

Transform Conflict in Your Life:

5 Tips To De-Escalate Heated Moments

When you are upset, it's hard to see possibilities. Before you make any decision about a situation that upsets you, take time to pause. This may be the most important step you can take to de-escalate the moment. By taking time to calm yourself down, you are likely to have better perspective on the situation and be more prepared to proceed in a manner in line with your core values and attitudes rather than escalated emotion.

Here's a simple mindfulness practice to follow when you are escalated:

1 Try to Calm Yourself First

Notice how you are breathing. Is it elevated, rapid, uneven? If so, focus with intention on each inhale and exhale, purposefully slowing the cadence. How do you feel when you are able to notice just the breath?

If you are having a hard time slowing your breath, do a quick body scan too; pay attention to each zone. Is your head pounding, are your palms sweaty, are you tense in your limbs? Remind yourself, literally, of how you want to feel: relaxed, grounded, focused. Acknowledge any shift, however subtle, in your physical body.

Repeat until you have slowed your breath and have recovered from the physical symptoms of escalation. Do not re-visit the escalation cause until you are physically calmer.



2 Focus & Reflect on the Cause

Once you are more physically relaxed, you may now turn your attention to what brought you the physical escalation.

- Find a comfortable, quiet, and safe space.
- Make sure you have time and space to concentrate on what really happened.
- Try not to multi-task or attend to more than this important issue, but, rather, bring all of your attention to what's really in front of you.
- Keep the scope of your focus on this one event.



4 Get Feedback

It's important, when facing conflict, not to insulate yourself from perspective. Whether you decide to consult a professional coach or speak to a trusted advisor or friend, I recommend you do a "reality check" before you next act after the escalation.

- Sometimes, when dealing with conflict, our physical and emotional responses trick us into thinking we are justified in an extreme response. This is rarely the case.
- After you've considered an alternate response, ask someone you trust, and who is likely not to just agree with you, to weigh in too.
- Consider asking your friend to play devil's advocate with you.

When you are ready to re-engage, create a safe space for neutral communication. You can also sit down with a professional who can hear your perspective and the other person's too. Either way you are ensuring a more likely scenario for success.



3 Consider the Possibilities

Now that you have your mental and physical space stable and aligned, turn your attention to the content of the conflict.

If possible, write down your recollection of the events as they happened. Read through what you've written several times, but do not change what you've written.

From there, list out possible responses. This can also include the actual response you had. You may find this exercise challenging and it may trigger some re-escalation of feelings. If so, take moments and re-ground yourself through the calming exercises. Then, if time allows, set it aside for at least a day or more.



5 Create Closure

If you are fortunate enough to resolve the conflict, allow yourself the opportunity to create a reset for future interactions. You have likely learned something about yourself and the other person in managing the conflict, so trust yourself enough to apply it in the future as well. Not every tool you used this time will work in the future, but you can be certain that any interaction that is less escalated will be more clear-headed and productive. Internalize for yourself what is likely to trigger a negative response and try to avoid scenarios in which this can arise. In addition, be sensitive to the other party's triggers too and recognize their limitations.



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