

# De-escalation Techniques



**COMMUNICATION AND CONSIDERATIONS**

**DURING A CRISIS SITUATION**

# OBJECTIVES OF WEBINAR



- **Recognize that prioritizing your safety and the safety of others is always the most important outcome**
- **Learn 3 things to help you remain calm and in control**
- **Learn 3 things you can do, or refrain from doing, to promote calm and cooperation in someone else**
- **Increase confidence in knowing when to step away and/or call 911**

# CRISIS INCIDENTS



- Crisis can be defined as an emotionally significant event that exceeds a person's ability to cope
- Usually a precipitating event has occurred within the last 24 hours
- Emotions are controlling a person's actions
- If the subject feels he is in crisis, he is

# INITIAL GOALS IN A CRISIS INCIDENT



- **Determining appropriate resources to safely handle the crisis**
  - Recognize you need to walk away if you are not equipped to handle the crisis safely
  - Staying in an unsafe environment complicates the situation for responding law enforcement
- **If on the telephone, recognize when to call the police**
  - Subject is threatening himself or others
  - Other people are with the person and may need help
- **As officers, know when a trained negotiator is necessary**
  - Basic de-escalation does not replace a negotiator

# COMMUNICATION



- **Is an art and not a science**
- **The best communicators are the best listeners**
- **The only thing you have control over during an incident is your own emotions**

# MINDFULNESS



- **Pay attention in a particular way**
  - What is the person in crisis looking for (the ‘hook’)?
- **On purpose**
  - You want to help - not “It’s my job”
- **Stay in the present**
- **Non-judgmental**
  - ✦ John Kabat-Zinn

# TIPS TO DEVELOP TRUST



## Do

- Take off sunglasses
- Share your name and role
- Meet the subject 'where he is'
- Be honest if you don't know an answer

## Don't

- Grill or quiz the subject
- Make promises you have no control over
- Lie or give easy answers to assuage the subject

# MAINTAINING YOUR COMPOSURE



- Model calm and relaxation (breathe)
- Remember: you do not have to resolve the situation immediately
- Model patience
- Do not take things personally
- Follow “The Golden Rule”



# BODY LANGUAGE



- **Self-awareness**
- **Relaxed open posture**
- **Posture that allows calm breathing**
- **Knees slightly bent**
- **Hands visible**

# ACTIVE LISTENING



- Many incidents may be diffused by simply listening
- People want to be understood
  - Problem solve
  - Show individuals the same respect as you would want
- **The first few minutes are critical (first 15 to 45 minutes)**
  - How you start the conversation sets the tone

# ACTIVE LISTENING



- **Stay focused on the persons problem(s)**
  - Always be aware of your surroundings and react appropriately if something changes to affect your safety
  - If law enforcement, utilize contact/cover to assess threats
- **Allow person to vent**
  - During the venting process you may hear what the real problem is
- **Don't assume**

# MINIMAL ENCOURAGERS



- Indicates to the subject you are listening
  - “uh huh”
  - “ok”
  - “really”
- Does not interfere with the flow of the conversation
- Encourages the subject to keep talking

# PARAPHRASING



- Repeating back *in your own words* what the subject just said
  - Lets the subject know you are listening, and by paraphrasing that you understand what he is saying
  - Good for using when you are at a loss of words
  - Don't over use ('parroting')

# EMOTIONAL LABELING



- You are identifying the emotion/feeling that you are hearing
  - Do not be afraid to label an emotion incorrectly
  - Label all the emotions you hear
  - Do not use when you are being verbally attacked
- Demonstrates you are listening to what the subject tells you he is experiencing

# REFLECTING/MIRRORING



- Repeating back the last couple of words
- Assures the subject you are still actively listening
- Helps to build rapport and trust
- Body language

# VALIDATING



- **Increases our effectiveness with others in all areas of communication**
- **Reduces defensiveness**
- **Validate the person and his experience using the skills discussed earlier**
- **Accept the person where he is emotionally**
- **Communicate your understanding of his experience**



# A KEY ABOUT VALIDATION



Being respectful, validating what the person is expressing and acknowledging the difficulty of his situation does not convey approval or agreement with his thinking or behavior.

# EFFECTIVE PAUSES



- **Silence**
  - Most people are not comfortable with silence and attempt to fill it with talk
  - Can be used before or after something important is said
- **Can be effective if used properly and not over used**
- **Can be an opportunity, if timed appropriately, for you to break the silence and direct the conversation**

# “I” MESSAGES



- Use when being verbally attacked or the person refuses to interact with you.
- “I'm here to help you. I can't do that through arguing or if you are swearing at me.”
- “I'm here to help you. I can't do that if you don't talk and help me understand what you are going through right now.”
- “I'd like to hear your side of the story.”

# OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS



- Cannot be answered with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’
- Usually starts with “what?” “how?” “where?”  
“when?”
- Avoid using “why” if possible
- Elicits more information than yes/no questions

# PSYCHOTIC SYMPTOMS



- Try not to get trapped in the subject's experience
- A person's perception is his reality

-“I know from what you are saying that *you have seen someone following you all day* – how scary that must be.”

-“I can see you are really angry that *no one else can see what you are seeing* so clearly but I want to help you.”

-“I don't have much experience/education about (reference the topic the person is delusional about), but I do want to help.”

# COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE IN CRISIS



- **Observe and deal with the behavior**
- **Behaviors may be caused by:**
  - Mental illness (initial or decompensation)
  - Medical illness or injury
  - Drug or alcohol use
  - Criminal activity as victim or suspect
  - Domestic violence
  - Parenting/custodial issues
  - Mood and anxiety disorders can have psychotic symptoms when severe

# COMMUNICATION WITH PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM A MENTAL ILLNESS CRISIS: Examples



- You seem afraid – what is scaring you right now?
- What is it that you are afraid of right now?
- What am I doing that is making you feel nervous? I want you to feel safe.
- How can I help you feel more calm (or more safe)?
- Who do you talk to when you need help, like feeling sick or needing a ride?

# Examples (continued)



- What kind of medication, if any, are you taking?
- When did you last take your medication?
- What does your medication help with?
- Where do you go to get your prescriptions?
- Who is your doctor - if you have one?
- What kind of medical or mental health conditions do you have that might help me understand how to be most helpful?



# WHEN SHOULD I JUST CALL 9-1-1?



- **Your safety is the #1 priority when in a crisis situation!**
- **If the person is armed or claims to be armed, call 9-1-1**
- **If you feel unsafe or threatened call 9-1-1**
  - Do not put yourself in a situation that forces police to act quickly by refusing to leave the person in crisis
  - Be accurate and detailed, **DO NOT** exaggerate the situation to get a faster response

# What if I am 9-1-1?



- **Recognize when you need other experts**
  - Call the crisis line
  - Listen to case managers' guidance about the person
  - Use your department's resources
- **Unless you are a negotiator, you are not a negotiator!**
- **Take your time**
- **If on the phone, continue to gain intelligence and get information for as long as possible**

# REVIEW



- **Do what it takes to be safe**
- **Take your time**
- **Show respect**
- **Listen**
- **Problem solve**
- **Active listening skills does not replace trained negotiators**
- **Know when to ask for help**
- **Do not be afraid to call 9-1-1**