

# How to De-Escalate a Violent Patient

In highly-charged emergency settings, a patient may become aggressive or violent. Knowing how to de-escalate the situation could protect you, your staff, and your patient. **Management of Assaultive Behavior (MAB) certification equips you with the skills you need to handle a potentially violent emergency.**



MAB certification is essential for a wide range of emergency personnel, including first responders, emergency room staff, and psychiatric healthcare workers. However, any healthcare provider who works directly with patients or patient families can benefit.



## UNDERSTANDING AGGRESSION

Aggression is a physical or verbal behavior designed to harm another individual. It can stem from fear and anxiety, unmet physical or emotional needs, pain, traumatic events, cognitive impairment or confusion, and feelings of powerlessness.

## RECOGNIZING EARLY SIGNS

Learning to recognize aggressive signs early helps you diffuse a situation before it escalates. Early signs of aggression might include **yelling, a closed or defiant posture, profanity, hitting or throwing inanimate objects, or pacing.**



## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The goal of effective communication is to **wrestle the control away from the patient in a calm confident way.** This involves asking questions instead of making demands and practicing active listening skills, such as nodding and summarizing what the patient is saying to ensure you understand.

## DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES

When aggression happen, but you can help prevent by following safety protocol. **Remember the following techniques:**

- Ensure back-up is available - use your facilities codes to alert staff
- Maintain proper eye contact and remain at the patient's level
- Avoid body language that may seem aggressive - keep your hands visible
- Practice "verbal judo" to regain control of the situation
- Use patience - you may need to repeat these steps multiple times



## DISTRACTION AND DIVERSION

Redirect the patient away from their anger by recommending a different activity or discussing a neutral topic.

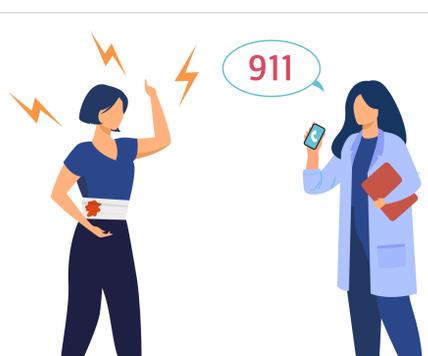
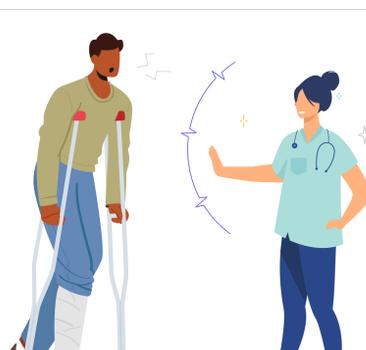


## NON-THREATENING BODY LANGUAGE

Use open, respectful body language such as a relaxed posture, open gestures, and eye contact. Avoid crossing arms or other potentially defensive positions. Keep your hands where the patient can see them.

## PERSONAL SPACE AWARENESS

Respect for personal space and maintaining a safe distance from an agitated patient can prevent aggression from escalating.



## CALLING FOR ASSISTANCE

Use your facilities code to call for assistance in a discreet manner. If your policy is to contact the police, try to do so without the patient knowing that you are calling.

## SELF-CARE FOR DE-ESCALATORS

Healthcare workers need to take care of their own emotional wellbeing once a situation has been de-escalated. **A debriefing with colleagues to discuss the event and provide support is often a good next step.**



## LEGAL & ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

De-escalation techniques and physical interventions can have legal and ethical ramifications. **Protecting yourself and others in the area is essential but should be done through appropriate use of restraining techniques.**

## PRACTICE & TRAINING

Management of Assaultive Behavior (MAB) certification is critical to ensure staff know the appropriate ways to respond to an aggressive situation. Ongoing training also serves to refine skills so healthcare workers are prepared for any event that might arise.



### Resources and References

Get more information about Management of Assaultive Behavior certification.

<https://surefirecpr.com/mab/>

