Many people have reported these changes to their perceptions while in “fight” or “flight.”

- **Time distortion**: Most report time slowing down, some report a speed up.
- **Visual distortion**: Objects and people appear much larger and closer than they actually are.
- **Tunnel vision**: Loss of peripheral vision, replaced by a hyper focus on the threat.
- **Auditory exclusion**: Temporary loss of hearing during high stress.
Signs that someone may be in fight or flight response

• Dilated pupils
• Pale or flushed skin
• Rapid breathing
• Trembling

After the threat is gone, it typically takes between 20-60 minutes for the body to return to its normal state.

Source: American Institute of Stress
“Amygdala hijack” – Emotional Intelligence, 1995

- Amygdala: part of the brain that senses threat
- Responds to threats faster than the cerebral cortex.
- In “fight” or “flight”-- the instinctive part of the brain is running the show until the rational part of the brain catches up.
Othering

• Reframing the person we are in conflict with as less than us

• Makes it easier to say or do things that we would not do to a respected equal

• When we start thinking this way, we are moving closer to inappropriate violence or hostility
Acting scary when feeling scared

- Showing willingness to be violent and not afraid of the other person.
- Intended to *stop* violence, and it works sometimes.
- If the other person is using the same strategy, a situation could escalate to serious violence.
- Other person may use self-defense because they feel threatened, resulting in serious violence.
- If the situation goes violent it will be hard to claim self-defense in a legal proceeding.
Replacing Fear with Anger

- Fear often makes us feel powerless
- Overriding fear with anger can give us a sense of power
- Anger can give us a sense of false justification to cause harm

When anger is driving the car, it leads us down the road to greater calamity.
De-escalation Mindset

Think “I am interacting with a scared, aggravated, or confused person who is having a bad day.”

...instead of “Now I have to deal with this jerk!”
Strategic Positioning & Body Language

- Safe distance & angle
- Use obstacles and barriers
- Clear escape route
- Avoid body language that could be read as aggressive, threatening, disrespectful or submissive
Emotional Warning Signs for Escalating Violence

- Othering Language
- Threatening tone of voice
- Threatening body posture: chin thrust out, puffed up chest
- Hitting or throwing objects
- Striking their own body
- Verbal threats
Physical Warning Signs for Escalating Violence

- Repositioning or taking off hat, glasses or jacket, moving hair, moving valuables
- Reaching in pockets or lifting shirt (reaching for weapon)
- Getting close enough so they can strike the other person without taking a step
- Tucked chin, muscle tension
- More protected body position, waiting for opportunity to strike the other person
- Decrease in talking or not talking
- Hyper-focus on the other person
Common threat posturing vs. Attack positioning

Threat posturing vs. Threat posturing  Threat posturing vs. Attack positioning
QUESTIONS? CONNECT WITH US!

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De-Escalation Workshop

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