

Conflict De-escalation

How to slow a disagreement before the nervous system turns it into a threat response.

Signs a conversation is no longer productive

- Voices get louder or faster.
- The same points repeat without new information.
- Sarcasm, contempt, threats, or character attacks appear.
- Someone becomes flooded, shuts down, or cannot track the conversation.

De-escalation steps

- Name that the conversation is escalating.
- Pause without abandoning the issue: set a time to return.
- Use movement, grounding, or breathing to reduce activation.
- When returning, discuss one issue at a time.
- Use specific behavior and impact rather than labels such as “always selfish” or “never care.”

Safety comes first

If there is intimidation, threats, stalking, coercion, or violence, ordinary communication techniques may not be appropriate. Prioritize safety and seek specialized support.

Try this reflection

How do you know you are too activated to solve the problem effectively?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.