

Tips for Staying Safe at Work

At Towson University

A simple list of things people can do to stay safe at work here at Towson University

- Arrive at work on time and park in a safe place
- If you are the first person to arrive at your work place, make sure that the door is locked prior to unlocking a door with your key.
- Turn on all lights and check to make sure the office is in the same condition from when you last left the office. If anything looks out of place, leave the office and contact the TUPD
- Keep your purse, wallet, keys, cell phones, or other valuables with you at all times or locked in a drawer or closet.
- Check the identity of any strangers who are in your office. If anyone makes you uncomfortable, inform TUPD immediately. 4-4444
- Don't stay late if you'll be alone in the office. Create a buddy system for walking to parking lots or public transportation after hours, or call TUPD for an escort if you feel uncomfortable walking alone during hours of darkness.
- Report any broken or flickering lights, dimly lit corridors, broken windows, and doors that don't lock properly.
- If you notice signs of potential violence in a student or fellow employee, report this to the appropriate person.
- Know your Office or building's emergency plan. Every building coordinator should have an emergency plan for their building.
- Keep your own emergency supplies (flashlight, walking shoes, water bottle, nonperishable food, etc.) in a desk drawer.
- Know the exit routes and evacuation plans in your building.
- Know at least two exit routes from each room, if possible. Be able to escape in the dark by knowing how many desks or cubicles are between your workstation and two of the nearest exits.
- Know the location of fire extinguishers and medical kits. We do not direct or ask people to fight fires so they should not stay behind to use fire extinguishers.
- Make sure there is a designated meeting location and that every employee knows what it is.
- Make special emergency plans for co-workers who are disabled or may require assistance during an emergency.
- Never lock fire exits or block doorways, halls, or stairways. However, keep fire doors closed to slow the spread of smoke and fire.

Conflict Resolution Tips

A quick list of things to remember when managing conflict

- How we handle our anger and how we deal with other people who are angry can make the difference between managing conflict effectively and having conflict end in violence.
- Be aware of triggers, which are any verbal or nonverbal behaviors that result in anger or other negative emotional reactions that can get in the way of resolving conflicts.
- Triggers are like lightning bolts. When they strike, they can interfere with communication.
- To avoid pulling others' triggers, pay particular attention to your own behavior, even your body language.
- Note that people already use strategies to control their anger (for example, walking away).
- Your actions can help prevent someone else from becoming a victim.

Verbal De-Escalation Techniques

A. Be in control of yourself

1. Appear calm, centered and self-assured even though you don't feel it. Relax facial muscles and look confident. Your anxiety can make a student feel anxious and unsafe and that can escalate aggression
2. Use a modulated, low monotonous tone of voice (our normal tendency is have a high pitched, tight voice when scared or nervous).
3. Avoid being defensive- even if the comments or insults are directed at you, they are not about you. Do not defend yourself or anyone else from insults, curses or misconceptions about their roles.
4. Be aware of any resources available for backup such as co-workers or supervisors. Know that you have the choice to leave, or tell the student to leave, or call the TUPD should de-escalation not be effective.
5. Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for help. The agitated individual is very sensitive to feeling shamed and or disrespected. We want him/her to know that it is not necessary to show us that they must be respected. We want to automatically treat them with dignity and respect/

B. The Physical Stance

1. Always be at the same eye level. Encourage the student to be seated, but if he/she needs to stand, you stand up also.
2. Allow extra physical space between you – about two arm's length (five feet) and the individual. Anger and agitation fill the space between you and the student.
3. Do not stand full front to the student. Stand at an angle so you can sidestep away if needed

4. Do not maintain constant eye contact. Allow the individual to break his/her gaze and look away.
5. Never point or shake your finger at the individual.
6. Do not smile. This could look like mockery or anxiety.
7. Never touch the individual. Even if some touching is generally culturally appropriate and usual in your setting. Cognitive dysfunction in agitated people allows for easy misinterpretation of physical contact as hostile or threatening.
8. Keep your hands out of your pockets, up and available to defend yourself. Hands at your side, palms forward represents the least aggressive position.
9. Do not argue or try to convince, rather give choices or empower the individual.
10. Do not be defensive or judgmental, don't be parental.

C. The De-Escalation Discussion

1. First, try to calmly bring the level of agitation down to a baseline.
2. Do not get loud, or try to yell over a screaming person. Wait till the person takes a breath; Then talk. Speak calmly at an average volume.
3. DO NOT answer abusive questions (e.g. why are all professors _____?). These types of questions should get no response what so ever.
4. Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, but respectful tone. Give choices Where ever possible in which both alternatives are safe ones (e.g. would you like to continue our meeting calmly or would you prefer to stop now and come back tomorrow when things can be more relaxed?)
5. Empathize with feelings but not with the behavior (e.g., "I understand that you have every right to feel angry, but it is not okay for you to use abusive language.)
6. Do not solicit how a person is feeling or interpret feelings in an analytic way.
7. Do not argue or try to convince.
8. Whenever possible, tap into the student's cognitive mode: Do NOT ask "Tell me how you feel, but: Help me understand what you are saying to me.
9. Suggest alternative behaviors where appropriate. e.g. "would you like to take a break, get a cup of coffee.(tepid and in a paper cup) or some water.
10. Give the consequences of inappropriate behavior without threats or anger.
11. Represent the external controls as institutional rather than personal.
12. TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS; if you assess or feel the de-escalation is not working, STOP! You will know within 2 to 3 minutes if it's beginning to work. Tell the person to leave, escort him/her to the door, call for help or call the TUPD.

There is nothing magic about talking someone down. You are transferring your sense of calm and genuine interest in what that student wants to tell you. You are doing so in a respectful, clearly limit setting way, in hope that the student actually wishes to respond positively to your respectful attention.

Again, if at any time the student threatens to harm him/herself or others, immediately contact the TUPD.