



September 4, 2025

De-escalation in Practice

Strategies for Supporting
Newcomers Experiencing Crises

switchboard
connecting resettlement experts





Today's Facilitator



**Jenna Christie-Tabron,
EdD, LMSW, MFT**

Senior Training Officer,
Switchboard



Today's Speaker



**Megan Rafferty,
MA, LPC**

Training Officer, Mental
Health and Wellness,
Switchboard



Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

1

DESCRIBE

escalation and recognize
early warning signs in
newcomer clients

2

EXPLAIN

trauma-informed approaches
to crisis preparation at the
client, staff, and
organizational levels

3

APPLY

the four core actions of
de-escalation in
resettlement settings



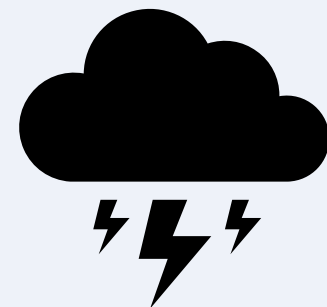
Rate your level of confidence with de-escalating clients experiencing high emotional distress.



Understanding Escalation



Roles of Stress and Trauma in Escalation



- Decrease a person's ability to cope
- Brain shifts to survival mode
 - Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn
- Increase sensitivity to perceived threats
- Can contribute to escalation

Triple Trauma Paradigm

Newcomer Stress and Trauma



Pre-Migration

Migration

Resettlement





What are some signs of escalation?

Escalation



When distress becomes
overwhelming

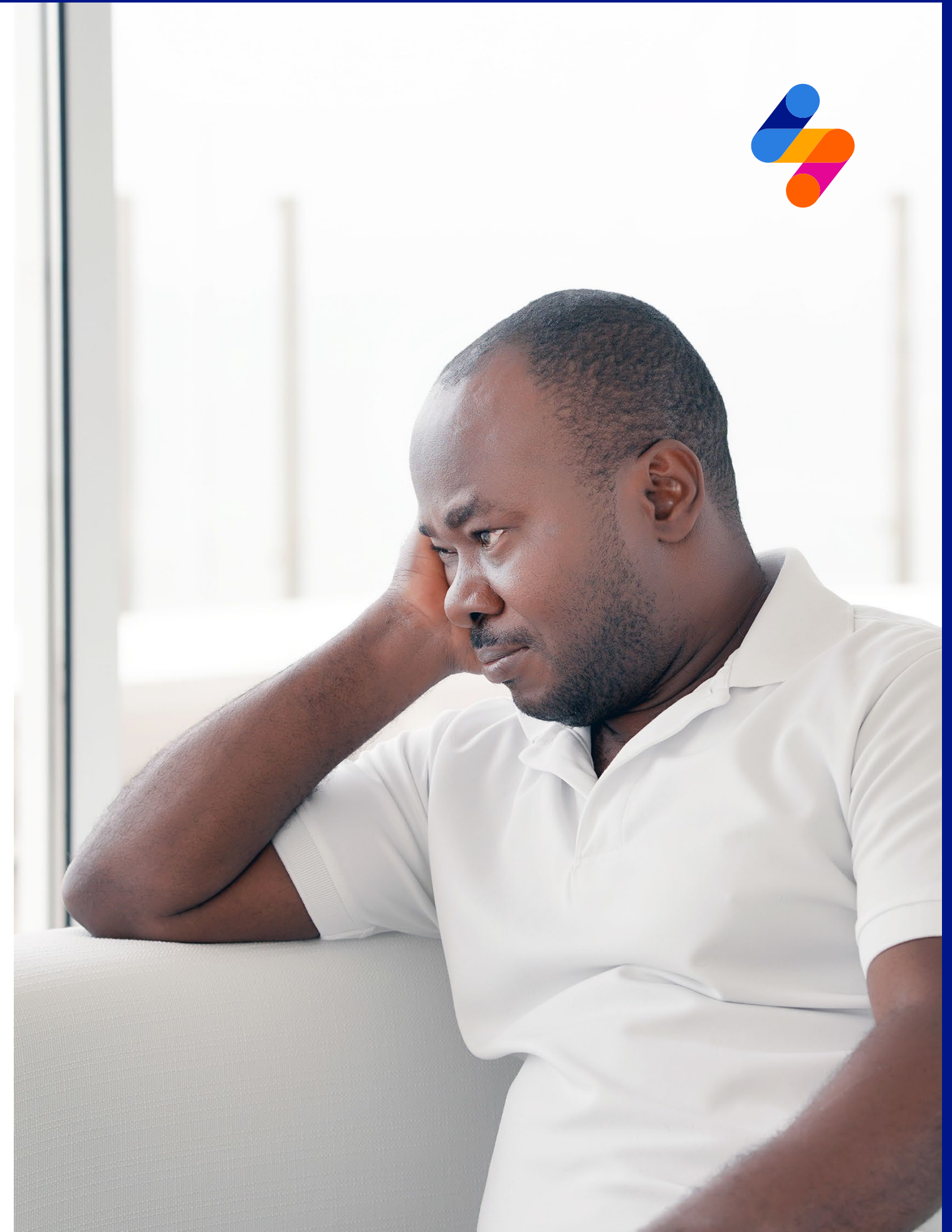
Difficulty reasoning,
making decisions, and
keeping calm

Can include yelling,
arguing, inability to
listen, etc.

Early Warning Signs of Escalation

Changes in

- Voice
- Eye Contact
- Body Language
- Physical Reactions
- Mood
- Communication





Preparation

Working in Trauma-Exposed, High-Stress Environments



The 6 Principles of Trauma-Informed Care



① **Safety**



② **Trustworthiness
& Transparency**



③ **Peer Support**



④ **Collaboration &
Mutuality**



⑤ **Empowerment,
Voice & Choice**



⑥ **Cultural, Historical
& Gender
Considerations**



Strong Foundations

Preparing to Work in Trauma-Exposed and High-Stress Environments



Client

Discuss expectations;
Understand their rights and responsibilities



Self

Self-awareness; securing
support and self-care



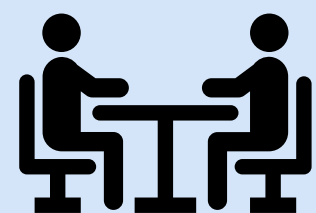
Organization

Policies and procedures,
recurring training, and staff care





Client Preparation



- **Build relationships** and rapport
- Use a **trauma-informed** approach
- Let clients know **what to expect**
- Give **control and choice** when possible
- Discuss **rights and responsibilities**



What feelings do you experience when you are with an escalated client?



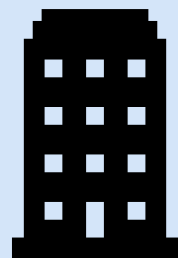
Self Preparation



- **Self-awareness** of your own triggers and history
- **Self-care** and grounding skills
- Ensuring you have the **support** and back-up you need
- **Safety measures**
- Setting **boundaries**



Organizational Preparation



- Trauma-informed **policies and procedures**
- **Recurring training** in crisis response procedures
- **Safety measures** protecting staff and clients
- **Staff care** and support in place
- **Documentation and reporting**



3

Four Core Actions of De-escalation

In Resettlement Settings



Defining De-escalation

- A **communication style** to use when clients are escalated, distressed, or overwhelmed
- Helps **restore calm** and assist clients in coping, listening, and engaging

Four Core Actions of De-escalation



1. Evaluate

if de-escalation is the appropriate response

4. Prevent

future escalation and crises



2. Listen and validate

the client so that they feel heard and understood

3. Plan

immediate actions to support the client

A woman with long, dark, curly hair is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a mustard-colored top. The background is a blurred office setting with a desk and a chair visible.

Caseworker Irina

Irina, a caseworker with two years of experience, has been working with her client, Jon for the past three months. Irina has helped Jon secure housing and employment and plans to meet with him again in two weeks.

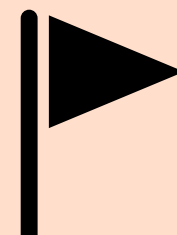
But today, the front office calls Irina to let her know Jon is in the waiting room without an appointment, demanding to see Irina and “angry about his paycheck.”



What should Irina consider when evaluating how to approach Jon?

Step 1: Evaluate

Initial and ongoing



Continue

Proceed with Caution

Stop



Irina and Jon

Irina goes to the waiting room to see if she can de-escalate the situation.

Jon appears frustrated but not dangerous. She asks Jon to join her in her office, moving the conversation to a private space.

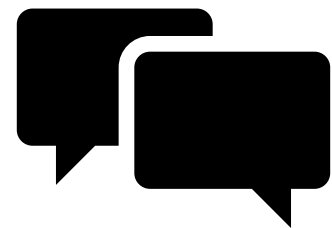
Here, she asks Jon to tell her more about what is going on. Jon shouts that his paycheck is not enough to afford his high rent and the food his family needs, and that it's Irina's fault.



How might Irina respond in this situation?



Step 2: Listen and Validate



- **Center yourself** before engaging
- Consider non-threatening **body language**
- Use **active listening** skills
- **Avoid judgment**, labeling, or correcting
- **Validate** the emotion

A man in a light blue denim shirt is gesturing with his right hand, palm up, while talking to a woman whose face is partially visible on the left. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

Jon's Stress

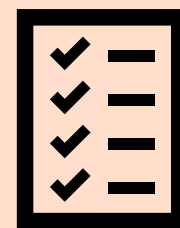
After talking with Irina a bit, Jon begins to calm down. He concedes that Irina seems to care about him, and it is not her fault. He shares that his family is unhappy here, and he feels like a failure for not being able to get a better job to provide for them. He lets her know that the pantry at home is empty, and he has to decide between buying food or paying the rent.



What might Irina do next?



Step 3: Plan to Help



- Planning begins **after calm has been restored**
- Focus on the **present**
- Keep it **simple**
- **Repeat** important information
- Set a date for a next **check-in**
- There is not always an answer; **listening with compassion** may be all you can provide



Irina and Jon's Plan

With Jon's permission, Irina connects him to a nearby food bank that can provide an emergency food box the same day.

To ensure he can easily get there, she enters the address into the map on his phone and gives him a printed copy of the details.

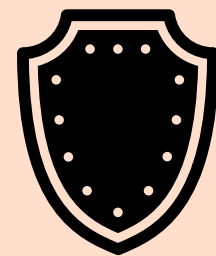
Additionally, she schedules a follow-up appointment for early next week to check in on his budget and employment progress.



What other steps can Irina take to support Jon?



Step 4: Prevent Future Reoccurrence



- **Identify clients at risk** of escalation, and proactively prevent incidents
- Help clients **identify triggers** and **coping skills**
- **Connect** to social support and/or mental health care
- Increase frequency of **check-ins**
- Create **safety plans**



Irina and Jon

Jon shares with Irina that he hasn't been sleeping well because of the stress he's experiencing, and that he's been having more frequent arguments with his wife.

Irina explains that these kinds of challenges are common during the early stages of resettlement. She mentions that some of her other clients have found it helpful to speak with a counselor, a trained professional who helps people manage stress, emotions, and personal challenges and asks Jon if he would be open to a referral



Post-Incident Follow-Up

- **Debrief** with affected staff
- Seek **supervision**
- **Document** the incident
- Engage in **self-care**





Q&A

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Help us help you!

Scan the QR code or click the link in the chat to access our feedback survey!

- Five questions
- 60 seconds
- Help us improve future training and technical assistance



Recommended Resources



Switchboard

- Toolkit: [Critical Incident Response: Toolkit for Developing Organizational Policies and Procedures](#)
- Webinar: [Suicide Prevention and Safety Planning](#)
- Guide: [Introduction to Safety Planning](#)
- Guide: [Safety Planning for Suicidal Ideation](#)
- Webinar: [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\): Foundations for Resettlement Caseworkers](#)

- Guide: [Trauma-Informed Care: A Primer for Refugee Service Providers](#)
- Guide: [Preventing Crises and De-Escalating Difficult Situations with Newcomer Clients](#)
- Webinar: [Trauma-Informed Care in Case Management](#)

International Rescue Committee (IRC)

- eLearning: [Safety Planning in Resettlement, Asylum and Integration Settings](#)
- eLearning: [De-escalation in Resettlement, Asylum and Integration Settings](#)



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The IRC received competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant #90RB0053. The project is 100% financed by federal funds. The contents of this presentation are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.