**Guidance on how to deal with Disruptive Individuals: How to De-escalate the Situation**

Within a church setting it is important that those in positions of leadership have the knowledge and skills on how to de-escalate aggressive behaviour to maintain church safety.

Your tongue has the power of life and death.
    Those who love to talk will eat the fruit of their words. (Proverbs 18;21)

When used properly, words can de-escalate many situations.

Why use de-escalation techniques?

* To keep the lines of communication open.
* To get the person talking.
* To actively listen.
* To maintain control of the situation through clear and calm communication.

Why might people become disruptive?

Disruptive behaviour is often due to a person being in crisis, when a person loses the ability to cope, and the emotional anguish becomes un-bearable. This may be due to:

* Financial problems – job loss, cost of living, lack of basic needs i.e., housing and food
* Family Problems – marriage break up, problems with children or other family members
* Medical conditions – pain, mental illness, frightening diagnosis, acting as a carer under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

How do I recognise the Physical warning signs?

The person may exhibit:

* Flushed or pale face
* Sweating
* Pacing, restlessness, or repetitive movements
* Change in voice
* Loud talking
* Shallow, rapid breathing
* Trembling
* Be using abusive language
* Clenched jaws or fists
* Exaggerating or violent gestures]
* Glaring or avoiding eye contact
* Violating personal space

What can I do to De-escalate the situation?

Be aware of your **body language** by:

* **Posture** – be mindful and open in the way you stand or sit. Your posture should be an open and relaxed stance. Don’t cross your arms, puff out your chest as this can be seen as aggressive or defensive behaviour. Hold your arms loosely beside your body and stand very slightly turned away.
* **Move slowly** – uses slow deliberate movements.
* Don’t point – it communicates accusation.
* Don’t shrug – it communicates uncaring or unknowing.

Be aware of your **facial expression** by:

* Keep your face **relaxed** – try not to furrow your brow.
* Smile – start friendly with a smile, but you may need to relax into a neutral expression if the situation changes.
* **Eye contact** – keep and maintain natural eye contact. Don’t close your eyes or look away but equally don’t stare as this may be interpreted as a challenge.

Be aware of your **voice** by:

* **Volume** – keep your voice volume soft as it’s calming and may even be matched.
* **Slow Down** your rate of speech. This is soothing.
* **Friendly** – keep your voice friendly and helpful.

Keep your own thoughts and emotions in check. They come across in the way you react.

Avoid intervening too quickly. People argue at times.

Avoid interrupting a disruptive person.

Don’t ask ‘why’ questions. Why questions are logic based and people in an emotional state do not think logically.

Don’t rush, take your time. If you hurry a verbal de-escalation you run the risk of re-igniting the heightened emotional state.

Avoid asking lots of question.

Do not use accusatory sentences such as ‘you need to calm down’, ‘this is a church’ or ‘don’t be silly’. These statements are inflammatory.

Avoid saying ‘I understand how you feel’, or ‘things can’t be that bad’. This is about them, not you.

Avoid shouting.

Don’t take things personally.

Don’t keep promises you can’t keep.

If you are concerned about their safety, follow Church **Safeguarding procedures.**

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