

An individual's behavior can become escalated when he/she is presented with feelings, circumstances, or situations with which he/she is unable to cope. The following are strategies on how to be proactive should an individual in your care show signs of escalating behaviors and proper methods of de-escalating a situation.

### PROACTIVE CRISIS INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Being proactive is a vital tool in dealing with an individual's behavior. You should use these situations as a teachable moment so the individual can learn effective and healthy coping strategies.

The most important step in crisis intervention is employee training. Direct care staff should not give support to an individual if the staff member has not been in-serviced on an individual's support plan. It is important that staff members are educated on early warning signs specific to the individual in their care, as well as the strategies used to help calm that individual.

### NON-VERBAL DE-ESCALATION

It is said that approximately 65 percent of communication consists of non-verbal behaviors. Of the remaining 35 percent, inflection, pitch, and loudness account for more than 25 percent, while less than seven percent of communication has to do with what is actually said. Here are some ways to non-verbally de-escalate a situation.

- Appear calm, centered, and self-assured even if you feel nervous. Your anxiety can make the individual feel anxious and unsafe which can further escalate the situation.
- Maintain limited eye contact. Loss of eye contact may be interpreted as a sign of fear, lack of interest, or rejection.
- Excessive eye contact may be interpreted as a threat or challenge.
- Maintain a neutral facial expression.
- Keep a relaxed and alert posture. Avoid aggressive stances.
- Minimize body movements. Excessive gesturing, pacing, fidgeting, or weight shifting are all indications of anxiety.
- This can increase agitation in the person you are supporting.
- Position yourself for safety
  - Enter the room last
  - Never turn your back
  - Keep the door open
  - Never allow the exit to be blocked
  - Maintain personal space boundaries. Keep a distance of at least two arms lengths between yourself and the person you are supporting.
  - Avoid crossed arms, hands in your pockets, or arms behind your back as these stances can be interpreted as negative body language.
  - Implement a "code word" staff can use when they need to call for assistance without alarming others.
  - Request help when needed
- Avoid touching whether it is in a calming or protective manner without first explaining your actions to the individual (e.g. "I'm going to touch your shoulder").
- Always be at the same eye level. Encourage the individual to be seated, but if he/she needs to stand, stand up also.

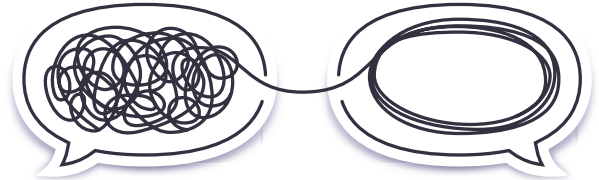
### *Know the Signs*

Here are some common signs that an individual has become escalated:

- Raised Voice
- Rapid Speech
- Excessive Sweating
- Excessive Hand Gestures
- Fidgeting
- Shaking
- High-pitched Voice
- Pacing
- Balled Fists
- Erratic Movements
- Aggressive Posture

## VERBAL DE-ESCALATION

Once non-verbal strategies are in place, verbal de-escalation is the next step in calming the individual. The objective of de-escalation is to reduce the level of anxiety so a discussion becomes possible, and the individual can learn appropriate reactions to stressful situations. The following are general guidelines for verbal de-escalation:



- Use a modulated, low, monotonous tone of voice (our normal tendency is to have a high-pitched, tight voice when nervous).
- Do not get loud or try to talk while an individual is speaking. Wait until he/she takes a breath, then talk. Speak calmly at an average volume.
- Do not be defensive even if comments or insults are directed at you. They are not about you. Do not defend yourself or anyone else from insults, curses, or misconceptions about their roles or behaviors.
- Maintain a respectful tone while setting limits and/or getting assistance from another staff member. An individual under stress is sensitive to feeling shamed and disrespected. It is important to treat all people with dignity and respect at all times.
- Respond selectively. Answer only informational questions no matter how rudely asked, (e.g. “Why do I fill out these stupid forms?”) This is a real information-seeking question. Do not answer abusive questions (e.g. “Why are all counselors jerks?”). This sort of question should get no response whatsoever.
- Be honest. Lying to a person to calm him/her down will lead to future escalation if he/she becomes aware of the dishonesty. However, do not volunteer information which may further upset the individual.
- Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, but respectful tone. Give choices where possible, in which both alternatives are safe options.
- Empathize with feelings but not with the behavior (e.g. “It’s okay to feel angry, but it is not okay to yell at me.”).
- Suggest alternative behaviors where appropriate (e.g. “Would you like to take a break?”).
- Do not argue as this is not a power struggle. Remember, an individual has a right to his/her feelings; your job is to teach him/her how to appropriately cope in a given situation.
- Ensure the individual is aware of the natural consequences of his/her actions.

It is important for an organization to implement crisis intervention training according to its policies and procedures. New employees should be trained before giving direct care. Refresher trainings at least annually should also be required.

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