

De-escalating a hostile situation

Responding to an angry member of the public requires a calm, professional approach focused on de-escalation rather than confrontation.

The primary goal is to lower the emotional temperature, validate their feelings without necessarily agreeing with their complaint, and steer the conversation toward a safe conclusion.

Knowing yourself and how you manage stress

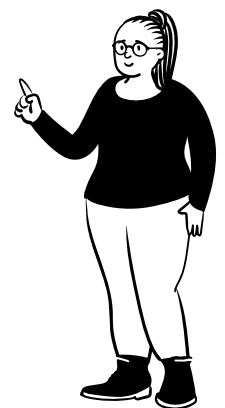
Stress is a normal reaction to conflict – being aware of how you respond to conflict is key to resolving a stressful situation. Particularly if you have had prior exposure.

Building a team/buddy system that works in pairs or trios and knowing when to step away (tag team) are all important aspects of providing and maintaining a supportive space on a stall centred on politics.



Staying calm

- Keep your voice low, body relaxed, and movements slow.
- Slow breathing, breathe deeply with a strong exhale.
- Don't argue, agitators want attention and reactions – don't provide this.
- Avoid raising your voice or responding defensively – as this will escalate the situation.
- You're under no obligation to respond to abusive questions.
- Use soft language – speaking slowly and in a neutral or soft tone encourages the other person to lower their own volume.
- Create space, step back and avoid physical closeness, avoid aggressive gestures such as finger pointing.
- Focus on why you are there – likely it's to sign people up/ hand out flyers and not engage with people who don't align with APN values.
- Remember you are not trying to do anything – during a time of conflict – other than calm the situation down for participants and members of the public.



Eye contact

- Avoid prolonged eye contact.

- Look somewhere neutral, like the shoulder or chest, or just past their side.

Facial expression

- Be mindful of your facial expressions.
- Maintain a neutral expression.
- Do not smile, as this can be misinterpreted as mockery.

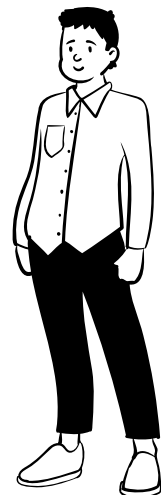


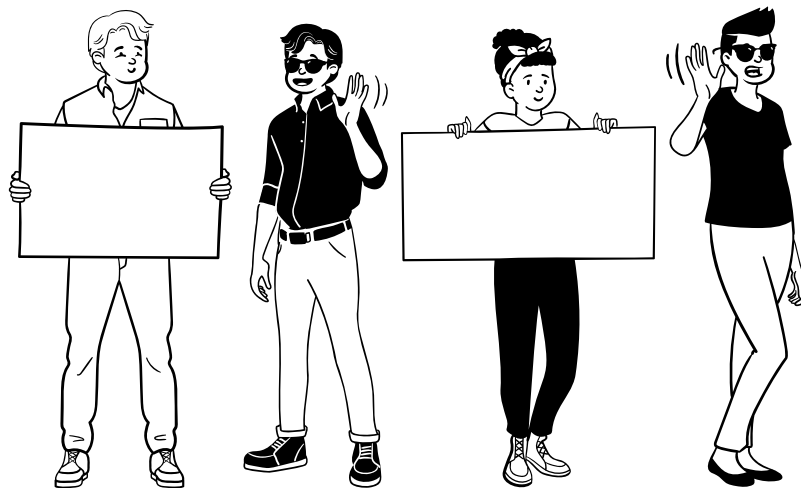
Body language

- Maintain some eye contact with your team – this helps facilitate support and communication.
- Keep your hands visible, relaxed, open and to the side of your body, or below your chest.
- Do not touch an agitated or argumentative person, as physical contact could be interpreted as hostile or demeaning.
- Move away, take a step back in the case of feeling “over shadowed”.
- Use natural barriers, including the stall table.
- Signal for assistance (tag team) if you feel unsafe or unable to manage the situation.
- Only one person should talk; many people talking can create confusion. Avoid creating a verbal or physical wall of hostility.

Active listening and empathy for de-escalation

- Listen to what the issue is and the person's concerns.
- Incline your head slightly to show you are listening and give you a non-threatening posture.
- Maintain appropriate eye contact, if appropriate, to connect with the person.
- Nod to confirm that you are listening and have understood.
- Wait until the person has released their frustration and explained how they are feeling to respond.
- Offer reflective comments to show that you have heard their concerns, e.g., “Thank you for bringing this to my attention”, “I will bring your concerns up with my team at our next meeting”.





Homework

Practice by standing in front of a mirror, moving your body, and adjusting your pitch.

Practice an argument on topics like immigration with a friend you feel safe and comfortable with. Have a time-out signal, and ground yourself before and after with tea, cake, and a walk.

Practice noticing where tension lives in your body, take the time to acknowledge this, breathe deeply and remind yourself that you are safe.

As a neurodiverse person, I am aware that some of these practices can feel different, uncomfortable or confrontational. However, if these practices interest you, with practice and growing awareness, you will find what works for you and your own style.

