

# COOL, CALM AND COUNTING

*A Guide to Keeping Calm  
at the Polls*



The  
Elections  
Group

# About This Guide

This pocket-sized guide includes helpful tips and reminders for de-escalating tense situations that may arise at voting locations.

When faced with a situation that may require the use of de-escalation techniques, election workers should above all be genuine in their attempts to reduce tension – understanding that situations related to voting are in many cases already emotionally charged. They should also recognize that de-escalation techniques will not make every situation better and have a plan for escalating the response to election officials or other authority figures.

Election workers should follow all relevant guidance provided to them by their jurisdictions for situations in which de-escalation is necessary. Likewise, in cases where one fears for his, her or their personal safety, law enforcement should be contacted using procedures established by the jurisdiction.

# Five Purposeful Actions



## REMAIN CALM

A purposeful demonstration of calmness & composure.



## CHANGE THE SETTING

If possible, remove people from the area. This could involve parties to the conflict and onlookers.



## RESPECT PERSONAL SPACE

Maintain a safe distance and avoid touching the other person.



## LISTEN

Give your full attention, nod, ask questions, and avoid changing the subject or interrupting.



## EMPATHIZE

Present genuine concern and a willingness to understand without judging.

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# Verbal Communication

Remain respectful and courteous. Address the individual with civility and use phrases such as “please” and “thank you.”

TONE + VOLUME + RATE OF SPEECH  
+ INFLECTION  
=  
VERBAL DE-ESCALATION

## TONE

Speak calmly to demonstrate empathy.

## VOLUME

Monitor your volume and avoid raising your voice.

## RATE OF SPEECH

Speak slowly – though not too slowly – because it is soothing.

## INFLECTION

Be aware of emphasizing words or syllables as that can negatively affect the situation.

# What to Say Instead



**INSTEAD OF:**

"Calm down."

"I can't help you."

"I know how you feel."

"Come with me."



**TRY:**

"I can see that you are upset..."

"I want to help, what can I do?"

"I understand that you feel..."

"May I speak with you?"

# Rules of Body Language

Be aware of your non-verbal communications. Ensure your tone, facial expressions, body language, and gestures relay calm and empathy.



## GOOD BODY LANGUAGE

- #1** Keep a relaxed and alert stance off to the side of the person.
- #2** Keep your hands down, open, and visible at all times.
- #3** Use slow, deliberate movements.
- #4** Maintain a neutral and attentive facial expression.

## Rules of Body Language (cont.)



### BAD BODY LANGUAGE

- #1** Standing rigidly directly in front of the person.
- #2** Pointing your finger.
- #3** Excessive gesturing or pacing.
- #4** Faking a smile.





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*More resources are available at  
[electionsgroup.com](http://electionsgroup.com)*