

The Art of Defusing Conflict:
De-Escalation Techniques for Transit Operators

FDOT

Developed in cooperation with the Florida Department of Transportation and the Florida Transit Safety Network.

Produced by the University of South Florida's Center for Urban Transportation Research

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Course Overview

- Teach transit operators techniques for de-escalating situations
- Learn the verbal and physical cues for situational awareness
- Learn agency's policies and procedures with regard to fare disputes and other types of passengers
- Learn relevant state laws and regulations in place to help protect you from assault

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Course Objectives

By the end of this course you will be able to:

- Define the terms "conflict" and "de-escalation"
- Identify situations that can cause passenger frustrations and recognize ways to reduce stressors
- Demonstrate techniques to defuse stressful situations to achieve positive outcomes
- Interpret state laws and agency policies with regard to difficult passengers and situations



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Customer Types

- Families
- Students
- Transient/homeless population
- Passengers with disabilities
- Elderly
- Teenage
- Business professionals



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7 Basic Needs of a Transit Passenger

- Reliability
- Safety and Security
- Conveniences and Accessibility
- Clean and Comfortable
- Simplicity
- Affordable
- Friendly and/or Empathetic



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Making a First Impression

- Based on:
 - Appearance
 - Body language
 - Demeanor
 - Mannerism
- Greet passengers with a warm and confident smile
- The way we present ourselves may be as successful as our verbal communication methods to defuse any potential conflict
 - If you smile at someone, they will likely smile back



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Discussion

How can the satisfied customer have a positive effect on the operator, the customers, and on the transit agency and its public image?

- For the operator:
 - Job security and satisfaction
 - Pleasant working environment
- For the customer:
 - Loyalty to the transit service
 - Reliability for safe and convenient commute
- For the transit agency:
 - Long term customer loyalty
 - Increased ridership



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Discussion

How can an angry/unsatisfied customer have a negative effect on the operator, the customers, and on the transit agency and its public image?

- For the operator:
 - Discipline or possible loss of employment
 - Negative impact on health (mental, emotional, and physical)
- For the customer:
 - Frustration
 - Loss of reliable transportation
- For the transit agency:
 - Negative reputation
 - Customer complaints



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Just the Facts

- Transit workers are at an increased risk for workplace violence because:
 - Direct contact with the public
 - Mobile workplaces
 - Work in community settings
 - Deliver passengers
 - Handle money
 - Work in small numbers



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Just the Facts

- Between 2013 – 2015 at 15 Florida's transit systems: 4,406 conduct-related incidents
 - 348 of these incidents were assaults on transit operator (including spitting)
 - Other conduct-related assaults include:
 - Disorderly conduct
 - Fare disputes
 - Verbal threats
 - Objects thrown at the bus
 - Vandalism
 - Indecent exposure

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Interaction Types

- Three main types of interactions that could cause conflict during your day:
 - Passenger vs operator
 - Passenger vs passenger
 - Operator vs operator



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In the News

- PSTA bus driver punched in face over \$2.25 fare (June 2016)
- HART bus driver badly hurt after being beaten by passenger (June 2014)
- Broward bus driver suspended after being beaten by passenger (Sept 2015)
- Former Miami-Dade bus driver wants his job back after altercation with rider caught on camera (August 2016)

Commonality = all incidents are conflict over fare



What is Conflict?

- **Conflict** is a disagreement in which the people involved see a threat to their needs, interests, or concerns.
- Damaging effects in terms of:
 - What is said
 - Actions taken
 - Injury suffered
- Potential conflict is everywhere
- When handled properly, negative effects can be minimized, and positive effects may result.
- Be prepared



Discussion

Let's identify some situations which might cause conflict.

Examples include:

- Rudeness
- Profanity
- Fare disputes
- Delays in service
- Poor hygiene



Triggering Events

- Triggering event: an incident which is perceived as a threat by the individual

Two types of triggering events:

- Fear inducing event: an event where the individual feels threatened or is about to lose something of value
- Frustrating event: an event where the person feels their needs are not being met



What is De-escalation?

- **De-escalation** is when we use communication skills to calm a person who is angry, out of control, or disturbed
- If you take proper charge of the situation, it reduces the possibility for violence



De-escalation Process

Triggering Event → Escalation Phase → Conflict

↑
Use de-escalation techniques (fight or flight)



Fight vs Flight

- Fight or flee the threat – natural response to stressful situations



The illustration shows two scenarios. On the left, a green figure is in a fighting stance, holding a stick, while an orange figure is in a defensive stance. On the right, a green figure is running away from a grey figure, and an orange figure is running away from a grey figure. The number 19 is in the bottom right corner.

Fight vs Flight

- During acute stress your body releases adrenaline, giving your brain and body bursts of energy
- Causes increased heart rate, breath rate, and blood pressure
- Changes in the body can be helpful, and make you more effective in coping with the danger



The number 20 is in the bottom right corner.

Types of Stress

- Acute stress: most common form of stress that comes from events that happen in our daily lives
- Chronic stress: comes when a person never sees a way out of a miserable situation
- Stressor: events that provoke stress



The number 21 is in the bottom right corner.

Effects of Stress

- Physically
- Emotionally
- Mentally

- Continued stress can lead to headaches, an upset stomach, high blood pressure, chest pain, problems with sleeping, and depression



Ways to Reduce Stress



Take a break



Exercise



Smile and laugh



Get social support



Breath deeply



Influences of Stress

- Stress can affect your ability to use de-escalation techniques
- Stress felt by others can escalation situations
- Understanding how stress affects you and others and using the proper skills can prevent a situation from spiraling out of control

Let's look at some real life scenarios.



Scenario 1

- A passenger boards the bus and immediately states:
 - "You're late, you're always late!"



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Helpful Hint #1 – Self-Control

- Changing the outcome of the a situation
- Recognize your trigger words

Proactive vs reactive response

- Proactive response: focusses on eliminating problems before the occur
 - Reactive response: depends on emotions
-
- Responding with a lack of respect will not resolve the conflict



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Scenario 2

- Operator performs improper bus stop procedures and prematurely engages the door on departure. Passenger's arm gets stuck in the door.



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Helpful Hint #2 – Prevent with “Post-vention”

- Use what you learn during a prior event to prevent it from happening in the future
- Experience from one bad situation can positively affect another negative situation



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Scenario 3

- A frustrated rider is looking for directions/connection information.



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Helpful Hint #3 – Listen

- Understand what a person is communicating
- Use active listening skills:
 - Use “I” statements
 - Ask open-ended questions
 - Paraphrase the frustration
 - Do not interrupt, let them vent



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Scenario 4

- A passenger on a 3-wheeled mobility device insists the operator uses their method of securement rather than typical procedure.



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Helpful Hint #4 – Adapt

- Adapt in the moment of needs for the person you're trying to support
- The only response that works every time is the right response for that specific situation

- Positive interactions
- Explain what CAN do rather than what you CANNOT do



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Scenario 5

- A passenger tries to board the bus with an iguana on his/her shoulder.



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Helpful Hint #5 – Think

- If you change your thinking about a situation, you can change the outcome
- Think before you react
 - Take a few seconds before you respond, this can give you a chance to positively make a difference



SPLAT (Self Control, Prevent, Listen, Adapt, and Think)

- **S**elf-control: When you maintain self-control you can change the outcome of the situation
- **P**revent: Using what you learned during a prior event to keep it from happening again
- **L**isten: To understand what a person is communicating by letting them vent and not interrupting
- **A**dapt: The only response that works every time is the right response for that specific situation
- **T**hink: If you can change your thinking about a situation, you can change the outcome



Recognizing the Warning Signs



Situational Awareness

- Recognize and “read” the indicators of difficult passengers
- Evaluate the entire situation before you react
- Be mindful of your own stress response
- Maintain self control
- Proactive response vs reactive response



Difficult and Disgruntled Passengers



Intoxicated Passengers

Signs and symptoms

- Smell of alcohol
 - Lack of coordination
 - Inability to remain focused
 - Inability to carry on a logical conversation
 - Slurred speech
 - Glazed eyes or dilated pupils
 - Slow motor skills
 - Trembling hands
- Maintain self control and pay close attention



Passengers with Disabilities

- Focus on the individual not the disability, "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person"
- Speak directly to the person rather than their companion or interpreter
- All assistive mobility devices are personal property or extensions of that person
- Always ask before providing assistance
- Don't be afraid to make a mistake



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Teenage Passengers

- Resolve issues differently with a teenager than with adults
 - Address them by name
 - Build a relationship to recognize unusual behavior
 - Paraphrase what they say to demonstrate active listening skills
- A technique that works with both adults and teenage passengers:
 - Put the most important information first
 - Instead of saying: "I will get you home soon if you sit down"
 - Try saying: "Please sit down and I will get you home soon"



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Elderly Passengers

- Tips for communicating**
- Face the person and make eye contact
 - Speak slowly, clearly, and in a steady tone of voice
 - Repeat the same statement
 - Use short phrases and common words
 - Use gestures and body language to help clarify
 - Allow more time for the person to process information and respond
 - Watch your tone of voice
 - Acknowledge their feelings



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Transient or Homeless Population

20% to 25% of the homeless population in the United States suffers from some form of severe mental illness



- Tips for communication:
 - Maintain a calm and soft yet firm voice
 - Avoid using your title or authority
 - Do not offer lengthy explanations or excuses



Words to Defuse Conflict

- I can call someone
- Sorry about that
- I hear you
- I appreciate that
- I'll do what I can
- I understand

Can you think of any additional statements?



Florida Statute Title XLVI § 784.07

- Public transit employees are protected
- This statute is applicable to the assurance of safety of all public transit employees or agents within the State of Florida.



Your Agency's Policy

Customer Service

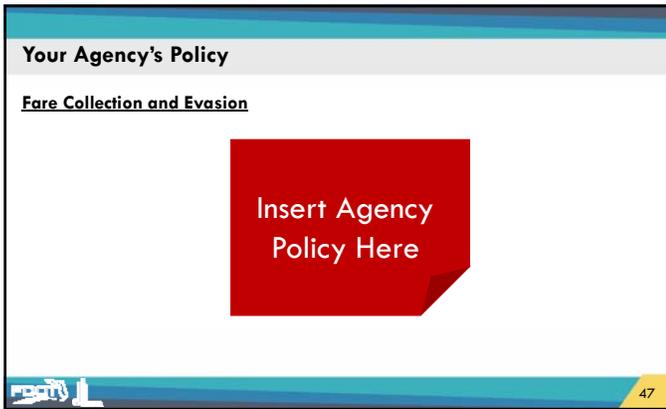
Insert Agency Policy Here



Your Agency's Policy

Fare Collection and Evasion

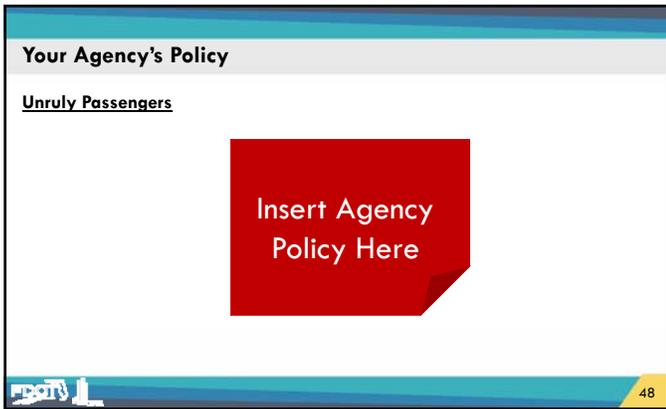
Insert Agency Policy Here



Your Agency's Policy

Unruly Passengers

Insert Agency Policy Here



Your Agency's Policy

Intoxicated Passengers

Insert Agency Policy Here



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Your Agency's Policy

Operator Conduct

Insert Agency Policy Here



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Employee Assistance Program

- Conversations are confidential
- Can help with both personal and professional issues
- Can help you cope with:
 - Crisis management
 - Emotional challenges
 - Legal issues
 - Financial issues



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Course Objectives in Review

Now that you've completed this course, you should be able to:

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Questions or Comments