

Shiro Bara Ju Jitsu
&
Shiro Bara Self Defence

Defusing Anger

Introduction

We have all probably met people that we believe can talk their way out of any situation. I know I have and I think it is a wonderful gift for the few people that do it naturally. Unfortunately though most of us have not been blessed with this skill and cannot do this naturally. So for the large majority of us if we are to avoid escalating an aggressive confrontation into a fight then we must learn that these skills are essential and that a lack of them could result in your only option in such a situation being violent confrontation, which must always be the absolute last resort.

In this paper I am going to investigate why some people feel anger and aggression and identify some methods to try de-escalate them.

Another important point to consider is “Is it something you have said or done to create this situation and reaction in the other person?”. In Neuro Linguistic Programming there is an exercise called positional perspectives. This exercise is simply about considering any given discussion from three different perspectives. The first perspective is probably the only one most people consider. “How does this situation appear to me?” The second perspective is “How does this situation appear to the other person in the discussion?”. The final perspective is “How does this situation appear to an uninvolved bystander?”. We can often gain more information about a situation by considering all three perspectives and this information may help us de-escalate a situation better.

The second section of this paper on de-escalation skills mentions a series of do's and don'ts. It is vitally important to be aware that not escalating a situation is as important as de-escalating it.

NOTE: It also be note that de-escalation techniques can also double for distraction techniques, so if you find yourself in a situation where you believe there is not other option but to defend yourself, then de-escalation techniques work very well as distraction techniques to enable you to land a pre-emptive strike.

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Understanding Aggression

We witness aggression in ourselves and other people for a large number of reasons and often verbal aggression can escalate to physical violence, which we need to avoid at all costs for our own well-being. Understanding aggression in other people can be key to helping to defuse a situation. Here are just a few reasons why aggression is prevalent.

- **Alcohol**
We've all seen the effects alcohol can have. In small amounts it promotes good feeling, joviality and openness. In large amounts or when used by people with an intolerance it can induce depression, intolerance and aggression.
- **Insecurity**
We all experience insecurity whenever we are fearful or feel a loss of control and predictability in our lives. When this basic degree of order and safety are threatened people often become volatile and unpredictable.
- **Lack of choice**
In general we respond with hostility and aggression when we perceive that our choices are limited. The sense of powerlessness that comes with feeling that we have little or no options often produces violent or hostile responses. Remember that cornered people are often intimidating and can inflict serious injury. Worse, they mask their powerlessness.
- **Imbalance of power**
When a person or a group feels that they have less power than another, the less powerful of the two may feel threatened, and become aggressive.
- **Disrespectful behaviour**
Any actions, which are considered inappropriate for whatever reason, are likely to result in aggression. Often disrespect isn't intentional though. We can often be disrespectful without realising it. Consider cultural differences, lack of knowledge of procedures or etiquette etc.
- **Mental health issues**
There are a large number of mental health issues, some permanent some temporary, which affect people's state of mind and can result in aggression. It would be unfair to condemn every person with any kind of mental health issue to hospital simply due to the fact that they "might" become aggressive. So we have to accept that we may encounter this in society and not judge these actions.
- **Bad example**
Unfortunately, we do learn by example. So if we witness lots of excessive aggression in our own lives or on TV then we are more likely to feel that sort of behaviour is acceptable and display it ourselves.

De-escalation Skills

There is a large range of skills and techniques you can employ to help you to defuse a situation. The first of these skills has to be NVC (Non Verbal Communication). When de-escalating a situation you have to be aware of your own body language as no matter what you are saying, if your subconscious body language suggests contrary to your spoken language then you may be wasting your time with verbal de-escalation. Our bodies subconsciously read and on the whole understand the signals given off by other people, so we would be seen to be dishonest if our verbal language and body language did not convey the same message.

The next section is listening and language skills. Listening is vitally important when de-escalating a situation as if an aggressor doesn't think you are listening due to you interrupting, butting in or look as though you are not paying attention then escalation of aggression will almost certainly happen. Language is also vitally important. There are many obvious rules like not swearing at or making threats, as these will obviously escalate a situation but there are also many other skills we can use like asking the right questions and alignment.

Before moving on to NVC and Listening and Language Skills I want to make the point of mentioning respect. Respect is the first and last thing I will mention in this section. Respect is often key to not finding yourself in an argument in the first place and respect is also key in de-escalating anger.

NOTE: If you find yourself in a situation where you need to employ de-escalation skills you may want to consider taking a disguised or defensive stance to enable you to respond better if the aggression evolves into an assault or to enable you to land a pre-emptive strike if the situation or need arises. The suitability and need for this obviously depends on the level of aggression you are dealing with, and is driven very much by each unique situation.

Non Verbal Communication

Without doubt NVC is hugely influential whether you are consciously aware of it or not. Learning to recognise and use NVC is a strong skill that can benefit many areas of your life. You can learn to read other peoples real feelings by reading the signals they are subconsciously giving off and you can also use these skills to skills to on other people. I have already written about aggressive NVC, which you will find an aggressive person using against you, so to respond with aggressive NVC will possibly escalate a situation. What we need to look at is a few simple NVC traits to use to support de-escalation and a selection to avoid at all costs. Please take the time to read more about NVC and how you can use it in to compliment your own martial skill. Here are just a few do's and don'ts to get you on your way.

When thinking about NVC we must consider each of the following areas:-

- touch
- glance
- eye contact (gaze)
- volume
- proximity
- gestures
- facial expression
- pause (silence)
- tonality
- dress
- posture
- word choice and syntax

Do's

- **Take a defensive stance.**
This is partly for your own protection, but also suggests non-aggressive confidence by placing objects between you and your aggressor, which subconsciously suggests to him that you are in control and not being controlled.
- **Nod.**
Nodding suggests agreement with your aggressor. If he feels you are agreeable he is less likely to become more frustrated.
- **Be silent.**
Be silent if your aggressor is telling you what is wrong. If you interrupt, you will look like your not listening even if you are.
- **Appear relaxed.**
Tension, nervousness, fidgeting etc can all give the impression that you are not in control or taking the discussion seriously and may add to your aggressor's frustration and escalation of the situation. Practice deep breathing to keep your mind calm.
- **Look at your aggressor**
But don't stare. Holding someone's eye contact for too long can be seen as a direct challenge.
- **Take a second to consider everything you say**

- **Turn to face your aggressor**

But don't stand square to them as this is seen as challenging. If you take a disguised fighting stance you will be OK.

Don't's

- **Frown.**

Frowning while listening suggests disagreement. So if you are agreeing with your aggressor verbally you may still be suggesting disagreement and escalating a situation.

- **Stand square.**

Facing your opponent squarely suggests confrontation, always adjust your angle slightly.

- **Stand too close.**

Standing too close to an opponent by stepping into their personal space can be seen as aggressive and may frustrate an aggressor. The intimate zone around a person is estimated to be around one meter. Do not stand inside this area.

- **Hold direct eye contact for too long.**

Short bursts of direct eye contact suggest confidence and authority when used correctly, but extended eye contact suggest dominance, arrogance and aggression, which may result in escalation of the aggression.

- **Touch your aggressor.**

Touching an angry person may be misinterpreted and seen as the start of a physical confrontation. Even if your touch is meant to be reassuring it may be seen as aggressive as you are venturing into your aggressors personal zone.

- **Raise your voice**

Its easy to try to make yourself heard by raising your voice. However, if you are raising your voice you are probably not listening to your aggressor and portraying dominant and aggressive signs yourself that may help escalate the situation further.

Take a look at each area of the areas of NVC that I mentioned at the beginning of this section and consider each one from the perspective of being an aggressor and dealing with an aggressor.

Listening and Language Skills

Listening is essential for a number of reasons. If you don't listen to your aggressor then you're not likely to be able to find out what it is that you can say or do to defuse the situation. Be sure that if your aggressor is raising his voice that he wants you to listen to what he has to say. Listening doesn't mean you are being submissive, it just means you're not being aggressive. Also remember listening isn't always easy. It's too easy to butt in, finish someone's sentences for them or prompt them when they are looking for the right words, but all of these things will serve to add to your aggressor's frustration and escalate the situation.

Here are a few listening skills that you can use to help de-escalate anger.

- **Empathise**

Put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to understand how they feel.

- **Validate**

When your aggressor says "Do you understand what I mean?", "I'm right aren't I?" or something similar nod your head and agree with them. This validates that what they have said is correct and you agree with them. You can then go on to say "you're right and I also think we should [*insert reasoning here*]"

- **Paraphrase**

Paraphrasing is a simple skill of repeating what your aggressor has said to you back to them. Often if an aggressor's requests are irrational or impossible by repeating them back they will see their request isn't practical. This can be the start of more structured dialogue as you are using the same words that you know the aggressor understands because they have just used them.

Paraphrasing Example:

Aggressor stood in pub doorway: "I want you to get the f*&k out of here"

Neil: "You want me to get out of here, but you're in the way"

- **Clarify**

If you don't understand your aggressor's needs then ask him to clarify them for you.

Clarification Example:

Aggressor comes charging into room: "Get the f*&k out of here now"

Neil: "OK...I'll get out if you can tell me what's wrong?"

Aggressor: "There is a gas leak"

Note: You might think this example is silly, but too many people would respond to the guy aggressively issuing a warning to get out with aggression and anger of their own. This might result in escalation of unnecessary aggression.

- **Gather information**

Try to gather as much information about a situation. This will prove useful when you verbally respond and show you were listening.

- **Recognise your own prejudices**

Your aggressor may be responding to feelings or responses they received from you because of your own prejudices.

- **Use your aggressor's name (if you know it)**

This shows respect for the other person.

- **Be patient**
Patiently repeating yourself isn't always easy to do. You are making progress though if your aggressor has asked you to clarify your meaning. So don't damage that progress by appearing short tempered, impatient or impatient. Repeat your point and watch your aggressor's body language for any prompts for you to clarify further if you need to.
- **Use open-ended questions**
By asking questions that require your aggressor to reply with more than a simple yes or no will help to engage their brain and help them to think logically again.
- **Ask probing questions**
If you are not sure what it is your aggressor is angry about then ask them. A simple sentence like "I can see you really upset about this and I'm going to do something about this if you can just tell me what you need me to do"
- **Offer options**
As we know people become volatile when they feel their options are limited. So by looking for and offering more options to an aggressor we de-escalating the situation by offering them more options.
- **Alignment.**
By aligning yourself with your aggressor you can take away the aggression he is directing at you by agreeing with his opinion.

Example 1

Imagine an aggressor tells you he is pissed off about something. Firstly agree with him then tell him it pisses you off equally as much as it does him and then ask him what he thinks you should do to resolve it. You have just aligned yourself with his opinion, avoided confrontation and might even get productive feedback.

Example 2 (True Story)

Around three years ago I was having lunch with some friends in Sevenoaks. I went to the bar to buy a round of drinks and lunch and was stood near a group of Chelsea football supporters. One of the guys spotted my Leeds United football shirt and pointed at me and shouted "Oi C*&t, we don't like your sort round here. F*&k off". I raised my hands in a despairing fashion and replied with something along the lines of "I know I know.. we're shit. I wish I didn't support them, but we're all stuck with our chosen team aren't we?. I wish we were doing as well as you guys this season. What's the score in the Chelsea game?"

This reply aligned me with the loud bloke as we both appeared to have the same opinion. I reinforced this by asking how his team was doing and showing an interest in the score. I also said I wish we were doing as well as they were that year which makes them feel my team were inferior to his and not a threat. After the game the group sat near us and he actually reported the score and some of the events of the game.

- **Acknowledge that your aggressors concerns are legitimate**
If you dismiss your aggressors concerns you will simply be adding to their frustration and escalating the situation. If your aggressor is upset about something you should recognise it is an issue to them and re-assure them that it is a valid concern, even if you do not think it is.
- **Always show respect**
This is the last and probably important of my listening and language skills. You have to recognise that your aggressor may be being aggressive because he is feeling threatened, anxious or fearful and may respond more aggressively if he feels threatened.
 - **DO NOT** use offensive language in your discussion with your aggressor. If it can be misinterpreted, it probably will be.
 - **DO NOT** smirk or laugh at their concerns. Even if you find what they say is funny.
 - **DO** remember that respectful behaviour reduces vulnerability.

De-escalation No No's

- **Do not accuse or counter accuse**

It is very easy in an argument to answer your aggressor's argument or accusation with a counter accusation. By throwing in an accusation into the situation you are actually adding to the list of issues that have to be resolved before the conflict is resolved. Simply try to resolve the issue at hand and don't add to the problem.

- **Don't make assumptions**

If there is something you are not sure about in an altercation, ask don't assume. If you assume wrongly you will be simply adding to the frustration of your aggressor.

- **Don't apportion blame**

Apportioning blame leads to people becoming more defensive or hostile rather than co-operative and understanding.

Disengaging

You must bear in mind that not all confrontations can be de-escalated. If you find yourself dealing with aggression and de-escalation fails you do not have to revert to a physical response. As long as you haven't escalated the situation further then it is still possible that you will be able to attempt disengaging from the situation (IE: Get out of there in one piece!). To do this you will have to swallow your pride, lose your ego's and accept that you have lost nothing by walking away from a confrontation.

When attempting disengagement always take a disguised stance so that if the disengagement fails you are in a position to throw a pre-emptive strike if you need to.

You must also try to disengage when: -

- Attempts at de-escalation have failed or resulted in escalation.
- You are too angry yourself to constructively de-escalate.
- You feel too much discomfort. If you feel the situation cannot be de-escalated or that you cannot do it, then don't, disengage instead.
- You are nervous about a situation and fear for your physical safety. If you think that the anger, or drunkenness, of your aggressor is so high it is likely to quickly turn to violence then attempt disengaging as soon as possible and do not attempt de-escalation.

Try some of these simple disengaging scripts: -

- "I can see your furious with me, so I will leave you alone for now and maybe we can chat later when we have both calmed down".
- "You're right about all of this, and we need to talk more about it sometime, but I don't think that's now".
- "Right now I feel this is a little too intense. I don't think I can deal with this to your satisfaction right now".
- "I'll be back later, will you still be here to chat more about this?"