

RESOURCES GUIDE

# Seven Verbal Intervention Strategies for Health Care Professionals



**In health care settings, dealing with individuals who are belligerent, hostile, or noncompliant can be an everyday occurrence. But not all defensive behavior warrants a restrictive intervention response. In fact, CPI training teaches the least restrictive forms of de-escalation to be used first. And that starts with verbal intervention.**

Your effective verbal response to noncompliant behavior is the key to avoiding physical confrontations with out-of-control patients.

While there is no guarantee that a patient under distress will not physically act out, using consistent, person-centered strategies across your facility will help you reduce the anxiety and defensiveness that often precede dangerous behavior. These seven principles for effective verbal intervention will help you intervene in the safest, most effective way possible.

## 1.

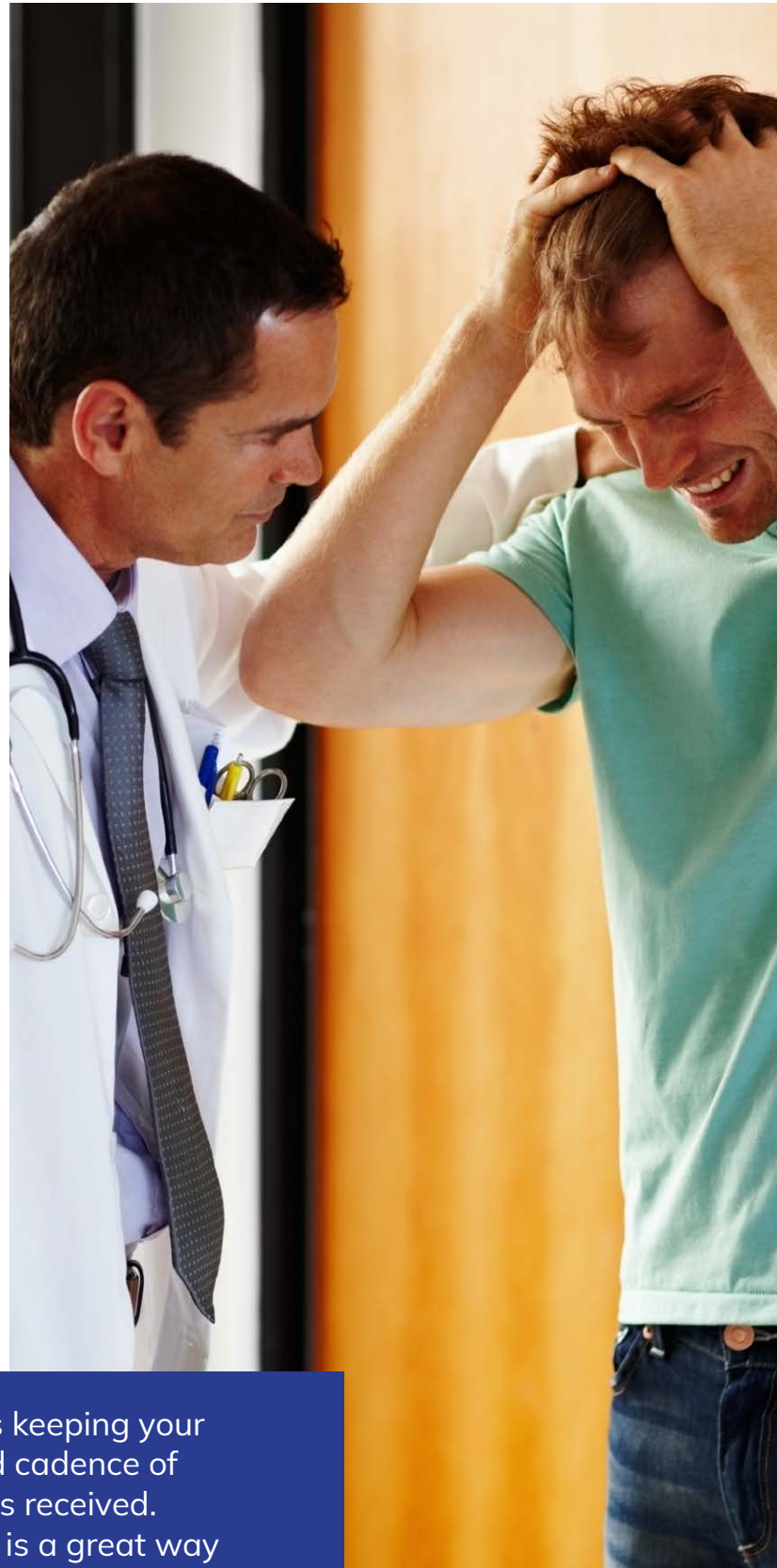
### Isolate the Individual

Onlookers such as hospital guests, other patients, and even colleagues tend to add fuel to the fire. If the verbally escalating person feels even more uncomfortable with the situation, their verbal behavior is likely to become more complex making it more difficult for them to back down. Try to isolate the patient from onlookers so you both can focus on a calm verbal discussion.

## 2.

### Remain Calm

When a patient in your care is screaming or making threats, remaining calm may be easier said than done. But it's important to remember that the verbally escalating person is beginning to lose control and their behavior is a form of communication. If they see you also losing control, the situation will undoubtedly escalate. Keep your cool and take deep breaths to reset yourself when feeling challenged, insulted, or threatened.



> **BONUS TIP:** A key part of remaining calm is keeping your paraverbals in check. Your tone, volume, and cadence of speech all play a role in how your message is received. Reminding yourself to use calm paraverbals is a great way to reinforce a calm demeanor.

**3.**

## Watch Your Body Language

An increasingly agitated patient will pay less attention to your words and more attention to your body language.

Keeping your nonverbals as neutral as possible begins to defuse the situation at a subconscious level by making the situation feel less combative. The trick, of course, is being mindful in those moments of adjusting your nonverbal messaging, consciously taking a nonthreatening physical posture, and controlling your tone.

**86%**

*of surveyed organizations rated CPI's prevention and verbal de-escalation skills as better compared to other de-escalation training programs they have attended.*



## 4.

### Keep it Simple

Be clear and direct in your message. Keep the choices you offer simple and avoid medical jargon that might make the patient more frustrated. A person who is losing rational control will not be processing information as well as they normally do. Complex messages increase anxiety and may make their behavior more difficult to manage.

## 5.

### Use Reflective Questioning

Reflective questioning is a powerful way to let patients know that you care enough to listen carefully to what they are saying to you. Here you'll put the patient's statements into your own words and repeat them back in a form of a question. This gives them the opportunity to clarify their message and helps them to feel like they haven't totally lost all control.

**> BONUS TIP:** Reflective questioning helps you to find the facts behind the statements. Take this strategy a step further by understanding the needs that their behavior is trying to meet.

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## 6.

### **Silence is Welcome**

Silence is a very effective verbal intervention technique. This allows the patient time to sort through their thoughts before restating their message. Rather than feeling rushed to respond, giving air space often leads to valuable insight and clearer understanding of the true source of the patient's distress.

## 7.

### **Practice, Practice, and Practice Again**

Your confident, skilled response plays a critical role in whether a situation escalates into a physical interaction or not. While you cannot control everything in a situation with a patient who's agitated, using these strategies consistently means you're more likely to influence behavior in a positive way. Share these tips with your colleagues and practice them in role-play scenarios so that everyone is prepared when real situations occur.



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