

Think about the last time you and a loved one had a heated discussion (ok, argument!) and you got truly angry. You stopped thinking and started reacting and then things just got worse from there. When angry, you acted out of your self-interests, but they probably weren't the best things to say for the long-term health of your mutual relationship.

When you are the one who needs to remain in control because you are the adult (or the professional or the one who is supposed to keep everyone safe), that important Alarm Reaction survival mechanism can actually work against you. This is why people say, "Cooler heads will prevail."



Alarm Reaction Chalk Talk

You've heard of the term **"fight or flight"**, but recent research [1] has shown there are a few more steps in the process. The process is actually:

1. freeze
2. flight
3. fight
4. fright

When you first observe danger, you actually freeze. This allows you to observe what's going on around you and assess the danger. Freezing may last mere moments and you may not even realize that you do it. Most people then progress to flight or fight, but some actually get stuck in freeze and are unable to respond at all. Not good.

Instinctively, you are more likely to flee than fight and only fight when unable to flee. The popular term, "fight or flight" should more accurately be said as "flight or fight." The fright response describes when someone is unable to flee or fight and just gives up. This is akin to playing dead or "playing possum" which has a different function from the initial freeze response experienced by everyone.

Why are we talking about *your* survival mechanism when we are supposed to be talking about de-escalating others? Well, when you or anyone else is confronted with a threatening situation this primitive brain function will likely get activated without your consent. That Alarm Reaction, which is a good thing in a survival situation, is a bad thing when you have to **think your way out of a situation**.

When your personal or professional ethics call for you to actually protect the person who is threatening you, **maintaining your self-control is paramount**. This is easy to see when the police officer or medic intentionally heads into harm's way, but often forgotten when it is that familiar battle with your own child that activates you. Professional emergency responders receive training and follow specific procedures to minimize the likelihood that they will have an Alarm Reaction. Maintaining awareness of the Alarm Reaction will help us from succumbing to it when more thoughtful action is required.

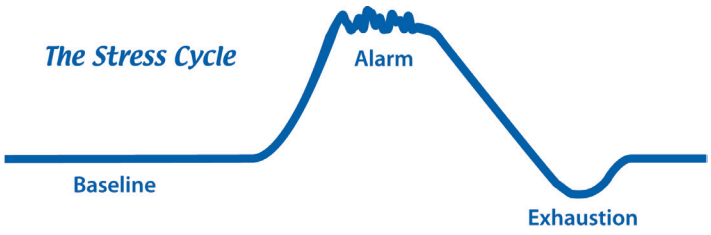
Situation: Stress!

Dr. Richard Lazarus, who studied stress extensively [2], has defined stress as **your perception of your ability to cope**. Notice the word *perception* in that definition. Stress is not the event but your response to it. Think about it: if you can deal with the situation, is it stressful? No. What is stressful? Stuff you cannot deal with. So, **stress is actually the reflection of your ability to cope** with demands.

Does this make stress a bad experience? Ask around and you will likely find that most people tell you that stress is a bad thing. They don't want stress.

So can stress be a good thing? Yes! Some amount of stress can actually be productive. Think about it: when do you get the most work done? When you are on deadline. Compared to normal baseline anxieties, some amount of **stress is beneficial to have a heightened awareness and responsiveness.** But, more stress than we can manage will result in an unmanaged Alarm Reaction. Also, having no stress can make you unresponsive (apathetic.)

The **Stress Cycle** is the process of physical and mental responses that occur when stress causes an Alarm Reaction [3]. You must recover from the ensuing Exhaustion before returning to Baseline again.



Baseline is the way you are normally. When you encounter a stressor you have a stress response. If that stressor is severe enough, like when someone cut you off in traffic, you can have an **Alarm Reaction**. It is important to keep in mind that after you experience excessive stress, your body will be depleted from expending extra energy. You will need to recover from this **Exhaustion** before you return back to your Baseline.

Stay Off the Roller Coaster

Remember that your own natural responses to unusual situations can provide physical barriers to successfully managing the situation in the form of stress responses and subsequent exhaustion. *What do I look like when I get stressed? How can I recognize this in myself? How does this look to others?*

Thinking Barriers

"I don't know if I can deal with this!"

"I just don't know what to do with you anymore."

Pay attention to your *thinking* in unusual situations because that physical stress response naturally shuts down the rational thinking part of your brain. With an Alarm Reaction, the autonomic and the emotional parts of your brain get activated and diminish the cognitive side of your brain. This challenges your ability to **think through situations** and makes it more likely that you will just react.

Grade your thinking in a situation. Ask yourself, "is this productive thinking or is this unproductive thinking?" Ok, skip the grade and just decide on pass or fail.

How would you feel if the firefighter showed up to a situation and said out loud, "Wow! I don't know if I can deal with this!" That wouldn't give you much confidence, would it? The people that you are supporting are also relying on you for confidence and for you to remain in control. The escalated person definitely needs for you to remain in control which means **you have to not only manage yourself physically, but also manage yourself mentally.**

Cognitive Distortions

Under stress, managing yourself is often challenged with the loss of thinking power. Shifts in rational thinking can often produce what are called **Cognitive Distortions** [4] which are irrational thoughts that lead to unhealthy and inappropriate boundaries with others. Professional responders are taught to be aware of their thoughts and look for cognitive distortions. So should you.

Some examples:

Oh come on, this will never end!

Why do these things keep happening to me?

This is so frustrating!!!

Things will never change.

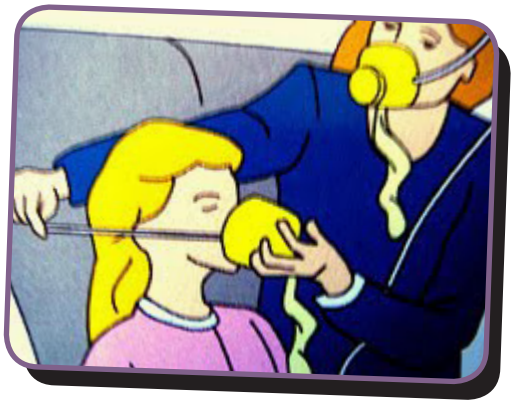
I can't take this anymore.

So how can one keep from becoming dysfunctional in a crisis situation? From the example scenario at the bank, the negative thoughts the individual had about being threatened with a punch in the nose had to be pushed aside to be productively present to the situation. How can you avoid your "buttons" from being pushed?

My examples:

Surprise # 1

In order to be effective in a crisis situation, you have to first manage yourself before you can manage other people.



During an airline safety briefing you are instructed when the mask drops to first place it on yourself before assisting anyone else. Why? **You've got to take care of yourself before you can take care of anyone else**. When medevac helicopter pilots are called to an emergency they are required to walk - not run- to the helicopter. People are dying and they are required to walk? Why? It is a known fact that running will elevate their blood pressure and impair their judgment right before they have to pilot the aircraft.

When hearing "remain in control of a situation", many assume that means that you control the situation by controlling the other person. The surprise here is that in order to manage others, you must first manage yourself. We cannot control others, we can only control ourselves. The way we remain in control of a situation is by controlling ourselves. The paradox here is that when you **change your own behavior,** you change the outcome of the situation.

Your Turn

What works for me? What helps me be present in a crisis situation?

Relationships Rule

If you know the person who is escalated, you will likely provide better support than if you don't know him or her at all. If you know the person, you know their motivations and their triggers. You know what kind of day they've had. You know if they missed their breakfast or not. You know what comforts them. What are their fears that you need to avoid? You know these things to some degree and they will guide your support.

Huh? So you have never before met the escalated person in front of you? Ok. So what happens if you don't know the person you are dealing with? Obviously, you lose the benefit of having an existing relationship, but don't make the mistake of assuming that you have no relationship with this person.

How is it possible to have a relationship with a person you never met? Your relationship is defined by your roles in the community. Those roles frame the limits and structure by which you are connected to each other. The rules for this connection are likely already established and will set the stage for your relationship once you do know each other.

For example, if you are a hospital nurse, librarian, school teacher or law enforcement officer, your relationships with the public are guided by civil rights and professional etiquette. In a private business, the bases for your relationships are modeled by a code of conduct or company values, such as "the customer is always right." These overt policies guide the development of relationships with strangers as well as serve as a reference point in your encounter.

Some relationships have policies that are not necessarily codified in writing. For example, most parents have the policy of unconditional love. Personal beliefs and religious views also form the boundaries of your personal relationships. Of course, these views are defined within the individual families.

Remember that relationships rule in de-escalation because they guide or set the scene for what will ensue. In a de-escalation intervention, your interaction is guided by your relationship with the person you are supporting. Your success is enhanced with the amount of experience you already have with the other person.

More on relationships later.

Destination: De-escalation

So how do you respond in any situation? Your response is guided by your **De-escalation Compass**. A regular compass does just one thing: it always points to the same direction. Your de-escalation compass should do a similar thing – point you in a consistent direction. That can only happen when you are already familiar with rules, regulations or guidance about what you will or will not do in an escalated scenario.

A navigational compass is a simple, but powerful tool even though it does just one thing: its magnetic needle always points North. A common misconception of the compass is that it tells you where to go. The compass doesn't know where you are going on any given trip, but it always knows the direction of North no matter which way you are facing. A compass is really only useful as reference point in combination with a map and a destination route. On your journey you may encounter twists and turns that will take you in different directions, but watching **your compass helps you keep your bearings** as you navigate the obstacles in your path.

Your De-escalation Compass can be a powerful tool that should similarly help you reach your destination. The forces that keep your De-escalation Compass needle pointing North may be hard to observe like the Earth's magnetic field, but are no less real.

Advanced Tip:

Note that a standard compass reacts to the Earth's magnetic field which is shaped differently around the globe. Also, this magnetic field is known to change over time. Navigators must continually make adjustments to their compass readings based on their location.

Similarly, your De-escalation Compass may point differently when you are at home, at work or at a community event and will vary based on your personal beliefs, professional requirements, community morays or religious tenets. Also, ideas about intervention may change over time. For example, spanking children is generally seen much differently today than in previous decades. Always having the right response means that you are adept at reading your De-escalation Compass and adjusting for the context.

If you are well versed in the expectations upon you, you will always know which way is North on your De-escalation Compass. Every situation is different, but watching your compass as a reference point helps you de-escalate anyone, anywhere and anytime.

Your Turn

Think now about how you are expected to respond in any situation?

When am I obligated to respond and when am I not?

What am I allowed to do and what is prohibited?

Surprise # 2

One Response Does Not Fit All

A common misconception of de-escalation skills is that you can learn a specific technique and it will always de-escalate the person in front of you. It is not uncommon to hear people say, "I usually do _____, but this one time it didn't work."

The same technique will not always work because different people have different needs. You can even take the same two people and the same issue and the situation may resolve differently on a different day. You will be most effective when you can adapt in the moment to the needs of the person you're trying to support. The only response that works every time is the **right response** for that specific situation.

Many people stick to just one response because that is the one tool they are comfortable using. Or, they continually use the same response because they are still using the same old map. "One response does not fit all" may seem obvious in writing, but ask around and see for yourself how many tools people keep in their **de-escalation toolbox**.

It is during the escalation itself that you need to reach into your de-escalation toolbox and use the right tool for the job at hand. Here, there are no shortcuts for experience, skill and training. Any tip or trick that you can pick up along the way can be useful in the right context. All de-escalation training can be useful. No de-escalation training, however, can tell you what to do in this escalation. The only one who can determine that is you and your assessment.

No one training program will ever give you all the skills and experience you need to always be successful. The consummate expert uses every learning opportunity to add tools to the toolbox and to increase proficiency with all of the available tools. There are a number of tools found in this book.

Unplug The Power Struggle

Escalation time is not teaching time. This is not a good time for discussion. Remember how your thinking brain gets turned off when you are escalated? You have to remember that the escalated person has a similar mindset. When their thinking brain is off you have to appeal to their survival brain.

Negotiating with an escalated person will likely be unproductive, if they are truly escalated. If you are able to negotiate with the person, they are probably not that escalated. Their responsiveness is a reflection of their escalation. If they cannot make any sense out of what you are doing or saying, that is a sign of their escalation. Their response is feedback for you and how you should respond.

"What's going on?" This is what you always have to be asking yourself. What is this person's motivation? What is driving this person's behavior? Is this issue specifically about me or am I bearing the brunt of their bad day? Do they need to just get this off their chest?

Constantly assess what is happening. The enemy of assessment is assumption. When you assume, you stop assessing. When you stop assessing, you are less likely to have the right response. When you have a relationship with the person you are de-escalating you may be able to take some things for granted. Beware, however, because in the de-escalation process you actually want things to change! How will you know if things change but for continually assessing?

We saw an example of this earlier in the Bank Line story with the use of a powerful de-escalation tool: **Silence**. When the woman in line began making violent threats, the person responding remained silent. This accomplished several important tasks:

1. By being silent, it allowed the responder to listen to the escalated person and assess her goals. It is, of course, harder to listen while also talking.

2. By saying nothing, there was no further fuel for a fire. It takes two to argue, as they say.

Silence worked well in that scenario but that doesn't mean it will work well in all scenarios. But since you are always assessing, you will know that.

Advanced Tip:

Sometimes the response to an escalation can itself create a power struggle. Many interveners will first demand compliance from the escalated person by telling them to be quiet or to "calm down." (There are a *lot* of reasons to not say the phrase "calm down," by the way.)

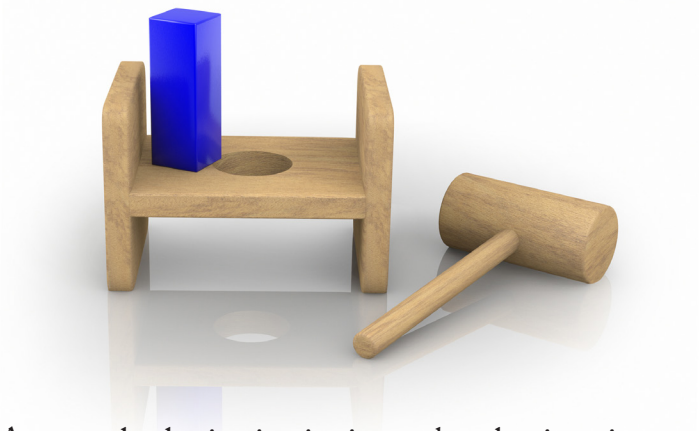
As a way to unplug the power struggle, ask the person why they are upset or what they wish to achieve. Your question, together with a demonstration that you are listening, signals to the escalated person that you are interested in supporting them. You will achieve a faster resolution with the person when you work together, not against each other. Note that sometimes the escalated person will not or cannot answer your inquiry. Use their response, or lack of one, as an indication of their level of escalation and need for support.

Might Is Not Right

Why do so many 2-year-olds try to solve their problems by hitting? Did you teach this behavior? No. It is instinctive.

You can look at this anti-social behavior as a sign that people are naturally violent [5]. If not, why would the history of problem solving be so marked by fights and wars?

Really, what the 2-year-old needs to learn is how to solve her problem nonviolently and without coercion. Think about the kinds of life skills required to obtain power, control and resources without the use of violence or coercion. There are a lot of options in solving problems at any age, but what percentage doesn't involve violence? Would you acknowledge that one certainly has to be thinking clearly in order to avoid reverting to mere violence and coercion?



Apparently also instinctive is to take what is acting upon you and use as much force, or more, to make it stop. Most people who are dealing with behavioral challenges have a goal of making the undesired behavior stop. Make it stop now! Especially if the undesired behavior is uncomfortable. But as we just discussed, might is not right with getting one's needs met. There are better ways to diminish undesired behavior. This leads to our third surprise.

Surprise # 3

Making It Stop Does Not Make It Stop

The Case Of The Misplaced Slap

My boy has Autism and we had to send him to live in a group home because he became so aggressive. He slapped everyone he encountered in the back. If he were within arm's reach, he would slap you in the back. People called him a "little monster." What would you do with him at this point? Punish him? Give him a timeout? Restrain him? Give him a high five?

Wait! A high five? Actually, the group home staff taught him the high five. Why? Someone wondered if the boy was slapping everybody in an attempt to have social interaction, but in such an ignorant way. So on that theory, the staff taught him the high five. Guess what happened to the backslapping? It stopped.

It turned out that the high five met the same need for him as slapping people in the back. Additionally, it was easier, safer and everyone readily wanted to engage in high fives with him (because they didn't want to get slapped in the back!) We tried it at home and so did the staff of his school. Once everyone around him started giving him high fives, the back slapping stopped in all of the environments.

Crisis: Communication in Action

We have to remember that **behavior is a form of communication**. It may not always be a good form, but it is a valid form of communication. Human nature drives people to get their needs met in whatever ways possible. To understand what a person is communicating, we not only have to listen to their words but also "listen" to their behavior and their body language.

Two Fundamental Questions:

1. "What is this person trying to gain?"

2. "What is this person trying to avoid?"

With the boy who was the back-slapper, it would have been tempting to try to punish the bad behavior out of him. It would have been easy to assume that his behavior was intentional and malicious. After all, why would somebody slap others in the back to the point of hurting them if not for the purpose of hurting them?

But the group home staff looked deeper. Theorizing the slapping was an attempt at social interaction, they taught him a more appropriate social skill. Because they were better able to communicate with him, they were better able to improve their relationship and his long-term success. In this case, what would have normally been considered to be a "behavior problem" was really an "education problem."

"Behavior is a form of communication"

The Offense of Self-Defense

Many will readily justify a back-slapping intervention of hitting him back or forcing him to stop by restraining him as self-defense - even claiming it is an inalienable right. But this scenario highlights the *risk* of "self-defense."

And in this case, physical intervention may have only escalated the situation, especially since many self-defense techniques are actually offensive in nature. If the technique involves the infliction of pain on another person it should be labeled as offense and not defense. Yes, in the court of law you can probably justify the use of violence in the act of self-defense.

And it is not uncommon for non-violent crisis intervention to turn aggressive because it forces the recipient to comply against their will. If it is a matter of life or death - you or them - you can probably defend the harm you inflict on the other person. But at what cost? Even if the rules allow it under certain circumstances, you will have to defend yourself. Your ethics will be reviewed. It may damage your reputation. It will certainly alter the relationship you have with the other person and probably not for the better.

A physical intervention actually increases the risk that someone will get hurt. A physical response usually plugs in the power struggle - justified or not. A physical response will likely escalate the situation, negatively impact the relationship with the other person and it may incidentally teach the other person that "might is right."

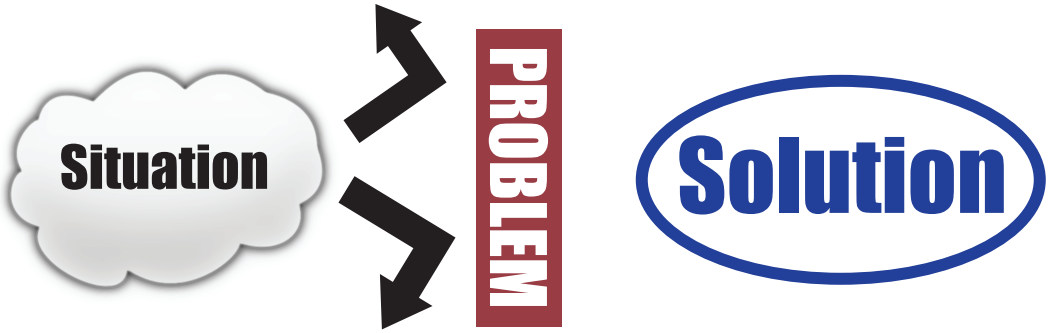
There are studies that show that a physical response to physical aggression actually increases the likelihood that physical aggression will occur again [6]. If you have to protect yourself or physically intervene, *it should* not *be for the purpose of behavior management, compliance, punishment or even to vent your own frustrations*. Physical intervention should only be used for the purpose of safety protection.

When is a physical response the right response? When that response makes the situation *safer*. If you're going to respond physically because of the danger, the response should be done in a way that reduces that danger. You need to weigh the risks in the moment. There may actually be a time in which you decide to not physically intervene because it would increase the risks of someone getting hurt, including yourself.

If you do plan to use physical intervention, be sure that you know the regulations in your area. And get training. Contemporary training programs now should be teaching alternatives to violence in self-protection and intervention.

Advanced Tip:

Notice that the group home staff did not try to directly stop the backslapping itself. **They stopped it indirectly by providing a better alternative.** Would they have had as much success if they tried to attack the problem by physically making him stop the slapping? If the boy couldn't slap, how would he have been able to get his social interaction needs met? Research shows that he would have tried to slap harder and more often if he was prevented from slapping [7]. This would not have made the problem go away, but rather it would have actually made it worse.



Don't work harder,

Work Smarter

Your Turn

Which physical interventions am I allowed or willing to use?

Which physical interventions am I not allowed or willing to use?

When is the use of these interventions the right response?

Now and Then?

Earlier, we discussed the importance of relationships and now we will consider their role in de-escalation. An existing relationship will change your perspective in an intervention and guide your actions. You must carefully balance the here and now with this person's long-term needs.

In the short-term, your primary intervention objective is all about safety. In the long-term, you are all about success. If there is a dangerous situation happening right now, you probably have a short-term perspective on safety. But you will be most effective in dealing with escalations, incidents, or assaults on a long-term basis.

Short-term focus	SHIFT...	Long-term focus
Intervention		Prevention
Reaction		Know now what to prevent
Seek shifting relationship		Build lasting relationship
Safety resolution (not problem resolution)		Problem resolution

How you respond in the moment will depend on your short-term and long-term perspectives or goals. If you know this person already and you have a relationship with them, likely you already have long-term goals that will guide your intervention. It's much harder to be successful in the short-term so you always want to **shift the relationship to the long-term.**

Is this a person you have not met before? Not knowing the person will make a long-term focus a bit more difficult. But just as a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, a personal relationship begins with a single interaction. Every interaction is an opportunity to create a long-term relationship.

If you do not know the person, you may choose to shift the relationship. **A shifting relationship is a long-term relationship in the making**. You begin the relationship by building rapport. If you don't know what is driving the person's behavior and what is needed to support them, then you need to start collecting that information. This information is the basis for a long-term focus.

Once you know what is likely to happen with this person, you begin to think ahead. This leads us to surprise # 4.

Surprise # 4

Postvention Prevents Problems

Prevention is the preparation before an event to ensure it doesn't happen. **Postvention** is what you learn after an event that allows you to prevent it from happening again. Maybe you were unable to foresee or prevent this incident from happening this time, but what you learn from this incident you can use to prevent it from occurring in the future.

Postvention prevents problems because you can only prevent something from occurring when you can foresee it. This means you need to **assess what has already occurred** and decide what should happen next time. This is a critical turning point in always having the right response. You are most likely to know what to do in an event when you have already planned for it. In a long-term approach, this will be your most critical work.

The best problems are the ones you don't have anymore!

When you know that something is likely to occur, it behooves you to do something about it before it occurs again. You may even be negligent if you don't. Prevention is the dominant paradigm in so many fields:

- bullying
- cancer
- crime
- disease
- fire
- risk management
- suicide
- theft prevention.

Prevention needs to also be the dominant paradigm in behavior management. In the end, prevention efforts cost less and achieve faster, longer-lasting results. Postvention is the key to Prevention.

Prevention Manual for Behavior Problems

Professional behaviorists help people change undesired behavior in two standard ways: Proactive Environments and Positive Behavior Support. Below are brief descriptions of these techniques which themselves are beyond the scope of this book, but will point you in the right direction should you find the need for effective behavior management strategies.

Proactive Environments

Prevent the likelihood of known problems from occurring by **proactively managing the environment**. A proactive environment uses strategies that effectively maintain appropriate social behavior and forge positive relationships and interactions.

Parents who install baby gates and drawer locks in advance of bringing home their baby are creating a proactive environment.

Think about the likely scenarios you will deal with. How can you modify the environment to prevent them from happening? Consider such issues as safety, expectations, communication, instruction and support.

Positive Behavior Support

For undesired, maladaptive or dangerous behavior, **use positive approaches to reinforce desired behavior**. Maybe the person doesn't know a better way to behave? The group home staff used the Positive Behavior Support process to help the boy who was the back-slapper.

In brief, the process begins with assessing the undesired behavior then setting goals for more desired. The process continues with implementing strategies for achieving the behavior change and monitoring outcomes.

Applying this process to the entire environment is positive behavior support on a mass level where the change is targeted at everybody in the environment. Apply that concept to your home.

Advanced Tip:

Be careful not to choose a short-term focus out of apathy or "convenience." It may come back to haunt you! If the matter at hand should really be treated as a long-term focus, you may be creating a larger problem by not addressing it. Choosing the short-term as a short-cut is definitely the wrong response! Dedicate yourself to solving problems. Plan for success.

Grappling Grandma

My Grandma was a very independent woman. She rode the bus everywhere even at age 84. Somehow, no matter when you saw her she always had cookies she just baked fresh for you! Unfortunately, she fell and broke her hip. Despite the seriousness of her physical injury, she seemed to be hurt more by the loss of freedom she experienced due to her extended hospital stay.

One day during a family visit there, Grandma was complaining about her "imprisonment" and loss of dignity. We tried to console and cheer her, but she became increasingly agitated. A nurse heard the commotion and came in. The nurse asked Grandma to get back in bed before she hurt herself again and impeded her recovery.

We were all extremely shocked when Grandma began physically threatening the nurse! Did I hear my Grandma say she was going to inflict physical harm if the nurse did not let her leave? During her agitated state, my Grandma stood and started throwing objects at the nurse. She was even able to pick up a chair and throw it at the nurse. My Grandma was also screaming and yelling, accusing the nurse of stealing her purse and trying to kill her. The nurse just kept telling my Grandma that she was there to help.

At first, the nurse expressed concern for Grandma's injury and tried to force her back in bed, but this seemed to provoke a bigger fight. When Grandma started throwing things, the nurse retreated back toward the door. She later told us that, at that point, she realized she could do more damage by trying to force the issue.

In the meanwhile, we kept talking to Grandma and tried to help her understand that she would leave the hospital sooner if she followed her medical advice. We understood that she was wounded emotionally due to her loss of freedom, but kept telling her to follow directions and get back in bed. We told her, "We want you to go home as soon as possible. Cooperating with your treatment will help you leave sooner."

Security was also alerted to the commotion and entered the room. Observing the confrontation between Grandma, us and the nurse, he paused momentarily to take in everything that was happening. But when he saw the chair sail across the room, the man from Security headed straight for Grandma like he was going to grab her.

The nurse suddenly exclaimed loudly for him to stop and back away! It turns out that she was observing us talk to Grandma and realized that we were making progress with her. When the security person backed away, we were able to tell Grandma that was a sign that no one was there to kill her and that we were giving her space for her safety. Grandma stopped throwing objects and, more and more, started focusing more on what we were telling her. After another minute or so, Grandma sat on the bed and started sobbing heavily.

After Grandma was resting again, we talked with the nurse about the incident. My mother kept apologizing for her mother's behavior, but the nurse graciously told her not to. The nurse told us at first she was concerned for Grandma's physical condition, but as she escalated the nurse changed her perspective. "I thought: 'how does it feel to be in her situation?'" the nurse recalled. "Then, I began to remember why I do this work. I thought to myself, 'I'm the professional, this woman is in pain. I am the one she is relying on.'"

This story illustrates the sometimes delicate balance of short-term and long-term goals. This nurse showed us confidence, empowerment, leadership and a desire to shift toward long-term relationships which leads us to our last surprise.

Surprise # 5

Inside-Out Change

Inside-Out Change is a significant de-escalation strategy. It comes from within and reflects the change you make regarding the situation. Earlier, we discussed the goal of always being in control of a situation. It turns out that **if you can change <u>your</u> thinking about a situation, you can change the outcome**. The nurse showed us the potency of reassessing the incident and shifting one's thinking about the outcome.

The nurse's discovery is a very common outcome for those learning these principles. Tens of thousands have attended the RIGHT RESPONSE Workshop (which is based on the same Guiding Principles as those presented in this book) and it is typical to hear afterward, "I came here to learn how to manage others but what I learned is that I need to first manage myself. If I change the way I respond to a situation, I completely change the situation for the better."

Many workshop attendees previously assumed that the bad behavior of another is the responsibility of that other person. But others are not always able to change their behavior, whether it is due to age, disability, or experience and so they need support. It is only through our consideration of the situation and separating our own reactions from the long-term interests of the other person, can we decide to take a proactive approach to resolve it. That is inside-out change.

Inside-out change requires confidence, empowerment, leadership and a desire to shift toward long-term relationships. Inside-out change requires both personal and professional leadership. Inside-out change requires the willingness to provide people with knowledge, skills and support. Inside-out change requires that we sacrifice our personal priorities and comforts in the service of those in need.

Spread this optimism. Maybe that last incident you dealt with was a horrible experience, but can you get beyond how it impacted you to plan what you will do to prevent this from happening in the future? That is a tall order for some people. Can you do it?

Inside-Out Change: *Changing your way of thinking and responding in order to make a difference in the situation at hand.*

3 Guiding Principles for <u>Every</u> Situation

How is it possible to always have the right response? During an incident you may not always know exactly what to do, but **3 Guiding Principles will always guide your actions in any situation**.

1. **Meet the needs** of the person that you're dealing with. Meet their individual needs, their needs in that moment as well as their long-term needs.

2. **Reflect respect and dignity** toward the people you're dealing with. No matter what this person is calling you or how they are inconveniencing you, the lack of dignity or respect will not help you productively resolve the situation.

3. It is always the right response to **maintain the safety of everyone** involved.

The Right Response?

How do you always have the right response? These 3 Guiding Principles will help you in any situation.

Not sure what to do? Take a little test:

- ❑ Will my response meet the **needs** of the person?
- ❑ Is my response **respectful** and dignified?
- ❑ Will my response maintain **safety**?

If yes, that is probably the right response. If your response does not meet these 3 goals, it is probably the wrong response. Remember that **the wrong response is likely to increase the escalation**, increase the risk of somebody getting hurt and negatively impact your relationship with that person.

This is the core essence of what it will take to always have the right response. The rest is experience, skills and tips. You cannot always have the right response unless you are ready for inside-out change and prepared to follow these 3 Guiding Principles.

The 3 Guiding Principles are themselves simple in concept, but achieving them may not be as easy. This approach may be more natural for some than others. You won't know until you try it.

You decide how much you wish to achieve. But, your work has already become easier with an understanding of the de-escalation process and the time you have spent aligning your De-escalation Compass. With every situation you face, the process becomes easier when you dedicate yourself to continual improvement.

Your Turn

Remember at the beginning of this book when you were invited to imagine the last incident that you are involved with? Have you thought about it while reading? Now that you have learned the 5 surprises and 3 Guiding Principles, what would you do differently if you were in that same scenario again? Take a few minutes to apply your learning from this book.

Glossary

Alarm Reaction: That ancient survival mechanism programmed deep in your brain that instantly switches your body into *"Action-Hero Mode."*

Cognitive Distortion: Irrational thoughts that lead to unhealthy and inappropriate boundaries with others.

De-escalation: Helping someone who is escalated to restabilize back to their Baseline state so that they can manage their own needs.

De-escalation Compass: The general orientation of your collective beliefs, morays and obligations that guide you in the intervention of escalations.

De-escalation Toolbox: The collection of all the skills and techniques you use during de-escalation.

Guiding Principles: Universal needs that must be met in order to have the right response.

Inside-Out Change: Changing your way of thinking and responding in order to make a difference in the situation at hand.

Physical Intervention: Techniques used to protect the safety of others; should not be offensive (inflict harm) to others.

Positive Behavior Support: The process that helps a person overcome a pattern of problem behaviors by focusing on teaching the individual safer, easier and more effective ways to manage themselves.

Postvention: What you learn after an event that allows you to prevent it from happening again in the future.

Power Struggle: The challenge of two or more people for control.

Prevention: The preparation before an event to ensure it does not happen.

Proactive Environment: A setting that is tailored to meet the needs of the individual and the group, designed for safety, and creates an effective learning opportunity.

Self Defense: Techniques used to protect your own safety; should not be offensive (inflict harm) to others.

Shifting Relationship: A long-term relationship in the making.

Stress: Your perception of your ability to cope with the demands of a situation.

Stress Cycle: The process of physical and mental responses that occur when stress causes an Alarm Reaction. You must recover from the ensuing Exhaustion before returning to Baseline again.

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Summary

In this book, we discovered 5 Surprises regarding the De-escalation Process. These tend to either defy human instinct or counter common knowledge.

5 Surprises

1. **Manage yourself first before managing others**
2. **One response does not fit all**
3. **Making it stop does not make it stop**
4. **Postvention Prevents Problems**
5. **Inside-Out Change**

3 Guiding Principles for Every Situation

1. **Needs**
2. **Respect**
3. **Safety**

How can you always have the right response? If you meet these 3 Guiding Principles, you will likely have the right response.

The specific goals of this book are to help you:

Remain in control at all times.

By understanding how your brain automatically reacts to threatening situations, you can better prepare yourself to be successful when you are required to think your way out of a situation. By moderating the stress you experience and channeling it productively, you can think more productively about successful resolutions. This might even strengthen your relationship with the other person! Controlling yourself and changing the way you think about a situation better allows you to remain in control at all times.

Support anyone, anywhere, with any issue.

Learning to find and use your De-escalation Compass provides you with a valuable tool for any situation. By already knowing your personal, professional, civic and religious views, you are grounded and know what you stand for. This is an extremely valuable position in that you are better able to decide what you will and will not do and more quickly choose the right tools from your De-escalation Toolbox. The focus on Universal Principles allows you to support anyone, anywhere, with any issue better than situational tricks or memorized phrases.

Avoid the wrong response which can make the situation worse.

By better assessing the person's needs, reading the situation and being open to long-term prospects, you are more likely to have the right response. Making someone stop an undesired behavior can stop the behavior, but at the cost of escalating the problem to more extreme levels. Instead, unplug the power struggle. With the right response, you are more likely to de-escalate the situation sooner and with less risk than with the wrong response. Avoiding the wrong response requires continual assessment and a desire to determine the right response for the situation.

About Service Alternatives Training Institute

Since 1993, Service Alternatives has been researching and developing best practices in the management of behavior and aggression problems in families, schools, group homes, hospitals, camps, detention centers and beyond. Every week, hundreds of people from all walks of life attend RIGHT RESPONSE Workshops nationwide to learn proactive and evidence-based strategies for de-escalation, intervention, restraint, prevention and positive behavior support.

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