



**Calming the Storm: Strategies for Diffusing Challenging Situations in Housing**  
GABI BARBARENA

14th Annual AHMA-PSW Nevada Conference & Expo  
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## DESCALATING

### SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. Understand what causes behavior and resulting actions
2. Learn to anticipate and prevent conflict
3. Handling challenging interactions
4. Understand how to de-escalate a situation
5. Strategies to de-escalate a situation
6. Maintain your professionalism

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### Engaging Participation

- Ask questions
- Share experiences
- Provide feedback
- Provide examples

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### Causes of difficult behavior

1. Communication barriers, unmet needs, and emotional distress.
2. Difficult behavior includes aggression, manipulation, passive-aggression, and disruptive behavior.
3. Difficult behavior can strain relationships and disrupt daily activities and routines.
4. **Strategies for managing difficult behavior** include staying calm, focusing on behavior, and seeking support.



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### Anticipate and prevent conflict

- Listen and observe behavior
- Listen to individuals that speak about a behavior of a tenant, vendor, visitors
- Triggers are highly individual and contextual, and can vary, tone of voice, a specific environment, or a feeling of frustration or misunderstanding



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### Handling challenging interactions

- *Stay Calm:* Maintain composure to avoid escalating the situation.
- *Listen Actively:* Show empathy and validate their feelings without necessarily agreeing with them.
- *Set Boundaries:* Be clear about what behavior is acceptable and what isn't.
- Communication skills are the key to calming and de-escalating a situation.



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**Strategies to de-escalate a situation**

- **Listen** to what the issue is and the person's concerns.
- **Offer** reflective comments to show that you have heard what their concerns are.
- **Wait** until the person has released their frustration and explained how they are feeling.
- **Look** and maintain appropriate eye contact to connect with the person.
- **Do not** get distracted.
- **Give** your full attention
- **Show** empathy



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**Maintain your professionalism**

Stay Composed and Calm

*Example:* Pause before responding to collect your thoughts.

Keep Emotions in Check

*Example:* Use neutral language and focus on facts.

Focus on Solutions, Not Problems

*Example:* "What steps can we take to prevent this issue in the future?"



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**Maintain your professionalism**

Communicate Professionally

*Example:* "I appreciate your feedback and will take it into consideration."

Seek Support When Needed

*Example:* "I want to bring the issue to management to help mediate this discussion."

Understand when a situation is not de-escalating

*Example:* "I need to get others involved to provide a solution."

What procedure does your company have to handle challenging situations?



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**Maintain your professionalism - continued**

Document Important Interactions

If it's not in writing it never happened!

Complete incident report

Photos, videos, third party complaints, etc.

*Examples:* Follow up with an email summarizing the discussion points and agreed actions.

Use pen and paper to catch the main points of the complaint and send to your management team. Report to HR, as appropriate.



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**Maintain your professionalism - continued**

Interrupt in an intentional manner and get specifics

*Example:* "If I could interrupt you for a moment; Can you please help me understand \_\_\_\_\_."

Ask for clarifying questions

*Example:* "I want to help and need more information to better understand the situation."



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**De-escalation Tool Kit**

- Ask the right questions.
- If you're not getting the response you want, rephrase the questions.
- Ask open-ended questions-

Who, What, When, Where, and How they tend to open a conversation

*Example:* "Would you please help me understand the problem you are facing?"



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**De-escalation Tool Kit**

- Shift the focus to solutions
- Problem solvers look at the problem with an eye toward finding solutions.
- Engage with the person to form a problem-solving alliance.
- Often complaints are vague or based on cascading generalizations.
- Show compassion. Their lives are often beyond their control.
- Commit to the lengthy process of getting them to focus on solutions.

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**Situation Debrief**

- Schedule a situation debrief with your manager as soon as possible.
- It is important to reflect back on what has happened to learn how to potentially prevent or minimize future incidents.
- Some important questions include:
  - What situations or triggers led to the incident?*
  - What worked to reduce tension or avoid a conflict?*
  - What steps did we or could we have taken to keep everyone safe and calm?*

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THANK YOU!!!

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