

Verbal De-Escalation Techniques for Poll Workers

Monroe County Board of Elections





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When a potentially violent situation threatens to erupt, verbal de-escalation may be appropriate...

There are 2 important concepts to keep in mind:

- 1) Reasoning with an enraged person is not usually possible. The first and only objective in de-escalation is to reduce the level of excitement so that discussion becomes possible.
- 2) We are driven to fight, flight or freeze when scared. However, in de-escalation, we can do none of these. We must appear calm even when we are frightened. Therefore these techniques must be practiced before they are needed so that they can become second nature.





01

Self Control

Be In Control of Self:

CTRL:

Control yourself

When approached, remain or appear calm, centered, and self-assured even though you may not feel it. Relax facial muscles and look confident, but not intimidating. The goal here is to de-escalate the situation.

ALT:

Alter your thinking

Think before you speak and/or respond. Use a modulated, low monotonous tone of voice (our normal tendency is to have a high pitched, tight voice when scared).

Do not be defensive- even if the comments or insults are directed at you, they are not about you.

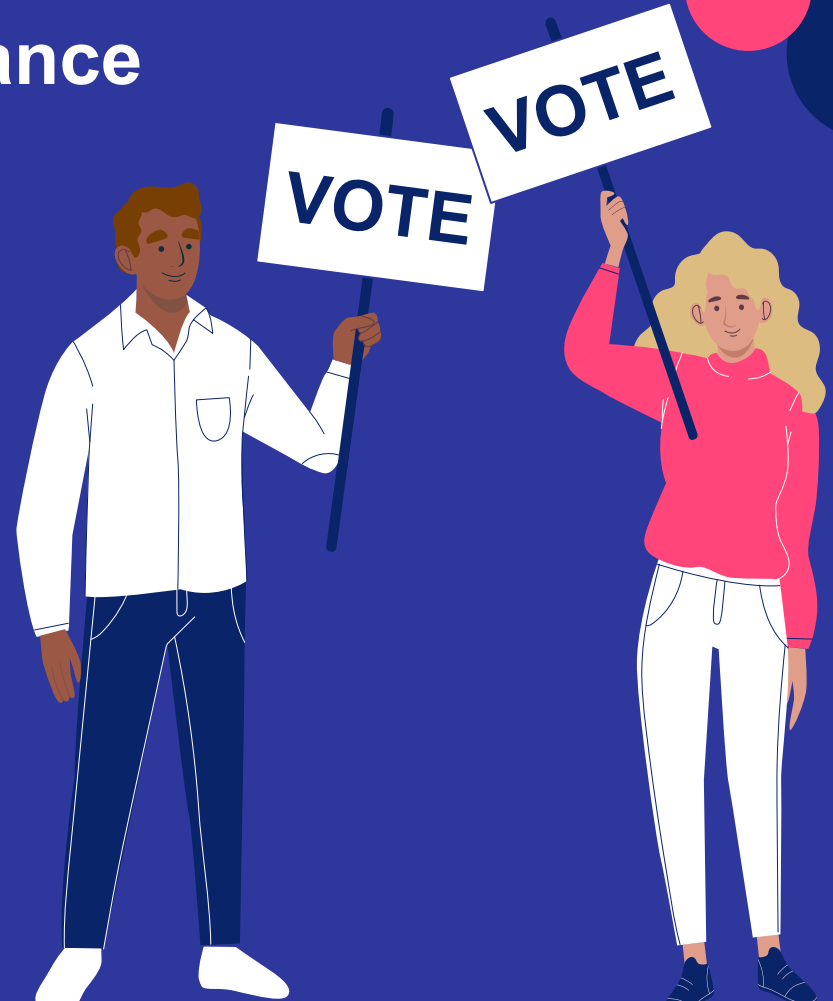
DEL:

Delete negativity

Stay positive by being respectful, even when firmly setting limits or calling for help. The agitated voter is very sensitive to feeling slighted or disenfranchised. We must assure them that we want them to be able to exercise their right to vote.

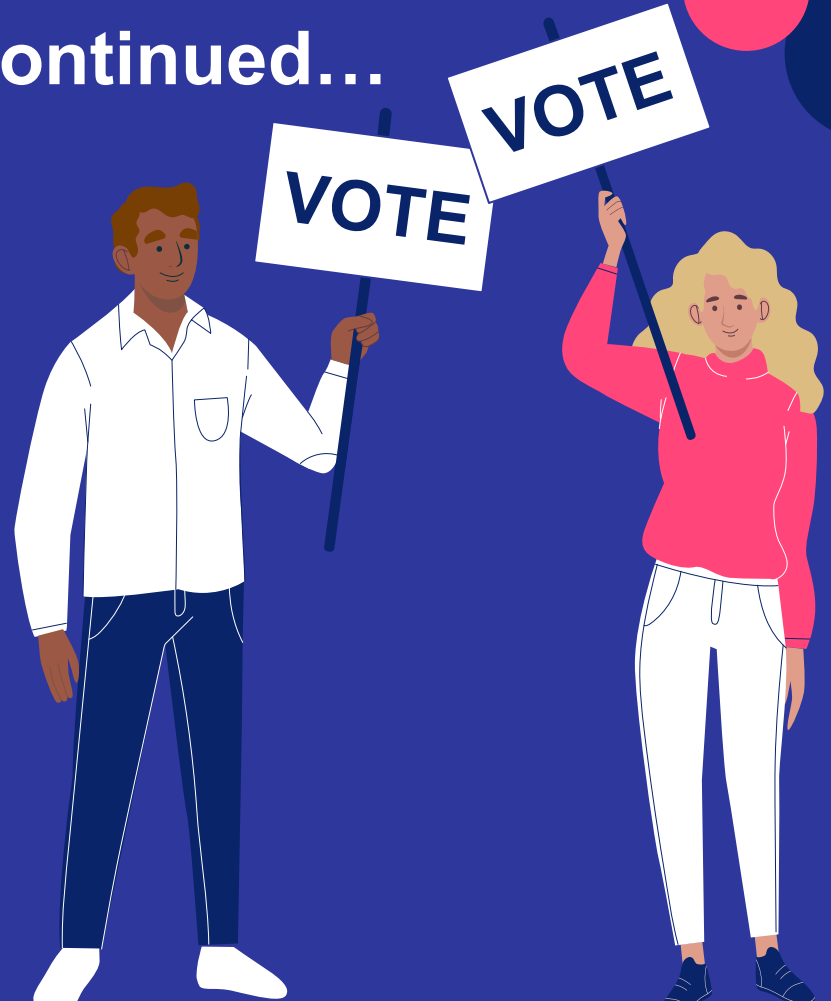
The Physical Stance

- Never turn your back for any reason.
- Always be at the same eye level. Encourage the individual to be seated but if they need to stand, you stand also.
- Allow extra physical space between you and the voter, about four times the usual distance.
- Do not stand fully facing the voter. Stand at an angle so you can side step as needed.
- Do not maintain constant eye contact. Allow the voter to break their gaze and look away.



The Physical Stance Continued...

- Do not point or shake your finger!
- Do not smile. This could look like mockery or anxiety.
- Do not touch, even if some touching is generally culturally appropriate and usual in your setting.
- Keep your hands out of your pockets. Keep them available to protect yourself.
- Do not be defensive or judgmental.





02

Discussion



DE-ESCALATION DISCUSSION

Remember: Your goal is to calmly bring the level of arousal down to baseline.

Do not get loud or try to yell over an irate person. Wait until they take a breathe, then talk. Speak calmly at an average volume.

Respond selectively, answer all informational questions no matter how rudely asked.

NEVER TELL A VOTER THAT YOU WERE NOT TRAINED OR DO NOT KNOW SOMETHING!

Instead apologize for any misunderstanding and offer to get them the information that they are requesting. Ask them for their continual patience while you further assist them, or while getting the attention of your Site Chair to take over.

Site Chairs are expected to handle the situation if inspectors are incapable of doing so.





DE-ESCALATION DISCUSSION continued...

Site Chairs: Allow Poll Worker to explain the situation to have a full understanding of the needs of the voter.

Introduce yourself by sharing your first name and that you are one of the Site Chairs in charge of the polling site.

Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, but always respectful tone.

Give choices where possible in which the choices are reasonable ones.

Example: “Would you like to continue our discussion calmly or would you prefer to take a moment to collect yourself in order for you to be able to exercise your right to vote?”

Empathize with the feelings but not with the behavior.

Example: “I understand that you have every right to be upset but it is not okay for you to yell at me or my staff”

Do not try to interpret feelings in an analytical way.





DE-ESCALATION DISCUSSION continued...

Do not argue or try to convince

Wherever possible, try to tap into the voter's cognitive mode. Do not ask "tell me how you feel", but: "help me understand what you're saying to me". Voters are not attacking you when they are telling you what they want you to know.

Suggest alternative behaviors where appropriate

Example: "Would you like to have a moment to think or would you prefer to speak with someone down at the Board of Elections?"

Trust your instincts. If you assess or feel that the de-escalation is not working, STOP! You will know rather quickly if it's beginning to work.

Tell the voter that if they do not calm themselves they will need to leave the premises. You may need to call security or 911 for additional help.





03

Reporting & Response

Reporting & Response:

For an Emergency / Imminent Danger:

REMAIN CALM

REMOVE YOURSELF FROM THE THREAT

IMMEDIATELY CALL OR DIRECT OTHERS TO
CALL 911

Reporting & Response:

There is nothing magical about talking a voter down. You are demonstrating your sense of calm and genuine interest in what the voter wants to tell you, in a respectful manner. In the hopes of that voter will emulate what you have actively demonstrated yourself.

What happens immediately after an incident?

Post-incident response will include the following, as appropriate:

- Provide as much detail as possible, including voter's name, time, and everyone involved on the incident report found in the Site Chair manual.
- Report the incident to BOE staff and the proper authorities as required.
- Secure the premises to safeguard any evidence and reduce distractions during the post incident response process.
- Reduce risk factors as possible.