

The Eye of the Storm

Tools for Navigating Challenging Conversations in these Turbulent Times

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Learning Outcomes:

Participants will be able to


- Identify 3 self-management strategies that can be used upon entering a challenging conversation
- Identify common scenarios best addressed first using de-escalation strategies
- Describe the stages of de-escalation and how to recognize the body language and behavior of each stage
- Identify communication strategies to transition from de-escalation to partnering
- Apply learning of successful communication strategies through simulated practice during breakout sessions

Agenda

- Current Landscape
- Three main concepts re: de-escalation
- Connect concepts to de-escalation strategies
- Practice session
- Share Out
- Exceptions/Alternative Interventions
- Questions

The Perfect Storm

- **Chronic Stress**- related to the pandemic- ongoing threat to safety
- **Trauma**- due to loss of jobs, housing, family members, mental health, or racial trauma due to exposure to race-based violence
- **Grief**- due to loss of life as we knew it
- **Uncertainty**- How long this will last? What information can we trust? Who can we trust? Will life ever get back to normal?
- **Instability**- Structures, routines, expectations, rules, supports



Look or Sound Familiar???

- No one is going to tell me what to do with my kid. You're not even a real nurse!
- The school is just picking on my kid
- These rules are racist against me and my family!
- Liberals just want to take away everyone's rights!
- I am the mother (father, grandmother) and I know what is best for my child!
- My child has rights! This is bull...!
- You make us get vaccines and then you are still having everyone wear mask. You people are crazy.

Concept 1

A Calm Brain is a Rational Brain

If either you or the person you are speaking with are agitated, you can expect one or both of you will have difficulty:

- Clearly expressing ideas
- Listening
- Processing information
- Problem solving

This is why getting and staying calm is so important

Concept 2

Energy is Contagious




- This is true in both directions
- Typically, the more powerful energy prevails

Concept 3

People Need to Feel Seen and Heard

(before they will)

- Listen
- Cooperate
- Collaborate
- Problem Solve
- Compromise

Challenging Conversation

I want to talk to whatever racist decided to make vaccinated kids wear masks. This is bull, and it's racist against my people. I have rights as a parent, to choose for my child whether or not they are stuck in a mask all day or not. This is not right!

Looks/Sounds Like

- Pressured speech
- Loud volume
- Fast-paced speech
- Red face
- Shifting eye contact
- Glaring eye contact
- Muscle tension
- Clenched fist
- Clenched jaw

Advanced Warning from the Secretary

DE-ESCALATION- STEP 1

Check In With Yourself

- Activation of Fight or Flight
 - Minimize response using breath
- Breath should be:
- Slow
 - Deep
 - Diaphragmatic
 - Exhales longer than inhales



A Calm Brain
is a
Rational Brain

Check Your Mindset

A Calm Brain
is a
Rational Brain

Doesn't Sound Like

- This parent is a pain
- Not him again
- I don't want to deal with them
- She is unreasonable
- I'm always upset after dealing with her

Sounds Like

- I can handle this
- This parent is passionate and invested
- This issue is important to them
- I am not going to make their emergency my emergency
- A calm brain is a rational brain

How Emotions Are Made- Lisa Feldman Barrett

DE-ESCALATION- STEP 2

Protect and Project

Protect Your Energy

- Visualize- glass wall between you and the other person
- Visualize- white protective light around you
- Set intention- Nothing bad in, Nothing bad out
- Physically- Zip up your energy (Qi Gong technique)

Project Calm Energy

- Relaxed muscles
- Arms relaxed by side or folded in front or behind you
- Easy eye contact
- Personal Space
- Relaxed, neutral expression
- Soft, slow voice

Energy
Is
Contagious

DE-ESCALATION- STEP 3

Create a Safe Space

- Reduce Sensory Input/ Stimulation
- Eliminate the audience
- Gently set firm limits (provide the reason before making the request)
- Communicate your willingness to listen and help

Energy
Is
Contagious

A Calm Brain
is a
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Doesn't Sound Like

- Ma'am, you need to take it down a notch
- Sir, calm down or I am calling security
- Sit down and relax, you are disturbing the students

A Calm Brain
is a
Rational Brain

Sounds Like

- I want to make sure I understand your concerns. Let's step into my office so we don't have any distractions.
- This sounds important. Let's step into a private location where we can talk privately.
- To keep the learning environment quiet for the students, let's take this conversation into the other room.

Distraction

(Must Be Used Wisely)

Doesn't Sound Like

- Did you see the game last night?
- How's the weather outside?
- Have you been to the mall lately?
- What kind of car do you have?



A Calm Brain
is a
Rational Brain

Sounds Like

- I really like your son. I'm glad I am finally getting to meet you.
- I heard there was a lot of traffic out there. I'm glad you made it here ok.
- You're the one with the new puppy. Your daughter told me all about it. She is so excited. How can I help you?

Also Consider- Water, Walk, Acknowledgment, Dark Chocolate

DE-ESCALATION- STEP 4

Look for Signs of Calming

Doesn't Look/Sound Like

- Non-compliance with requests
- Tense muscles/facial expressions
- Sarcastic comments
- Glaring eyes
- Loud, pressured speech
- Sighs- of aggravation
- Talking at you, not listening

Looks/Sounds Like

- Compliance with requests
- Quieter speech
- More relaxed muscles
- More eye contact
- Sighs- releasing tension
- Verbal exchange

*A Calm Brain
is a
Rational Brain*

DE-ESCALATION- STEP 5

Use Reflection Statements

- Statement summarizing what you heard
- Simple reflection- contains basic information or feeling
- Complex reflection- a summary of the information including the feeling
- Does not include your ideas or solutions

*People Need to feel
Seen and Heard*

Challenging Conversation- revisited

I want to talk to whatever racist decided to make vaccinated kids wear masks. This is bull, and it's racist against my people. I have rights as a parent, to choose for my child whether or not they are stuck in a mask all day or not. This is not right!

Reflection Statement

Doesn't Sound Like

- I understand
- I hear you
- I get it
- I know what you are saying
- I know a solution
- I think...
- Yes, but...

Sounds Like

- Simple- That sounds frustrating
- Simple- You're concerned that your child will have to wear a mask all day
- Complex- It sounds like you are frustrated because your child went through the vaccination process and is still being asked to wear a mask.
- Complex- It sounds like personal choice is important to you and the current rules about masks feel racially unfair and take away some of your parent rights.

Breakout Group Activity

Speaker

- Talk for 1 minute about a challenging conversation you had or that you anticipate having in the near future

Listener

- Listen to the speaker and then summarize what you heard in one or two sentences. Try to include the main idea and the feeling.

Observers

- Observe any changes you see in the speaker after the listener states their reflection statement(s)

Share Out



Speaker

- How did it feel to have someone reflect back what you said without including their opinions or solutions?

Listener

- What signals did you receive from your speaker that let you know your reflection was accurate?

Partnering

- Collaborative Problem Solving- State their concern first (reflection statement) and then state your concern
- I'm wondering how we might address your concerns about the mask rules and still keep your child safe. Maybe we can brainstorm some ideas together. What are your thoughts?
- What things are you willing to consider?

Ross Greene – Collaborative Proactive Solutions

Exceptions/ Alternative Interventions

If the person:

- is under the influence of Alcohol/Drugs
- Actively psychotic
- Extremely paranoid
- Has a personal vendetta against you

You may need to:

- Get security involved
- Involve the police
- Call your local crisis center
- Politely hang up the phone, with an invitation to call back
- Own your mistake, apologize, make amends
- Hand the person off to someone else (preferably someone they have a positive relationship with)

