

Serving the public under pressure: Communication and De- Escalation skills

PRESENTED BY: JESS WALKER QMHP



rosecrance[®]
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



Objectives:



By the end, participants will:

- **Recognize signs of escalation in patrons**
- **Use de-escalation strategies in public-facing situations**
- **Maintain personal and workplace safety**
- **Set boundaries while preserving dignity**
- **Manage their own stress during challenging interactions**

Facts on Mental Health

- 18.5% of adults in the United States experience a mental health disorder in a given year, but this is likely an underreported figure.
- One in 17 adults (6%) lives with a serious mental illness
- One in 10 children (10%) lives with a serious mental illness
- Only 41% of individuals with a mental illness seek services/treatment in any given year with the average delay between symptom onset and treatment is 11 years
- Adults with serious mental illness die on average 25 years earlier than other Americans

Common Mental Health Signs & Symptoms

Remember: We do not know what people have been or are going through so we must meet them with kindness and an open mind

Common Mental Health Signs & Symptoms

- Communication
- Cognitive Functioning
- Emotional Presentation
- Behavioral Signs
- Physical Appearance

Communication :

- Repeating questions or statements
- Talking very fast or very slow
- Difficulty focusing or staying on topic
- Long pauses or trouble responding

Cognitive Functioning:

- Forgetting what they were doing
- Asking the same question repeatedly
- Appearing lost or unsure of surroundings
- Trouble understanding simple instructions

Emotional Presentation:

- Irritability or frustration
- Sudden anger or defensiveness
- Tearfulness or appearing overwhelmed
- Flat or withdrawn responses

Behavioral Signs:

- Pacing or restlessness
- Refusing to follow directions
- Invading personal space
- Difficulty making decisions
- Fixating on a specific issue
- Staring or looking around a lot

Behavioral Signs cont.

- Talking to themselves or unseen others
- Distracted by things others don't notice
- Strong reactions that don't match the situation
- Laughing to themselves
- Paranoia or mistrust ("you're against me")

Physical Presentation:

- Strong body odor
- Noticeable changes in hygiene
- Slurred speech or unsteady movement
- Appearing extremely tired or “out of it”
- Unusual outfits or dressed weather inappropriate

Verbal De-escalation

What can we do about it ?

Start out on the right foot:

- Greet all patrons respectfully and equally
- Avoid making assumptions about behaviors, recognizing that everyone may have different needs or challenges.
- Offer information and choices
- Maintain some privacy when having difficult conversations

Rational Detachment

Rational detachment is the act of separating your emotions from the situation so you can respond thoughtfully instead of reacting

Remember: It's not about you



4 stages of Behavior Escalation



**LEVEL 1:
ANXIETY**

**LEVEL 2:
DEFENSIVENESS**

**LEVEL 3:
RISK BEHAVIORS**

**LEVEL 4:
TENSION REDUCTION**

Anxiety

BEHAVIORS

- restlessness
- avoidance of eye contact
- difficulty focusing
- pacing
- fidgeting
- sighing
- shutting down
- mild irritation or attitude

WHAT DOES THIS SOUND LIKE?

These are going to be more mild statements, frustrations or questions.

Think:

- “Ugh, I can’t get this stupid thing to work”
- “I don’t understand why can’t I bring my bag with me”
- “What do you mean I can’t eat over here, I’m hungry”

Anxiety

STAFF RESPONSE



BE SUPPORTIVE:

What does Supportive look like?

- Active listening
- Validate and acknowledge feelings
- Ask questions / offer support
- Tone, volume, cadence
- Give space
- Be aware of body language/non-verbal communication

Active listening

3 A's of active listening:

Attitude: Approach the conversation with an open and positive mindset

Attention: Give the speaker your full attention

Adjustment: Be willing to adjust based on the conversation

SOLER Technique:

Squarely face the person

Open your posture

Lean toward the other speaker

Eye contact Maintained

Relax while listening

Supportive Stance

Position: position yourself at a slight angle so you are not face to face

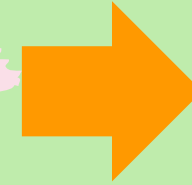
Posture: Make sure your posture remains non-threatening, balance and relaxed.

- Consider the other person's position : Kneeling, sitting or standing

Proximity: Think about how close you are to a person, respect their space (generally the louder someone is the further away to go)

Anxiety

PATRON SAYS



STAFF RESPONSE

"Ugh, I can't get this stupid thing to work"

"I'm sorry this isn't working, can you tell me what you are trying to do or find, and we can see if I can help? "

"I don't understand why can't I bring my bag with me "

"I know you want to bring your bag in with you, unfortunately we have a policy about bags over a certain size, If you would like I can show you where you can keep it"

"What do you mean I can't eat over here, I'm hungry"

"I understand you are hungry, no one is allowed to have food or drink in this area, you are welcome to eat it outside, over there ect. or wrap it up to save for later"

**Being
Supportive
usually helps
avoid the Dig...**

However, escalation can
always happen

Defensiveness

BEHAVIORS

- shouting or raising voice
- pacing
- slamming hands
- refusing
- asking challenging questions
- acting in a threatening manner
- not letting anyone else speak

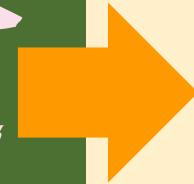
WHAT DOES THIS SOUND LIKE?

Defensiveness is broken into 3 behavior categories:

- Questioning
- Refusal
- Release

Defensiveness

STAFF RESPONSE



BE DIRECTIVE:

What does Directive look like?

- use short and simple phrases
- provide limits and choices
- be objective—decide if this person is capable of listening and understanding your response
- give them time, space, remove triggers, relocate them ask a colleague for help

Responding to types of defensiveness:

QUESTIONING

You can:

- Maintain supportive demeanor
- Information seeking vs. challenging
- Redirect / put question back on them
- Be consistent
- Avoid power struggles

“Why is that even a rule? That makes no sense.”

Don't give too long of an explanation

Redirect Instead:

“I hear that it's frustrating. What are you hoping to do today?”

“I know that's frustrating, I'd be happy to talk about it over here and see if I can help you”

Responding to types of defensiveness

REFUSAL

You can:

- Set limits
 - Clear
 - Predictable
 - Not emotional
- Offer choices
 - Preferred option first
- Explain consequences and outcomes (if x, then y)

"I'm not moving, I am staying right here"

"I understand you don't want to move. We do need to keep this area quiet. You're welcome to move to [designated area] or take a break outside."

Setting further limits: "If you are unable to x,y,z then I will need to ask you to leave"

"I understand this is frustrating for you, but this is the policy, so if you would like to stay you have to be quiet in this area or come back another time"

Responding to types of defensiveness

RELEASE

You can:

- Do NOT interrupt, but can interject
- Limit bystanders or observers – remove audience
- Allow venting when possible
- Do not take it personally
- Rationally detach

“This is ridiculous! Everyone here is so disorganized. I can’t believe you’re making me wait!” ect.

Try and wait for a break in conversation, then directly address and ask for the behavior you want to see

“I hear that you’re frustrated. I want to make sure we can help you. If you could please follow me to the counter I would be happy to address this concern.”

Sir, I would be happy to help you with this, First i need you to lower your voice and then we can figure out a solution

How to approach a difficult conversation:

- Stay Calm
 - Your tone sets the direction
- Be Aware of Body Language
 - Give space, stay non-threatening
- Be Clear & Direct
 - Focus on behavior, not the person
- Start Respectfully
 - "Hi, I just wanted to check in..."
- Don't Take It Personally
 - Stay professional and grounded
- Know Your Plan
 - Be ready with policy, options, and support

Small Group Activity

Remember:

ANXIETY

Be SUPPORTIVE

Listen
Validate feelings
Offer help
Keep calm tone
Give space

DEFENSIVENESS

Be DIRECTIVE

Questioning

Don't argue
Redirect
Keep it brief

Refusal

Set clear limits
Offer choices
Stay calm

Release

Let them vent
Don't interrupt
Acknowledge
emotion
Redirect after

Risk Behaviors

BEHAVIORS

- Threats
- Physically harming themselves
- Physically harming others
- Acts of aggression

STAFF RESPONSE

- Do not intervene alone
 - Seek out assistance from co-workers
- Take safety precautions
- Take all threats seriously
- Call 911 if appropriate
- Notify your supervisor
- If possible, get someone the person trusts to help de-escalate the situation

REMEMBER: ALLOW SPACE, STAY CALM, USE APPROPRIATE VOLUME AND TONE,
OFFER CHOICES

Tension reduction

BEHAVIORS

Person may respond by crying, apologizing, losing energy or a sense of crashing, this is followed by "normal" behavior

STAFF RESPONSE

- Still maintain supportive attitude
- Respond to sorry's appropriately
- Ask if they would still like help figuring out the problem

Take care of yourself

**WHAT CAN
YOU DO AT
WORK?**

**AFTER
WORK?**

Where to find resources?

CALL: 988, 311, 211

WWW.CHICAGOFOODBANK.ORG

LOCAL SHELTERS

Rosecrance.org

NAMI

SAMHSA



rosecrance[®]
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH