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De-Escalation Techniques

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De-Escalation Techniques

Officer Alexander Robinson, Riley County Police Department

Communication during times of crises can be a daunting task, especially in environments where you don't feel safe. However, it is precisely at these times that effective communication is most vital. I have compiled a list of tips for ways to communicate in crisis situations that will hopefully allow you to have confidence and be able to diffuse situations that might otherwise continue to escalate.

- Find common ground. *Us vs. Them* mentality is tough to break, especially in a crisis. Finding something that you both agree on, or both have in common, even if unrelated to the current situation, can help move you from a *Them* to an *Us*.
- Manage your emotions. Elevated emotions are contagious. It's why TV shows have laugh tracks, why fights between partners tend to escalate quickly, and why large groups of people who are otherwise peaceful riot. If you can control your emotions, others involved in the crisis will often respond subconsciously. Many conflicts can be averted simply by managing emotions.
- Take the time to listen. In times of crisis, our initial instinct is to hurry things up to end the situation quickly. If you can slow things down and really listen to what the other side is saying, you might find that the true reason for the crisis isn't at all what you (or the other party) thought. Finding, and addressing, the true cause of crisis can often help defuse the situation.
- Don't be afraid to say sorry. Sometimes crises arise from our own actions. In these instances, often times the other party is just looking for closure. A simple I'm sorry or acknowledgement of your mistake will prevent further escalation.

While these actions are simple, they are not easy to execute with heightened emotions and raised stakes. Practicing these skills in personal relationships, whether with a significant other or a friend, will help prepare you for real world situations.