



# *VERBAL DE-ESCALATION SKILLS*

Crisis Intervention



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# *Review of Critical Assumptions*



- **Psychotic individuals are not evil**, they are mentally ill
- **Mental illness is not a choice** or a dodge for personal responsibility
- Psychotic persons are highly reactive: they will react to your presence, your demeanor, your professionalism
- The best strategy is **firm compassion**



# *Relationship Building in Crisis Settings*



- It is the basis of helping the client problem solve
- It is about de-escalation of the client's internal stress and their actions
- It is about helping the client help themselves





# *What is escalation?*

- Emotions which are working overtime to move behavior in the direction of crossing safe boundaries.





# *What is de-escalation?*

- Bringing down the level of emotion so that behavior can be controlled within safe boundaries.





# *What is verbal de-escalation?*

- Verbal skills we use to prevent a person from going out of control and hurting themselves or others.
- First Response Skills we use to lessen or avoid the need for more dangerous interventions .





# *Is it different for mentally ill?*

- Sometimes it is:
  - Mental illness can disorient the emotional brain centers and disturb rational thought processes.
  - Behavior may be more motivated by unmet needs, fear, and medicine and medical issues, than intent to do harm.
  - Individuals may have no knowledge of what appropriate behavior is. It can be a teachable moment.
- Sometimes it is not.
  - Despite your best efforts, behavior may still require normal interventions of your profession.
  - Sometimes it is not clear. That is why we have crisis people to do diagnosis. That is not your job. You do the best you can and that is what I am about today. To give you some clues and additional training, but not to throw out your already good instincts. Just name them.



*But First a Word from Today's  
Sponsor*

Today's Sponsor is

**SAFETY**





*REMEMBER:*

*SAFETY IS YOUR CHOICE*



# *THE SAFETY DECISION: When Can You Make It?*



- Anytime from when you first arrive on
- It is never a one time decision
- Two Choices: Forced Custody or Relationship
- Forced Custody: Once this choice is made you can't shift back until they are under control
- Relationship: Whenever this goes wrong you resort to Forced Custody
- You can still be nice once they are under control, but they will still be under control.





# *What is your goal?*

- Safety
  - Safety
  - Safety
- 
- Give it time. Don't be in a rush.





# *Basics of Communication*





# *Communication*

- Albert Mehrabian, Ph.D. of UCLA
  - 38% how I talk
  - 55% how I look (nonverbal)
  - 7% words I use





# *Sending a Message*





# *Fight or flight*

- What is going on with you?
  - Manage your non-verbal “give aways”.
- What is going on with them?
  - Read their signals
- Demonstrate
  - What makes you nervous about this?





# *Fear*

- Fear hijacks rationality.
- Your job is to rebalance rationality.





# *Non-verbal Elements*

- Stance
- Appearance
  - Who do you remind them of
- Facial Expressions
- Eye contact
- Physical Presence
  - Gender
  - Size
  - Numbers of people
  - Professional status – calming or confusing
- Personal Space
- Movement
- Touch





# *Voice*

- Tone
- Volume
- Rate of speech
- Emphasis on words
- Invite into your emotional space



# *How we say something not just what we say*



- One sentence can convey completely different meanings depending on the emphasis given to individual words
  - I didn't tell George you were incompetent.
  - I want you to feel so relaxed that you feel better.





# *Assess yourself*

- Body check
  - Centered Position and Good Space
  - Hanging hands
  - Easy Gestures
  - Calm Voice
  - Kind Eyes
- Do all of the above say the same thing as your words?





*The ABCs of  
the CIT Scene*





*Awareness of Your view of the situation and then theirs*

*Become the safe person they can trust and talk to.*



*Create an open door for solutions*



# *Awareness*





# *Safety Assessment*

- Normal procedures of surveying scene.



# Assess *Them* and the *Situation*



- What are you dealing with?
  - Assess them non verbally
    - Agitated or aggressive – sometimes hard to tell
      - Targeted or digressive
  - Personal history you know already – dispatch call
  - Situation – search for clues
    - What was the call
    - Why now?
  - Environment as you would usually do
    - Who else is present
    - Family –
      - Ally or foe to you?
      - Ally or foe to individual?





# *Approach*

- Approach with a calm demeanor. Anxiety and fear are contagious. Threat causes fear based reactions.
- Introduce yourself first
- Find out their name
- Be polite
- Modulate your voice tone according to the intensity of the scene.



*Become Safe*





## *.Diminish emotionality*

- Diminish emotionality and you will increase rationality.
- Person will probably be non-compliant at first. Take your time and be patient.
- Allow person to ventilate to learn the problem.





# *Verbal De-escalation*

- Use your voice and your language to create calm communication channels.
- Maintain compassionate authority. Don't let your guard down, only adjust your non-verbal cues when it is a barrier to communication.





# *Verbal De-escalation*

- Computer Mode
- Invite them to your emotional space





# *Say what you observe*

- Use your vision and hearing senses
  - What you see
  - What you hear
- Reflect back feelings you are picking up





# *Listen for their story*

- Attend
  - Physical attention to the person
  - **USE** the person's name and give them yours
  - Be polite
- Following
  - Eye contact
  - Nodding your head
  - Say okay
  - Occasional question or clarification





# *Silence is golden*

- You can't talk and listen at the same time
- You can't be formulating your next reply and listening at the same time





# *Attending*

- Does the person feel like you are really paying attention?





# *Clarify - Probe*

- Use gently and sparingly. Constant interruptions make a person change directions in their thinking and they may lose focus to the point of loss of communication with you. Sometimes their focus is hanging by a thread.
  - So, when did this all happen?
  - I didn't understand if you wanted me to contact someone for you.





# *Restate/ Reflect*

- Send the message back to be sure you are hearing what they are saying
- Helps person know they have been heard
  - Let me see if I can understand this....
  - It sounds like....
  - I'm hearing you say...
  - It seems like you are ...





# *Restate and Summarize*

- Reflect
- Restate in your words
- Validate feelings and concerns
- Identify with the individual's story
  - I understand
  - I have felt \_\_\_\_\_too sometimes
- Clarify the next steps
  - Separate facts from feelings
  - Work on solution together if possible
  - Action that will be taken and why





# *Redirect*

- Getting their mind off the subject or making them switch gears unexpectedly can sometimes cut the adrenaline loop immediately. Then immediately return to the subject by reflecting the last sentence they used on topic.
  - Mr. Johnson, I must tell you what a gorgeous yard you have this year.
  - Excuse me, Ms. Jones didn't I meet your son at church on Sunday?
  - Mr. Sims I noticed you had a new truck out there. Are you enjoying it?





# *Reframe*

- Create a hopeful alternative to the way they see things playing out
- Present another view of their story
- Suggest to them there may be options
- Be careful not to give false hope





# *Refocus*

- Bring rambling conversation back to center
- Help them get to a place of less confusion
- Keep reminding them of the task at hand or the need to look at next steps





# *Letting the Air Out*

- Continuing conversation so that you can wear them down emotionally by letting them tire physically may be helpful. And can also create a trust by indicating real interest.
- A person with bipolar can keep on going for quite awhile, so have to be careful not to go too long or can escalate instead of deescalate. Cycle the focus.
- A person with personality disorder can talk you in circles until you are not sure what to respond to. Cycle the focus back to one point. End it after three times.





# *Summarize*

- Reflect back what you have heard.
- Reframe
  - Clarify the problem – Ask probing questions if needed, but interrupt rarely until story is told
  - Restate what they said in your own words to see if they agree with your read of the situation. Paraphrase.
- Refocus.
  - Bring back to the subject if chasing rabbits. Sometimes a person just needs to be heard out and not interrupted and then they are tired and calm down, but if it is just going in circles, then bring them back by going back and reflecting back the last sentence before the story went off path.





# *Open Ended Questions*

- Open Ended – not “yes” or “no”
  - How can I help you today?
  - Then what happened.
  - What seems to be the problem?
  - It sounds like you’re upset; I wonder what I can do that would make a difference?
  - That must have been really difficult. Can I help in some way?
  - I imagine this is very confusing.
  - Tell me more about..... (Not can or would)
  - Who has been helpful in the past when this has happened?
  - Then you \_\_\_?





# *Close Ended Questions*

- These are helpful with those who are anxious. It is simple and settling and refocusing for the answer.
- Use these to help the person focus.
  - Who is it that could help you with this?
  - And what is it that you think you need right now?





# *“I” Statements*

- Get out of the “You must” mode
- I understand that ...
- It seems to me that ...
- I’m glad to try to work it out ...
- I want to see that you have ...
- How can I help with this?
- Who can I contact for you?
- I know it must be tough when...





# *How do I say it?*

- **THIS**

- How can I be of help?
- I think you said...
- I want to understand how..
  
- It seems to me that you might need to ....
- I'm glad to try and work out...

- **Vs. THIS**

- What do you want?
- You are wanting what?
- How in the world did you ...?
- You gotta' ...
- You are going to have to ....





# *Rule of Fives*

- If aggressive, use short sentences
  - 5 words or less
  - Words less than 5 syllables
- Repeat yourself.
- When the brain is rapidly firing, this can help to reel it back in.





# *Validating*

- **THEY MUST FEEL THAT YOU TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY.**  
They are used to being disregarded.
- Empathic understanding
  - Not sympathy
- Be genuine
  - Be yourself
  - Be authentic
  - Be free from pretense
- Acceptance
  - Everyone has a right to their thoughts and feelings even if they don't make sense to you
  - Consumers should be respected regardless of age, race, gender, sexual preference, and cleanliness
  - Not easy when client is acting strangely





## *Validating (cont'd)*

- If a person feels validated, they will forgive your lack of knowledge of their conditions.





# *Offer Choices when Possible*

- Change environment
  - Would you like to go in the next room where you could sit down?
  - Would you like to sit here or over there?
  - Would you like to walk with me? (Backup comes along.)





# *Solution Finding.*





# *What is the need?*

- What is the need





# *What can you offer?*

- Goal is surrender, acquiescence or cooperation of the person
- Options
- Resources
  - What is in the community?
- Partnering in problem solving. To many who are mentally ill, problems are overwhelming threats. In crisis, they often cannot plan.





# *Reassure*

- About their safety
- About help





# *Find Common Ground*

- Find one thing you can come to agreement on.
- Validate feelings and concerns.





# *Plan a Solution*

- Describe what cannot continue
- Describe what the options are
- Help them choose one if they are able. If not you choose
- Explain what will happen before acting if not out of control. Even then your calm can get through and they may be hearing more than you think.
- Continue to seek relationship even during transport. Calm may still come during travel.



# *If person is starting to increase resistance*



- Slow down conversation.
- Physical movements slow.





# *Delusional or Hallucinating*

- Don't verbally challenge or attempt to reason
- Move with the delusions until a safer situation can be created.





# *Be Direct where Direct is Due*

- Be direct without being hostile or disgusted with their behavior and lack of focus.
- Safety is number one.
- Mental illness is not an excuse to allow harm to self or others to go unchecked.





*Don't's*





# *Barriers*

- Criticizing
- Name calling
- Engaging in power struggles
- Threatening
- Minimizing
- Arguing
- Not listening





# *Contact Information*

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