

Questions to De-escalate Conflict

Peoplenovate® Dialogue

Conflict often escalates not just because people disagree but because their fundamental needs and interests have not been taken into account. The right question, asked at the right moment, has the potential to stop a conflict from escalating into a dispute.

This resource offers practical questions that help shift conversations from aggressive snowballing to respectful dialogue.

Before Asking Questions

A de-escalating question works best when it is:

- calm rather than confrontational;
- curious rather than accusatory;
- open rather than leading; and
- grounded in genuine listening.

The goal is not to prove a point.

The goal is to create a respectable space for constructive dialogue to start.

1. Questions That Slow Down Escalation

- “Can we pause for a moment and clarify what the main concern is?”
 - “What do you think is being misunderstood here?”
 - “What seems like the most important next step to you right now?”
 - “Can you help me understand what led you to that view?”
 - “What part of this situation feels most frustrating?”
 - “What is the best you or we can do in this situation, and what will it take?”
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2. Questions That Build Understanding

- “What outcome are you hoping for?”
 - “What would a fair resolution look like to you?”
 - “Can you explain your losses in more detail?”
 - “What do you think actually happened that led to this situation?”
 - “Is there something beneath the immediate disagreement that we should address?”
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3. Questions That Reduce Defensiveness

- “What would help this conversation feel more constructive?”
 - “How can we discuss this in a way that works for everyone?”
 - “Would it help if we focused on one issue at a time?”
 - “What do you need in order to make this problem go away?”
 - “Can we start by separating the problems from the people?”
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4. Questions That Encourage Problem-Solving

Use these once emotions have lowered and dialogue becomes possible again.

- “What options do we have from here?”
 - “Where do you think there is room for compromise?”
 - “What would a solution look like?”
 - “What can be the most constructive thing we can do next?”
 - “Are we being idealistic or realistic?”
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A space for mediation, dialogue, and human-centred conflict resolution.