With respect to safety, it's important to take special care to avoid using body language that may be interpreted as intimidating or threatening. This helps ensure patients don't become violent in reaction to their fear that they are in danger. Here are a few specific tips:

- **Move slowly.** To avoid starteling the agitated patient, avoid sudden or abrupt movements, and approach the person in clear view.

- **Maintain eye contact.** This shows you respect the patient (Tingleff, Bradley, Gildberg, Munksgaard, & Hounsgaard, 2017).

- **But not too much.** Some eye contact is good. But too much might be perceived as a challenge or threat.

- **Speak at eye level.** This conveys that you see the patient as an equal. If necessary, sit down next to the patient to achieve this.

- **Don’t stand over the patient.** This makes patients feel that you are looking down on them.

- **Don’t back the patient into a corner.** Being backed into a corner can intensify the patient's anxiety and paranoia, leading to agitation and panic. When patients are cornered, they fight. Give patients space and an exit route to prevent them from feeling trapped.

- **Don’t crowd the patient.** Give the patient plenty of space. Put at least 3 to 4 feet of distance between yourself and the patient during de-escalation. If the person has a history of aggression or violence, give them even more room. This will decrease anxiety and enable successful de-escalation.

- **Don’t touch the patient.** This could be interpreted as an aggressive gesture (Paterson, Leadbetter, & McComish, 1997).

- **Don’t turn your back on the patient.** This prevents you from monitoring the patient visually and places you in a vulnerable position.

- **Keep your hands free and in the open.** Some patients feel threatened if they cannot see your hands. As an added bonus, keeping your hands free and in the open means you will be better able to quickly defend yourself if the patient attacks.

- **Adopt a supportive stance.** In this stance, the feet are shoulder width apart, arms are bent slightly, and hands are open in front of the thighs with the palms facing upward (Hallett & Dickens, 2017). This stance is a nonverbal way to convey that you are not a threat. It communicates kindness, courtesy, and respect (National Health Service, 2008). This stands in contrast to a fighting stance, which will generally be interpreted as menacing—especially if you are standing right in front of the patient.

**REFERENCES**


