

# De-escalation in Large Crowd Situations

## Theatre, Fun, Music and Song

These can all be used to entertain and change the energy.

- If the energy is getting too excitable, music and especially drumming can be used to first meet the energy of excitement and then gradually calm things down by slowing the beat until it is the same as a calm heart-beat.
- When tension is building, start up a calming song, and invite others to join in. Teach and then sing it slowly and calmly. You can find some examples [HERE](#)
- If arrests are starting to happen, or if tension is rising for another reason, ask any musicians playing to slow things right down and play something calm, or with a slow heart-beat type rhythm. You might want to ask them to stop altogether, so the crowd can be together in song.
- Be careful not to be over-zealous with calming music and song; some people need the upbeat rhythms and to be able to let off steam so make space for this whenever possible - otherwise frustrations will build.

## Establishing Silence

In large crowd situations where the tension is rising, it can be really helpful to establish silence, because it can be calming in itself and because it will enable you to initiate other tactics, with everyone aware and joining in. However, establishing silence does require a high level of responsiveness and may not be possible in really large or dispersed crowds. If it feels too difficult, don't waste time on it, but move on to the next tactic.

Two methods:

- One person falls quiet and raises their hand, whilst inviting the people around them to do the same. This works well if enough people are practiced.
- Project without shouting and say 'Clap once if you can hear me' and then clap once. Say 'Clap twice if you can hear me' and then clap twice. Say 'Clap three times if you can hear me' and then clap 3 times. Each time, more people around you should be joining in, until everyone has clapped 3 times and then fallen silent, waiting for what's coming next.

You can then very briefly and calmly let people know what you'd like to do next and why (why nonviolence and de-escalation are important), invite people to join in with a song or use one of the

tactics below.

## Sit Down and Invite Others to Sit Down Too

This can have a very calming effect.

Make sure there is plenty of space around the violence / conflict, especially a free route to withdraw.

It can also be helpful to fall silent. .

## De-escalation Line

This is especially useful for conflict between lines of police or riot police and activists when tension is building too much.

- Explain to the police that you will be asking activists to give them space and reduce tension.
- Form a line of people between police and activists with one person facing toward police, one facing towards activists, alternating.
- Invite activists to take two steps backward to give the police some space and then sit down.
- Remind rebels that through this action rather than 'giving in', they have enhanced their nonviolent stance and strengthened the held space.
- Withdraw the line when all is well.

## Gentle Singing / Chanting and “Stop” Hand Gesture

- Ideally, first get the crowd to be quiet (see above)
- Everyone takes up a gentle chant such as “peace, love, respect” and assumes the “stop” hand gesture towards the aggressive action, arm outstretched. The hand gesture is palm facing towards the situation, fingers pointing upwards.
- The stop hand gesture can be softened by everyone placing their left hand over their heart area (top of chest). Left hand over heart activates the right brain associated with connection and wellbeing.
- Keep the song going.
- We are not shaming and blaming angry people. There’s a lot to be angry about, so we want to support the people in not venting their anger in unhelpful ways. Make sure that there is plenty of space for the people to withdraw from the crowd.
- Lots of other possibilities here. Make up your own, keep it simple. Or you can just use a ‘hummmmmm’.

## We are non violent, how about you?

This next one is only appropriate to use when engaging with aggressive police and other aggressive people.

- Get quiet.

- Sing “We are nonviolent. And how about you?” to the tune of the John Lennon chant “Give peace a chance”.
- Then begin saying “We’re nonviolent. How about you?” Think about how you are delivering this. Does it sound gentle and suggestive or confrontational?
- This was used **as a spoken chant** against violent police at the Seattle mass mobilisation against World Trade Organisation. If chanted it comes across as very challenging and should only be used in extreme situations - **when there’s a need to meet a high energy level with similar intensity - and especially towards aggressive police.**

Try it out and compare the effect with the sung version. At the International Rebellion in October ‘19 it was sometimes used inappropriately when police were behaving with respect - so then it created tension where there wasn’t any before. See [4 min film](#).

## Encountering Extreme Anger or Threatening Behaviour

If you can’t deal with it, get help elsewhere (including the police if necessary).

- This is a last resort to be used if someone is going to be hurt.
  - The intention is not to inform on people or create difficulties in people’s lives.
  - The intention is to keep people safe.
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