

# DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES FOR TRIBAL SECURITY

A Tribal Security Skills Toolkit — National Native Justice Institute | [www.nativejustice.us](http://www.nativejustice.us)

## ■ DE-ESCALATION IN TRIBAL SECURITY SETTINGS

De-escalation is the deliberate use of communication, distance, time, and environmental management to reduce the intensity of a conflict or crisis without resorting to force. For tribal security officers — who often lack arrest powers, operate without backup, and serve communities where every interaction has relational consequences — de-escalation is not a soft skill. It is the primary operational tool that determines whether an incident resolves peacefully or escalates to force, injury, or lasting community harm.

🧠 Research shows that 80–90% of use-of-force incidents in security and law enforcement settings could have been prevented or reduced in severity through effective de-escalation.

❤️ In tight-knit tribal communities, every security interaction has relational ripple effects. A use-of-force incident involving a community member affects families, clans, and community trust for years.

⚠️ De-escalation does not mean passivity. It means choosing the most effective response — which is almost always communication before physical intervention.

📞 If de-escalation fails and the situation presents an imminent threat, contact tribal police or 911 immediately. Security officers should not assume the risk of physical confrontation when law enforcement is available.

## ■ THE NEUROSCIENCE OF ESCALATION

Understanding why people escalate is the foundation of effective de-escalation. When individuals feel threatened, disrespected, trapped, or out of control, the brain's threat response activates — producing fight, flight, or freeze behaviors that are not rational choices but physiological responses. De-escalation works by reducing the perceived threat and restoring a sense of safety and control.

- Fight response: aggression, verbal hostility, physical resistance — often misread as deliberate defiance.
- Flight response: attempts to leave, refusal to engage, running — often misread as guilt or evasion.
- Freeze response: silence, unresponsiveness, inability to comply — often misread as contempt or intoxication.
- Historical trauma in tribal communities amplifies threat responses. A security officer in uniform may trigger trauma memories rooted in generations of harmful encounters with authority.

## ■ CORE DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES

### Physical Presence & Environment

- **Manage Distance** – Keep at least one arm's length distance — more for agitated individuals. Distance reduces threat perception, gives you reaction time, and signals non-aggression.
- **Control Your Body Language** – Hands visible and relaxed, body at an angle (not squared up), voice calm and even. Your posture either escalates or de-escalates before you say a word.
- **Reduce Environmental Stimulation** – Move the conversation away from bystanders, reduce noise, lower your own voice. Crowded, loud, public confrontations are harder to de-escalate.

### Communication Techniques

- **Lead with Introduction and Purpose** – Always identify yourself and explain your role before making any request. “My name is [name], I'm security here at the court. I want to make sure everyone is safe.”
- **Use Active Listening** – Reflect back what you hear without judgment: “It sounds like you're frustrated about the way this case is being handled.” Feeling heard reduces aggression.
- **Offer Choices, Not Ultimatums** – Ultimatums back people into corners. Choices restore agency: “Would you like to step outside and talk, or would you prefer to wait here quietly until the recess?”
- **Validate Without Agreeing** – You can acknowledge someone's emotional experience without endorsing their behavior: “I understand you're upset. I'd like to help if I can.”
- **Use Time Deliberately** – Slow the interaction down. Ask questions. Pauses are powerful. Time reduces adrenaline and creates space for reason.

### Cultural Considerations in Tribal Settings

- Direct eye contact can be perceived as confrontational in some tribal cultural contexts. Be attentive to cultural communication norms in your community.
- Avoid raising your voice near elders or in ceremonial contexts. Respectful deference to elders in a crowd can reduce ambient tension significantly.
- Recognize that your security uniform may carry historical weight in your community. Acknowledge it implicitly through your respectful, community-centered conduct.

# RESOURCES, GRANTS & SUPPORT

Funding, Training, and Support Resources — Tribal Security De-Escalation Programs | [www.nativejustice.us](http://www.nativejustice.us)

## ■ FEDERAL GRANT RESOURCES

### Court Security Funding

- **COPS Tribal Resources Grant (TRG)** – Funds tribal public safety including court security staffing, training, and equipment. [cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources](http://cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources)
- **CTAS – Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation** – DOJ consolidated tribal funding for courts, law enforcement, and security programs. [justice.gov/tribal](http://justice.gov/tribal)
- **BJA Tribal Justice Programs** – Supports tribal court operations and court security capacity. [bj.a.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice](http://bj.a.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice)
- **FEMA Tribal Homeland Security Grant Program (THSGP)** – Annual DHS funding for tribal security infrastructure and emergency preparedness. [fema.gov/tribal](http://fema.gov/tribal)

### Behavioral Health & Training

- **SAMHSA Tribal Behavioral Health Grants** – Funds behavioral health co-responder programs and de-escalation training for tribal security and law enforcement. [samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac](http://samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac)
- **IHS Behavioral Health Programs** – Tribal behavioral health services supporting co-responder and de-escalation models. [ihs.gov/behavioralhealth](http://ihs.gov/behavioralhealth)
- **BJA Justice & Mental Health Collaboration (JMHCP)** – Funds cross-system collaboration including security-behavioral health de-escalation training. [bj.a.ojp.gov/program/jmhcp](http://bj.a.ojp.gov/program/jmhcp)

## ■ STATE & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **State Court Security Standards** – Most state court administrative offices publish court security standards applicable to tribal courts under intergovernmental agreements. Contact your State Court Administrator.
- **State Homeland Security Grants (SHSGP)** – Tribal court security programs may be eligible for state-administered FEMA homeland security funding. Contact your State Administrative Agency (SAA).
- **Tribal Law & Order Act (TLOA) Resources** – TLOA expanded tribal justice authority and DOJ technical assistance for tribal courts and security programs.
- **Grants.gov Tribal Search Tool** – Search all federal grants available to tribal entities. [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) (filter: Tribal Government eligibility)

## ■ HELPFUL TIPS FOR TRIBAL PROGRAMS & LEADERS

<p><b>Integrate De-Escalation into Every Security Training</b></p> <p>De-escalation should not be a stand-alone module. Integrate it into entry screening, patrol, courtroom positioning, and prisoner escort training as an operational standard, not an add-on.</p>	<p><b>Use Community Members as Role-Play Partners</b></p> <p>Scenario training with community members who represent the real population security officers serve produces more culturally relevant and effective skill development.</p>
<p><b>Track De-Escalation Outcomes</b></p> <p>Document incidents where de-escalation was used and what the outcome was. Data demonstrates program effectiveness, supports grant applications, and drives training improvement.</p>	<p><b>Reward Successful De-Escalation</b></p> <p>Organizational culture shapes behavior. Supervisors who recognize and reward officers for successful de-escalation reinforce it as a valued professional skill, not a compromise.</p>

## ■ KEY WEBLINKS

National Native Justice Institute	<a href="http://www.nativejustice.us">www.nativejustice.us</a>
National Center for State Courts	<a href="http://ncsc.org">ncsc.org</a>
COPS Tribal Resources Grant	<a href="http://cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources">cops.usdoj.gov/tribalresources</a>
BJA Tribal Justice Programs	<a href="http://bj.a.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice">bj.a.ojp.gov/program/tribal-justice</a>
SAMHSA Tribal Behavioral Health	<a href="http://samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac">samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac</a>
FEMA Tribal Grants	<a href="http://fema.gov/tribal">fema.gov/tribal</a>
CTAS – DOJ Tribal Assistance	<a href="http://justice.gov/tribal">justice.gov/tribal</a>

## ■ PARTNER WITH NNJI — WE ARE READY TO SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY

**TAKE ACTION TODAY** — Contact NNJI at [www.nativejustice.us](http://www.nativejustice.us) to schedule training, consultation, or access resources.  
*Strengthening Tribal Justice — One Community at a Time*