

TIPS TO PREVENT OR DE-ESCALATE ANXIOUS/AGGRESSIVE CLIENTS

People with cognitive challenges may become angry or hostile when they are under stress. It is important to remember individuals may have little or no control over their behaviour due to the nature of their disability. Using these de-escalation strategies will help you respond to these situations in the safest, most effective way possible.



Be Empathic and Non-Judgemental:

- When a client says or does something you may perceive as bizarre or unreasonable, try to be empathetic.
- Keep in mind that whatever the person is going through, it is likely the most important thing in their life at the moment.

Respect Personal Space:

- Stand three feet away from a person whose behaviour is escalating. Personal space will decrease a person's anxiety and will remind them you are not there to impose authority.
- If you must enter someone's personal space for any reason, explain your actions so the person feels less confused and frightened.

Use Non-Threatening and Non-Verbal Communication:

- The more a person becomes agitated, the less they are able to listen.
- Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, & tone of voice.
- Keeping your tone and body language neutral will go a long way toward defusing a situation.

Focus on Feelings:

- Your client's feelings can be as important as the facts in the case.
- Watch and listen carefully for the person's real message. Supportive statements such as, 'This must be very scary,' will let the person know that you are empathetic to their situation.

Avoid Overreacting:

- Remain calm, rational, and professional. While you can't control a person's behaviour, how you respond to their behaviour can have a direct impact on whether the situation escalates or defuses.
- Positive thoughts such as, 'I can handle this,' and 'I know what to do,' will help you maintain your own rationality and calm the client down.

Ignore Challenging Questions:

- Answering challenging questions often results in a power struggle. When a person challenges your knowledge or competence, redirect their attention to the issue at hand. Ignore the challenge, but not the person.
- Bring their focus back to how you can work together to solve the problem.

Set Clear Limits:

- If a person's behavior is aggressive, defensive, or disruptive, give them simple limits such as "That's not allowed in a courtroom," or "You may not get bail if you say that."
- A person who is upset may not be able to focus on everything you say. Speak in clear language and offer the positive choice when possible.

Allow Silence for Reflection:

- We've all experienced awkward silences. While it may seem counterintuitive to let these moments occur, they can give a person with brain injury a chance to process and reflect on information they've received, what's happening, and how they can proceed. Silence can be a powerful communication tool.

Allow Time for Decisions When Possible:

- When a person with a brain injury is upset, they may not be able to think clearly. Give them a few moments to think through what you've said.
- People with brain injury often need a longer time to process information. Allow extra time for your client to understand the situation and calm down.

www.abijustice.org



www.bist.ca | 416-830-1485