



Visitor Experience

Conflict De-escalation Strategies – SLOW

When confronted by a visitor who is angry or upset, it can feel like everything is happening all at once. An effective approach is to **SLOW** things down, keep under control, and you will be able to de-escalate a tense conversation or encounter.

SLOW (STAY COOL)

Don't take it personally. Allowing a visitor's words or actions to get under your skin will only escalate the situation. When people are feeling hurt, vulnerable, ignored, or unsafe, emotions tend to dictate their behavior. Keep a composed tone of voice and body language.

Be self-aware of the signs that you might be losing your cool, for example:

- Rising heartbeat
- Getting fidgety
- Talking more loudly and being curt

Regain or maintain composure:

- Take deep breaths
- Pause, listen to your body
- Remind yourself that the visitor's anger or agitation is not directed at you
- Avoid becoming defensive

SLOW (LISTEN)

When a visitor is upset, often hearing them out will help. Allow them to express what is upsetting them. To show that you are listening, try restating, reflecting, or summarizing what you have heard. When someone feels like they are being listened to, they feel valued and important. This can often lead to a calmer conversation.

Demonstrate active listening:

- Maintain eye contact
- Stand or sit straight, nod head
- Do not interrupt or contradict
- Repeat back what is being told to you

SLOW (OFFER VALIDATION & OPTIONS)

We've all been there. Upset, angry, or frustrated with a situation or request that is beyond our control. Sometimes we just want someone to tell us that the way we are feeling is valid. You don't have to agree with a visitor's beliefs, values or interpretation of a situation, but a simple, "that sounds frustrating" goes a long way. A part of offering validation is to acknowledge that what is happening needs to stop. Offer alternative options to help facilitate an acceptable outcome, and if applicable use rules, policies & regulations as reference.

Support statements, examples:

- *I am sorry you feel that way.*
- *I understand you are frustrated.*
- *I am here to listen to you.*

SLOW (WAY FORWARD or WALK AWAY)

Hopefully, the conversation can end with an agreement on next steps. Moving forward is facilitated by having connected with the visitor's frustration, clarified the regulations, and asked to comply with one of the options. Be sure to set clear limitation on what can be done, and what will not be tolerated. However, if the visitor is still not agreeing to available options, it is important to know when to end the conversation. Pay attention to body language, reactions from others nearby, and other factors that point to the need to walk away. If the interaction is turning into an unsafe situation, walk away and get some help. A supervisor or person of authority should step in at that point.

Exit language - phrases or ways you can end a conversation. Coordinate with your manager about what options are possible. Some examples:

- *I'm not going to be able to help you with this but let me find someone who can.*
- *I think we've explore all the solutions I can think of; would you like to speak to a supervisor instead?*
- *Would you like me to take down your contact information, and share it with my manager?*