



WE KEEP US SAFE

de-escalation tactics and practice

building safer communities  
without police

*This practice guide was compiled and printed by  
Storefronts I.N.C.*

*We are an alliance of small businesses, workers, and  
community organizations who seek to minimize and  
halt police presence in our storefronts by developing  
and practicing means of community self-determination  
and autonomy. We understand the role and impact  
of policing as a violent racist, classist, and patriarchal  
force. Therefore, as keepers of physical gathering spaces  
and businesses we have a responsibility to actively  
disrupt that violence. We invite you to join us.*



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*shoutout to For The People Safety Team and other  
Suigetsukan Dojo members that developeped and  
shared this training material*

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## WE KEEP US SAFE

### De-escalation Tactics and Practice for Storefront Workers

The following curriculum is for participants (workers, owners, volunteers) of a storefront or specific physical location who share the goal of minimizing violence or harm in situations of potential conflict or threat in a way that allows them to avoid calling the police. This curriculum was adapted from a self defense and de-escalation training given by members of Suigetsukan Dojo in Oakland, CA. Ideally everyone at your location can train on these practices, but if that is not possible, at least one person that is present at any given time (ie shift manager, etc) being trained and practiced would prove helpful. It is important to state that innumerable factors may play out and cannot be covered in one, or any number of trainings. Participants of this training must/should:

1. Want to calm down, or de-escalate situations and have the ability to practice the cultural and situational awareness (aka street smarts) to understand that they are not acting as mediator or judge to resolve a case, but merely seeking to assess and steer involved parties toward de-escalating themselves and moving on.
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2. Come from a place of care when addressing people who may be dealing with or reacting from a place of crisis, especially when factors include or combine substance use, mental health crisis, malnourishment, etc. Acknowledge that these are often symptoms of greater systemic ills.
  3. Follow the assumption that most of how we react in emergency situations is based on core instincts and muscle memory, so practice and repetition is key. This means that you or your group should do these trainings annually or more often.
  4. Follow the assumption that you as participants know your own workplace and life situations best. This will enable you to help imagine and create the interactive practice scenarios most relevant to you.
  5. Do you! De-escalation skills are already present in us all, and everyone has a different mix of styles and strong suits that allow them to handle difficult situations. Training and practicing in de-escalation involves tapping into your existing communication style and mannerisms to notice what is most useful to the task at hand.

This version of the training curriculum is based on participation in three trainings taught by Suigetsikan

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Dojo members. It is offered as a resource and hopefully will be improved upon with companion videos for some of the technical/drill sections. It is meant to be a guiding document that allows groups to get trained in:

1. basic threat assessment
2. body language and presentation
3. verbal strategies
4. place specific awareness
5. physical intervention (as a last resort)

DISCLAIMER: The following is not intended for situations involving armed robbers, we do not advocate risking life to protect material wealth or goods.

Nor is this training intended for those that want to stop or interfere with people engaged in protest or expropriation (aka rioting or looting). As it is already requisite in most commercial rental agreements and business licensing, we recommend standard (or better) insurance to cover losses in these cases.

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To begin... Start with Introductions!

However your group does it...

## PART 1: Intensity Levels

Since we are preparing to deal with a wide spectrum of possible situations, it helps to categorize them by level of intensity. Note that level of intensity of a given scenario is not static, but can change at any moment. For example, a low intensity conflict can suddenly escalate to high intensity, and vice versa based on the words and actions of those present, yourself included!

It helps to divide into three general levels, low, medium and high.

**Low Intensity:** Observation, Assessment and/or de-escalation. Examples:

- Obnoxious customer
- Disagreement between customers
- Small theft

**Medium Intensity:** De-escalation and Physical intervention. Examples:

- Escalation of a conflict or disruption that puts people at some risk.
- Shouting argument between customers
- Medium theft/robbery

**High Intensity:** Self-defense and/or Evacuation.

Examples

- Serious physical conflict
- Armed hold up

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**Drill-** Participants get in groups of 2 or 3 and give examples from the low and medium levels. These should be drawn from personal experience.

Because high intensity situations can be traumatic, participants do not need to speak about the ones they may have experienced unless they feel that they've sufficiently processed them in the past. Instead, participants can give an example of a high intensity situation they can imagine.

List back the examples to the larger group, and discuss any differences in categorization (like if there's disagreement about what would be low versus medium, etc).

## PART 2: Basic Presentation and Verbal Strategies

### ***Body language, tone, and muscle memory***

We often think it's words that can help resolve tensions, but at a certain point it is not what we say but, rather tone and body language. For reference, think of the way some people talk to animals or small children.

Goal- always remember that the larger goal is conflict management, not conflict resolution. While sometimes possible, it is too ambitious and unrealistic to assume that you can resolve any conflict at any time between anyone.



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## Your Stance

- posture and tone is more important than words,
- Safe distance- arm length or if person has something that could be used as a weapon, range outside swinging radius.
- distance is appropriate based on your relationship and social/cultural considerations.
- Hands up, elbows bent, non-threatening. Hands can be gesturing with palms out, like "hold on" or "wait." Prayer hands. This allows for faster reaction time for blocking in self defense if needed.
- Knees bent
- Keep words simple



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## Your Presentation-

- Assertive- not aggressive, not passive,
- Give them face- concerned yet showing confidence

## Self-Control-

- Let go of the power struggle
- Stay aware of breathe.
- Exercise patience.
- Recognize if you have anger on behalf of others. If you do that's ok, just try to keep a neutral appearance.
- Recognize self-limits- ie if you are having a bad day, don't channel your agravations/hardships into the conflict at hand.
- Be aware of and let go of ego.

## Buddy System-

- Take turns addressing the person/people in conflict when possible
- calm self and/or support buddy in between- calming self can look like getting water, breathing, stepping away. Supporting buddy can be standing behind and to one side as a physical witness.

## Possible interventions-

Ask them what they need, offer glass of water, bite to eat.

Be an ally (without being manipulated)

Ask them to stop what they're doing

Ask them to leave in that moment

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Ask them to leave and not come back for six months, forever, etc.

Make a scene, ask customers to help. Non-linear redirection approach

Ex. A library worker receives repeat unwanted advances from someone who frequents her branch. One day, he tries to give her a gift basket of chocolates. Very loudly, she thanks him for bringing chocolates to "all of the library staff" and then distributes them to her coworkers.

**Drill-** One and two person hassle line - not physical-  
Get in groups of 3.

Come up with a realistic scenario of being hassled by someone at work. Role-play two roles: one hassling and one deflecting without anger or impatience, appearing neutral. Rotate through so each person does each role. Practice the same of a new scenario with one person hassling, and the other two deflecting as buddies. Come up with a safe word- tag each other out.

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## PART 3: Advanced Presentation and Verbal Strategies *Observation and Adaptation*

### **Rubric 1: Identify The STATE Of Those You Are Addressing**

How we physically posture and present should, when possible, adapt and cater to the situation at hand. It will help if we can learn to observe and as quickly as possible recognize what state the people we are addressing are in.

High Adrenaline State- Someone who seems in shock and has narrow focus of thought. Adrenals are two tiny little glands that sit on top of your kidneys and control quite a few actions in your body including your stress response, weight, blood sugar, blood pressure, and immune system. The adrenal glands control our fight or flight mechanism.

#### *Indicators Of "High Adrenaline" People:*

- Dilated pupils
- Fast breathing
- Fixated and unaware of others
- Indifferent that they are causing a scene
- Repeating or obsessing over seemingly unimportant information or details

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### To de-escalate: SIMPLIFY

- Short sentence structure, repeat things, be a broken record.
- Give clear directives. Ex: “wait--wait--hold up--wait a sec”  
“Listen--listen--listen”
- Name behaviors: “do you really think it’s cool to wyle out on \_\_\_\_?”
- Be assertive without escalating. Square up, eye contact, speak calmly, repeat. Ex: “stop yelling”
- Knees bent, shoulders hips sunken, breath lower lungs, lower self adrenaline.
- Non-linear redirection approach can be used, if carefully. Ex: Shout in front of a crowd to get their attention, like “ hey don’t I know you, what’s going on?”

Buddy up when possible. Tag in and out, have each others back if it gets challenging, take turns redirecting attention. Remember that feeling scared is a natural part of this.

**Drill:** Pair up, come up with a scenario of a high-adrenaline person and role play, then switch roles.

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## Rubric 2: Identify The Behavior Of Those You Are Addressing

Assess behavior to affect the other person. Respect the person - address the behavior

When possible incorporate/assess the four causes of physical assault- Fear/paranoia, frustration, manipulation, and aggression. Factor any known history, triggers, use of alcohol, drugs

### Intervene Early

People tend to act out in one of four common ways. Try to identify signs of the following:

- Fear/paranoia
- Make yourself their ally if possible, or get someone else who can.
- Problem solve with them
- Frustration
- Hear out what happened while setting boundaries
- State what you can (and can't) do to help
- Manipulation
- The more they invest in manipulating, the more likely it is to escalate
- Use detachment as much as possible
- Aggression/Intimidation
- Try to read- just bullying, or likely to aggress physically?
- Clearly state boundaries
- Find out what they want

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- Check their stance
  - Say "back up" and keep chin down
  - Watch their hands

## PART 4: Physical Strategies

Reasons for practicing physical intervention-

- Self-defense
- Minimize harm to self and others
- To build confidence when needed to improve verbal intervention

A note on self defense: Self defense is legal, buuuut... If someone was to actually press charges, it would come down to the legal definition combined with any witness account or footage of the situation. So move accordingly. Movements must at least appear to seem reasonably necessary given situation.

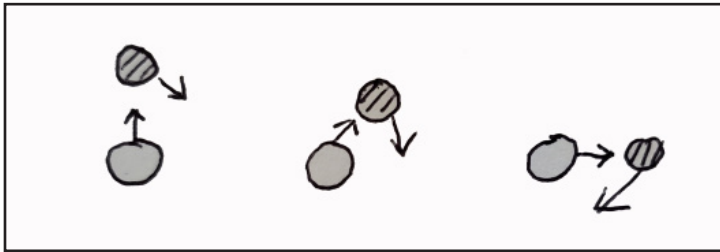
***Legal Definition*** - minimum of level of force you reasonably believe necessary to safely resolve the situation.

### Moving People

Sometimes you may need to physically force someone to leave. This can sometimes be done without putting hands on someone, which is a good first approach.

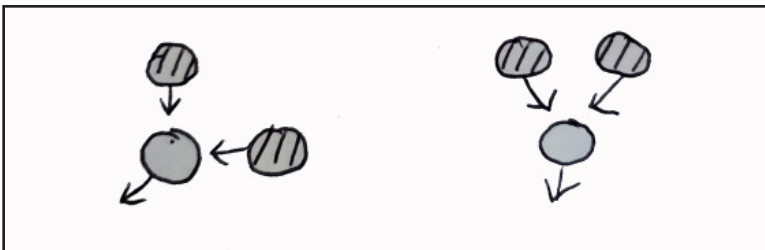
Set-up early - even if things start out low intensity, hold ground, move deliberately, showing hands, not suddenly. Having hands up also sets you up for defense, but won't look threatening if used to gesture.

If they are trying to move you back, go in a circle to keep them from advancing.



TO move without touching, try two approaches:

- Front on approach: step back, hands up, say "I can hear you from there." move forward to move them back.
- Side approach: Arms out, 2 people. Corner them to where you want them to move, without touching. Don't encircle or surround them, but instead leave one clear out and make that the direction you want them to go.





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**Drill:** Intervention to move someone from front and from side (optional per participant, based on individual comfort)- roleplay or demonstrate

When you can't move someone with the above approaches and really need to move them, and have a buddy present who you've practiced this with, you can try moving them together with the following approach.

If the situation escalates physically, you or others are in direct threat and feel it is your only option, self defense is a must.

Moving someone physically touching them (only if practiced with a partner, comfortable, and agreeing this to be the best option. When you've gotten to the point of feeling that moving someone is your only option, try your best to be assertive but not aggressive with your grip. When grabbing the elbow and from behind the neck, do so in a way that makes it clear your grip will not be easily broken, but not so tight that it is causing immediate injury.

One worker standing in front of the person being addressed and talking to them and then using a code phrase when they are done talking. At that time the other worker who is standing behind the person being addressed comes in and puts one hand on the back

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of the neck and another on their elbow with their body close to the person and directs them to start moving.



If the person turns toward them and/or struggles then the other worker will come in on the other side and grab the other side of the neck and the other elbow. The two workers will push the elbows together in front of the person while both controlling the neck. Once the person has been moved, necessary next steps should be taken, with quickness!

(ie. close and lock doors or otherwise secure space, continue try to address concerns in improved atmosphere, etc).

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## Best Defenses If It Gets Physical

(look for demo videos on these as well as the other techniques in this curriculum at @storefronts.INC on IG)

Mastoid process/ulna combo

Foot to back of calf

Nose and claw

Groin and claw

### ***Other considerations if things get physical:***

#### Awareness Of Environment

- Know where your escape route is (and don't block it)
- awareness of dangerous items or situations
- mindset like crossing the street- keep checking
- Trust your gut
- create advantage
- keep a barrier between you
- keep others safe also
- victims are often picked by whether they are paying attention
- cell phone as tool, but not distraction
- look alert, purposeful
- get help

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## Work Specific Awareness

- don't make yourself an easy target
- don't have too much money on site
- always look like you're paying attention
- don't make the register accessible
- do safe bank drops
- back each other up, but don't expose each other to unnecessary risk
- avoid being alone, and be extra mindful and diligent when you are
- stay aware especially at night/end of the day
- check your assumptions- race, gender, dress, etc
- Make protocols and have agreements about how to intervene or what to do if we get robbed/held up.

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## PART 5: Putting It Together/Review

### Verbal Strategies:

assertive: not aggressive, nor passive.

broken record/detachment

name the behavior

clear directives

redirection

### Physical Strategies:

holding your ground

backing them up- from front on or the side

move in circle

moving someone physically: two person "come along"  
(only if practiced)

getting away

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## PART 6: In Cases of Serious Physical Violence

When weapons are involved, best to focus on safety. Damage to property is preferable rather than harm to people. Work together, everyone get to safe place/ distance, lock yourself in or evacuate, communicate with staff and customers.

It is important to discuss and agree that loss of property is not worth risking physical safety of self, or others.

After robberies or other such incidents, be aware that it is sometimes possible to obtain a police report for insurance purposes without inviting police to your location. And for Emergency Medical Services in the east bay: fire, ambulance, no police: 510.444.1616.

**Drill-** role play armed robbery

## PART 7: Aftermath

### ***Legal, Emotional, Physical***

- Ask for support from others in your group
- Check for injuries immediately and after adrenaline
- Write down what happened, asap, easy to forget details as adrenaline wanes
- Process safely- give person that went through it time and space to vent without criticism. save that for later
- Depression- watch for common symptoms: shakes, etc.
- Effects come in stages and will affect later interactions





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