



# ASSESS

## How To Navigate the Risk When Someone is Escalating

The assessment process **determines whether an emergency response is needed, if de-escalation is possible, or if a more formal assessment is needed.**



### Begin with Awareness to Enable Assessment

- Awareness of precipitating events or stressors
- Awareness of your response and ability to manage your emotions
- Awareness of the situation to determine if you should engage, whether a simple “hello” will deter a threat or a more purposeful action to de-escalate the situation is required, or immediate notification to law enforcement or security is necessary



**When observing activity or behaviors that raise reasonable suspicions or concerns, individuals should assess the situation to protect personal safety and the safety of those around them.**

## WHAT DOES AN ESCALATING PERSON LOOK LIKE?

### Early Warning Signs

- Changes in a co-worker’s baseline behavior
- Pacing, ruminating, agitated gestures, or uncontrolled and disorganized behaviors
- Staring through you
- Blocking other’s movement
- Finger pointing
- Change in mood
- Distractions from work or an inability to focus
- Inappropriate responses to environmental stressors

### Signs of Imminent Danger

- Intensity in appearance with heightened senses
- Flushed, tightened jaw, clenched fists, shaking, flaring nostrils
- Rapid breathing, raised voice, nervous laughter
- Poised to strike or lunge
- Standing in a position to attack or defend
- Personal space violation
- An unauthorized person trying to enter a restricted area
- Someone impersonating an authorized person
- Someone trying to avoid security systems or personnel
- Someone abandoning an object or package and then leaving the area

### Barriers to Assessment and to De-Escalation

- Lack of empathy
- Reacting with defensiveness or anger
- Lack of respect for or shaming others
- Blaming, criticizing, preaching, labeling, or lecturing
- Lack of commitment to obligations, being preoccupied, or in a hurry
- Ordering or engaging in a power struggle
- Language or cultural differences

*This document describes activities and behaviors that may be concerning or indicative of impending violence. Some of these activities while concerning, may be constitutionally protected and should be reported only when there are sufficient facts to support a rational conclusion that the behavior represents a potential threat of violence. Do not report based solely on protected activities, or on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or a combination of only such factors. In addition, be aware that critical infrastructure owners and their operations may also be targeted based on these factors.*



## ASSESS YOURSELF

- Start by trusting your instincts; if the situation is beyond your abilities to engage, seek help
- De-escalate yourself first – remain calm or act calm if you aren't
- Control your breathing
- Relax your body and avoid gestures or postures that could be interpreted as aggressive or defensive
- Reassure yourself with positive self-talk – “You can do this” or “I can handle this”
- Project confidence and remain centered and self-assured



## ASSESS THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE ENVIRONMENT

For situations where the individual is unknown, assess if the individual presents a potential threat — the **Power of Hello** offers a means to navigate the risk.

- Does the person appear to be legitimately patronizing the business or service?
- Is the person's clothing consistent with the weather or the situation?
- Is the person avoiding security?
- Is the person asking questions about business functions or employee information? (e.g., “Who is closing?” or “How many people work here?” etc.)
- Is the person's behavior making you feel threatened?
- How is the person reacting to you or others when approached?

Assess if the environment is conducive to de-escalation:

- Is someone present who is agitating the person?
- Is there someone or something that is aggravating the situation?
- Is it crowded or lacking personal space?
- Are there environmental barriers to de-escalation (i.e., noise, weather, other distractions)?



## FORMAL THREAT ASSESSMENTS

**In some circumstances, a more formal threat assessment process is necessary.**

Threat assessment requires the organization to gather and analyze information about an employee or team member who may cause harm.

- A primary purpose is to inform decision-making on how to manage a person of concern, with the goal to prevent an incident.
- A thorough assessment by the organization's multi-disciplinary threat management team may include an interview with the person of concern and any witnesses - co-workers, associates, friends, family, or others - who can offer firsthand knowledge of the person's behaviors, history, or stressors.
- Is there evidence to suggest the person of concern poses a threat?
- What type of threat does the person of concern pose?
- Is the person of concern moving toward committing a malicious act?

Threat assessment for both emergency and non-urgent situations asks key questions:



## HELPFUL LINKS

**Power of Hello:**

[cisa.gov/employee-vigilance-power-hello](https://cisa.gov/employee-vigilance-power-hello)

**CISA Insider Threat Mitigation Guide:**

[cisa.gov/publication/insider-threat-mitigation-resources](https://cisa.gov/publication/insider-threat-mitigation-resources)

 [cisa.gov](https://cisa.gov)

 [Central@cisa.gov](mailto:Central@cisa.gov)



These assessment techniques are options for consideration. This is not intended to mandate policy or direct any action.