

Mental Health Wilderness First Aid
De-Escalation Tools for Field – Guest speaker workshop

Scenarios (feel free to adapt the specifics of each scenario to fit your field situation)

1. One of your clients seems to have a hard time taking instructions. She likes to take risks and test boundaries; for instance, walking too close to an edge, or ignoring directions. You and your co-worker find yourself constantly “walking on eggshells” around her, giving instructions where necessary for safety, but trying to be “hands off” as much as possible because it creates tension when she resists or ignores your instructions. You also believe that other members of the group are noticing the dynamic as well.

At one point, you notice this client scaling a small cliff above where others are situated. You ask her to come down as the rock is loose and she is directly above some sensitive equipment, in addition to the falling risk. She yells back, “You need to relax!” Others in the group begin calling to her to come down, too. You feel your own blood pressure building.

2. In your camp there are a couple of members who seem to get frustrated easily, and when conflicts arise, will swear loudly at each other or others in the group. Another team member called them out recently, saying that kind of language was not appropriate in the setting. They both responded that it was no big deal, “It’s just words, that’s just how I talk when something pisses me off.”
3. You hear a commotion in camp, and two members of your team are surrounded by the rest of the group. Both team members are agitated, and one of them has a bleeding nose.

Others tell you that the two members had gotten in to a fight, after one accused the other of theft. The first team member (the one who now is bleeding), “got in the face” of the second member, yelling at him, and the second member shoved the first away, causing him to hit a tree, which resulted in the bleeding nose.

Your first instinct is to remove the one who did the shoving from the field, since he made physical contact. However, you are told by several other team members that both members were clearly involved in the conflict, and escalated it unnecessarily. Also, due to the circumstances, it would be ideal for a variety of reasons to be able to keep both team members in the field.

