



Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC

De-Escalation for the Armed Citizen: How to Safely Navigate Conflict When You're Legally Carrying a Firearm

Francis M. Duffy, Ph.D.

On May 30, 2025, I posted the following on Facebook: “As a person legally carrying a handgun in Maryland, you have a responsibility to retreat from a confrontation as long as it is safe to do so. De-escalation is one way to ‘retreat.’ De-escalation isn’t a sign of weakness. It is the ultimate expression of discipline, maturity, and responsibility. When carrying a handgun, your goal isn’t to win a fight—it’s to avoid one. The safest fight is the one that never happens. By mastering de-escalation tactics, you fulfill not only the legal and ethical obligations of carrying a firearm, but also the moral one: to be a protector, not a provoker; a defender, not a warrior.”

That post received many supportive comments. Based on that feedback, I am pleased to present this article to you. In this article, I’ll guide you through the process of de-escalating a potentially dangerous confrontation, reducing the likelihood of violence, and maintaining control over your emotions and actions, especially when you're armed. Several de-escalation principles are discussed.

When you carry a firearm, you have accepted an enormous responsibility. Not just the duty to protect yourself or your loved ones, but also the burden of restraint—the commitment to avoid conflict whenever possible. De-escalation isn’t weakness. It’s wisdom in action. It’s control. Moreover, in a legal and moral sense, it’s often the most critical skill an armed citizen can have.

Understanding the Conflict Mindset: What You’re Up Against

Dangerous encounters often follow a predictable arc: verbal aggression → posturing → physical escalation. Many times, people escalate without even meaning to, driven by pride, fear, ego, or the need to “save face.”

If someone is yelling at you, insulting you, or acting aggressively, it's easy to respond emotionally. That's normal, but it's also dangerous.

Your mindset must be different: calm, deliberate, and disengaging. Think strategic withdrawal, not emotional confrontation. Ask yourself, "If this ends in violence, what will it cost me?" If the answer includes your life, jail, a lawsuit, or the loss of your permit, the only logical move is to de-escalate.

Furthermore, if you are carrying a handgun in a violent confrontation, that gun is no longer "yours." It's potentially anyone's gun, and the person more skilled in violence will own it. Moral of the point: Avoid violence.

True story. Chad LaBrun is an undefeated MMA fighter who trains a hostage rescue team. We invited him to run a special training session for our concealed carry customers. We also invited members of a local police SWAT team. Participants were paired with one another. The session provided participants with the experience of using jiu jitsu while protecting their handgun (blue plastic training guns). With very few exceptions, the armed person was disarmed by the aggressor!

Key Principles of Effective De-Escalation

1. Control Yourself First

If you have anger management issues, don't carry a handgun!

You cannot calm another person if you're angry. Breathe. Slow your speech. Keep your tone calm. Control your body language—no clenched fists, no puffed-up chest, no aggressive gestures. Your goal is to project that you are not a threat and not interested in conflict.

De-escalation is less about what you say and more about how you say it. Use a soft, even tone. Avoid sarcasm or "talking down" to the other person. Remember, respect, even when undeserved, can defuse tension and be a powerful tool in your conflict resolution arsenal.

2. Create Space and Break the Pattern

If someone is approaching you aggressively, remember, taking a step back is not a sign of fear, but a strategic move. Physical space is psychological space. It disrupts the aggression pattern, giving you more time to assess and react. It's a strategic advantage you can use in a potentially dangerous situation.

Try to change your position. Step sideways, turn your body slightly (adopting a non-confrontational stance), or move behind a barrier, such as a table or car door, if things feel like they could escalate into a physical confrontation.

3. Use Verbal Jiu-Jitsu

I have over 20 years of martial arts training, ranging from hand-to-hand combat as a Ranger-qualified Green Beret to Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. Verbal jiu-jitsu can be used to de-escalate a potentially violent encounter. De-escalation can save you from physical injury, even death, and from legal consequences. This skill can help you get away, which is a legal requirement in Maryland as long as it is safe to do so.

Here's a link to a video showing Sifu Tim Tackett demonstrating verbal jiu-jitsu: [Verbal Jiu Jitsu](#).

4. Use Non-Threatening Language and Body Posture

Avoid phrases like:

- "Calm down!" (ironically, this usually enrages people)
- "Back off or else!"
- "You don't know who you're messing with."

Instead, try:

- "I don't want any problems."
- "Let's both walk away from this."
- "This isn't worth it, man."

One of the critical lessons I learned from practicing Relson Gracie style Jiu Jitsu (at *Rising Tide Academy* <https://risingtidemaryland.com/>) is to keep your hands visible, slightly

raised with your palms open. This is a universal gesture of non-aggression. It also keeps your hands in a ready position if things go south.

5. Listen Without Reacting

Sometimes the fastest way to defuse someone is to let them be heard. People in a rage often calm down once they've vented. Nod, offer short replies like "I hear you," or "Okay," without feeding the argument. Your silence can be more potent than any comeback.

6. Know When and How to Walk Away

If you've calmed the situation—or if it's not getting better—you need to disengage. Be deliberate, but not rushed. Turn your body slowly, check your surroundings, and walk away with confidence. Remember, as mentioned a couple of times in this article, in Maryland and some other states, there is a legal requirement to get away as long as it is safe to do so.

If the aggressor follows, it may be time to call 911 and prepare for self-defense; however, do everything possible to avoid reaching that point.

Warning: Never walk away blindly. Always keep peripheral awareness. Do not turn your back if there's any hint of imminent violence.

7. Don't Let Ego Decide for You

This may be the hardest lesson for many. Someone cuts you off in traffic, insults you at the gas station, or calls you names in front of your family. Your first instinct might be to confront them, "man to man."

That instinct will get you hurt, killed, or arrested.

You're not there to win an argument. You're there to win at life. Protect your family, your freedom, and your future by letting petty things go.

You don't look weak by walking away with your gun still holstered. You look wise.

What If De-Escalation Fails?

Let's be real: not every situation can be de-escalated. If someone is committed to violence, your priority shifts from calming to surviving. That's where your firearms training and situational awareness come into play.

There are two possible responses to failed de-escalation:

1. Escape—you will have 30-60 seconds if you get prior warning. However, you cannot outrun a bullet.
2. Defend—you will have 3-5 seconds to find cover or draw out.

However, you should only draw your weapon when:

- You are facing an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury;
- You have no safe path of retreat.
- You are justified under your state's laws (know them!).

Even then, your goal is still to stop the threat, not to punish (i.e., use just enough force to stop the threat). This is referred to as proportionality in Maryland firearms law.

The Aftermath: What You Say Matters

Whether you de-escalate successfully or end up needing to defend yourself, remember: the legal system is watching. After any conflict, be very careful with your words.

If police are involved, say: "I was in fear for my life. I'll cooperate fully, but I'd like to speak to my attorney first." Then stop talking. Police are only required to provide your Miranda Warning rights before you are formally placed "under arrest" and questioned. According to the United States Concealed Carry Association ([USCCA Aftermath-Document-Standard.pdf](#)), it is critical to remember that anything you say at any time before you are arrested can and will be used against you. Invoke your Fifth Amendment right to remain silent with the following statement: "I AM INVOKING MY FIFTH AMENDMENT RIGHT AND WILL NOT ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS WITHOUT MY ATTORNEY PRESENT" (Do not say another word without your attorney present).

If police want to search you or your property, always say, "I AM INVOKING MY FOURTH AMENDMENT RIGHT AND DO NOT CONSENT TO A SEARCH OF MYSELF OR MY PROPERTY." Continue to reiterate this, but DO NOT interfere with the police if they

choose to search you or your property without your consent. Your attorney will address that in court.

Conclusion: The True Measure of Strength

De-escalation is not about being passive. It's about being mature, aware, and committed to preserving life. As an armed citizen, the most potent weapon you carry isn't your firearm. It's your judgment.

In high-stress moments, courage isn't pulling the trigger—it's keeping your cool when everything in your body says fight. Protect yourself by walking away whenever possible and as long as it is safe to do so. Fight only when you must. Live to go home.

Never forget: Restraint is a warrior's greatest strength. For those of us who know and practice martial arts, also never forget: You can't put a rear naked choke on a 9 mm bullet traveling at 1200 feet per second (you also cannot outrun it).

About the Author

Francis (Frank) Duffy is a veteran of the 6th and 5th U.S. Army Special Forces Groups (the Green Berets), a graduate of the Army Ranger School, and a Green Beret combat diver. He is also a certified executive protection specialist.

He is a certified instructor for the NRA (rifle and handgun instructor), the Maryland State Police, and the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA). He is a certified concealed carry instructor for the District of Columbia.

He is also a member of the Board of Directors for Maryland Shall Issue, an all-volunteer, non-partisan organization dedicated to preserving and advancing gun owners' rights in Maryland. He is the co-founder and Vice President of Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC. He can be reached at 443-472-0216 or via email at frank@spartanftg.com.

Individuals interested in scheduling a private, one-on-one firearms training session should contact Frank.

About the Spartan Firearms Training Group

The Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC (www.spartanftg.com) is a Special Forces Veteran-Owned business formed in 2015 by Paul and Francis Duffy. At the end of March

2025, we entered into our 11th year of business, and we have trained thousands of Maryland residents in a variety of ways, including:

- Concealed carry training
- Handgun Qualification License (HQL) training
- Emergency Casualty Care training
- Long-distance precision shooting training
- Home Defense training
- Private, 1-on-1 firearms training
- Private group training

Our training calendar can be found at the [SFTG Calendar](#).

Paul Duffy can be contacted at 410-707-2992

Paul@spartanftg.com

WHEN FACING A LIFE-THREATENING EVENT, YOU WILL FALL TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR TRAINING, NOT RISE TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS. TRAIN THE WAY YOU FIGHT!

©2025 by Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC. All rights reserved—permission required to distribute. The article may be used with permission for training purposes, but the copyright ownership must be identified.