



De-escalation Skills

LARA

LISTEN	AFFIRM	RESPOND	ADD
<p>Demonstrate you are listening and trying to understand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal attending • Nonverbal attending 	<p>Find an authentic way to connect to your shared humanity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gratitude • Appreciation • Normalization • Acknowledgement • Agreement 	<p>Share the impact they have had on you or others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts • Feelings • Beliefs 	<p>If appropriate, offer directions for continued learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources • Relationships • Opportunities • Information

Step One: **Listen**

- In a debate, when you are listening to your opponent, you listen for errors in their position, to counter with facts in an effort to make them look foolish. With LARA, listen until you hear the moral principle that they are speaking from, a feeling, or an experience that you share. Listen until you find a way in which you can open yourself and connect with them.
- Try to understand what lies at the core of the question: Fear, uncertainty, anger, perhaps frustration.
 - What might their voice inflection or emotional state tell you?
 - What assumptions might their question or comment demonstrate?
 - It's also important to listen to what the person is actually saying. In trying to understand what might be behind the question or comment, we don't want to miss what the person literally said.

Step Two: **Affirm**

- This is a step we do not usually think about in a conscious way. Express the connection that you found when you listened, whether it's a feeling, an experience, or a principle that you have in common with the other person.
 - Affirm whatever you can find in their question or statement(s) that represents a reasonable issue or a real fear. If you can't find anything, there are other ways to affirm.
 - The exact words don't matter—the important part is to convey the message that you're not going to attack or hurt the other person and that you know that they have as much integrity as you do.
- To actually be affirming, this step must be genuine.

Step Three: **Respond**

- We often start here. Wait. Listen. Affirm.
- Debaters, politicians, (and sometimes the rest of us) often avoid answering the difficult questions or responding to difficult comments. With LARA, respond if you are able. Respond to the issue the person raised.
- Sometimes it seems that the person does not really want information but is simply trying to share their feelings or to connect with you. Response is not always necessary, or may come in subtle forms.
- Personal insights and experiences often reach people in a way that abstract facts do not.

Step Four: **Add Information**

- It may help the other person to consider the issue in a new light or redirect the discussion in a more positive direction.
- This is a good time to state whatever facts are relevant to the question the person asked. This may involve correcting any mistaken facts they mentioned; you can do this now because now that you've made a personal connection, the other person is probably more open to hearing your facts than they would have been if you had started there.
- Some other possibilities include offering resources (such as books, organizations, or specific people) or adding a personal anecdote.



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Teamwork Vignettes

1. **Obstinacy to Change:** A new student employee has joined the team, and during their first week on the job makes the team aware that they use “they/them” pronouns. Weeks later, one of your peers continues to refer to the student using “he/him” pronouns. When you raise the issue in a private setting, your peer says: “I just can’t think of him as a ‘they’. It’s hard enough to remember people’s names. I think he should understand that.”
2. **Urgency to Act:** Your team has self-organized a series of educational webinars and article discussions to raise the group’s consciousness on issues of Trans inclusion and transphobia. The conversations have been occurring regularly for six months. At the start the most recent article discussion, one team member asserts: “All of this talk is a waste of time! It’s a waste and a distraction. If y’all really cared about Trans people you wouldn’t be here talking, you’d be out there doing something about it!”
3. **Defensiveness to Feedback:** Several students have approached you about the problematic behavior of one of your peers. The students share concerns that your peer uses racially insensitive language and is dismissive when they express their concerns. When you broach the issue with your peer, they share: “Yeah, I know what you’re talking about. They’ve all accused me of being racist or having white privilege ... or whatever. I’ve decided to just avoid them. I have a lot of work to do, and I can’t spend all of my time worrying about using the exact right words just in case they might hurt somebody’s feelings. Everybody is so sensitive.”

Teaching Vignettes

4. **Peer Dismissal:** During a lively large group discussion, a student confronts a peer who has made several contributions in support of an unpopular argument. The student asserts: “I think we can all agree that your idea is stupid. But you keep bringing it up. No one agrees with you. Let’s just move on.”
5. **Repeated Interruption:** The topic of the day’s class addresses issues of hunger and homelessness, and the exacerbation of the US epidemic by 1990s public policy. At the beginning of class, a student shares that they take issues with the premise of the readings and feel that the authors are discriminatory against hard working people. The student shares that the class is just a ploy to indoctrinate liberal attitudes about welfare. As class discussion begins, the participant becomes visibly upset and as others share their perspectives, the student begins interrupting them by repeating “That’s just your opinion!” The student is steadily raising their voice, and their peers appear uncomfortable.
6. **Expressed Nationalism:** A student interrupts a guest speaker during a portion of their presentation on immigration and assimilation. The speaker emphasizes the importance of practicing first language as a means of maintaining connection to their family, culture, and heritage. A student raises their hand and states: “I think it’s rude to speak a different language when you are in America. In America we speak English, but I always hear international students speaking in other languages. I think if you are going to come all this way, you might as well speak English.” The speaker looks surprised and makes eye contact with you.



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Management Vignettes

7. **Misinterpreting an Issue:** At the start of the term, the division leader of your organization announced a unit wide initiative to improve the sense of belonging for indigenous faculty and staff and faculty and staff of color. The announcement was accompanied by an affirmation statement, a list of trainings, and a commitment from the division head to focus additional recruitment and retention efforts on Indigenous and POC faculty, staff, and graduate students. One supervisee shares their ambivalence about the initiative with you: “This doesn’t make sense. We have the highest proportion of indigenous faculty and staff of any unit on campus. Also, our climate survey shows that our faculty and staff of color are happier here than in other units. I’m all for diversity and inclusion, but maybe it’s time to focus in areas that need more attention.”
8. **Tokenization:** A supervisee laments to you about their difficulty assembling a search committee for an open position within the unit. They are particularly frustrated by the decline of one of your peers. They share: “I am not sure what to do. We are supposed to be recruiting a diverse pool of candidates, but the only people who have said yes are white. I asked Kimberlee to join, and she said no. Well, she’s the only person of color on the team, so if she’s not going to do it, who is. I am frustrated because Kimberlee is always commenting about how we need to be more diverse, but now that an opportunity comes up to do something about it, she doesn’t want to help.”
9. **Reticence to Dialogue:** You are leading a staff discussion on how to imbed diversity, equity, and inclusion into the team’s strategic goals for the next year. One white staff member has remained silent throughout the discussion. Twice you have invited them to share, and they have responded politely by saying: “I’m not an expert, I don’t have anything to contribute. I am happy to listen.”