

Verbal De-escalation & Aggression Control

Training

Managing Aggressive Behavior

- ▶ Aggression control is the safe behavior management of disruptive, assaultive people.
- ▶ It is an essential skill when providing behavioral health services.
- ▶ You will learn techniques to control your own anxiety while handling a crisis situation.
- ▶ Remain as professional as possible.
- ▶ Intervention skills extend beyond verbal and physical.

Two Kinds of Aggressive Behavior

- ▶ Aggression can be verbal or physical
- ▶ Overreacting or underreacting can further escalate the situation
- ▶ Match the intervention to the aggression. Verbal hostility requires a verbal response, and physical altercations require physical intervention.
- ▶ There are four levels of a crisis situation and four approaches to manage them.



Four Levels & Approaches:

Level 1 - Anxiety and Support

- Anxiety appears as an increase in energy and/or a noticeable change in behavior
- Use active listening and empathy to defuse the patient
- Be supportive and nonjudgmental



Four Levels & Approaches:

Level 2 - Agitation and Setting Limits

- Patient becomes defensive
- Aggression is expressed verbally
- Dramatic shift in communication (tone, volume, etc.)
- Patient will try to push your buttons and is irrational.
- It is critical to remain calm, professional, and rational.
- Do not support the patient's defensiveness.
- Set a clear limit and be prepared to enforce it.
- Do not threaten and provide positive consequences for compliance.
- Let them choose their consequences. Do not get in a power struggle.

Four Levels & Approaches:

Level 3 - Acting Out and Physical Intervention

- Total loss of control evidenced by physical aggression
- Patient now presents a danger to themselves and/or others
- Physical intervention is required. Verbal management has not worked.
- Only use physical restraint when absolutely necessary.
- Don't take it personal. Remember the patient is overwhelmed.

Four Levels & Approaches: Level 4 - De-escalation and the Therapeutic Relationship

- Physical and emotional draining of energy
- Patient regains rationality but may not remember the entire outburst.
- This is a great time to talk to the patient, who is likely scared and confused.



Nonverbal Communication

- At times, this may be the only form of communication that the patient can receive.
- Keep your distance to remain nonthreatening.
- Give more distance than you normally would.
- Pay attention to your body language. Do not communicate face-to-face, which appears aggressive.
- Keep your hands visible. Do not clench your fists.
- Use less direct eye contact

Paraverbal Communication

- Verbal communication beyond the words that are said
- Tone, volume, and rate of speech
- How you speak to a person can be more important than what you say
- Do not raise your voice or use a demeaning tone
- Pay attention to the patient's response to know if you are delivering your message correctly



Defusion Strategies

Do

- ▶ Appear confident and calm
- ▶ Give them space
- ▶ Speak slowly, gently, clearly
- ▶ Use active listening
- ▶ Reduce direct eye contact
- ▶ Use nonthreatening postures
- ▶ Keep your hands visible
- ▶ Ask open questions and show concern

Don't

- ▶ Stare
- ▶ Argue or confront
- ▶ Get too close or make them feel trapped
- ▶ Move suddenly
- ▶ Allow an audience, who can escalate the situation
- ▶ Threaten

Two Key Concepts

- ▶ You cannot reason with an unreasonable person. **The primary objective is to calm them down, not to reason with them.**
- ▶ These techniques must be practiced because they are not natural reactions to dangerous situations.



More Tips for Verbal De-escalation

- ▶ Do not get defensive. It is not personal.
- ▶ Remember you have back-up.
- ▶ Always treat the patient with respect and dignity.
- ▶ Never turn your back on them.
- ▶ Get at their eye level.
- ▶ Be very careful what you do with your hands.
- ▶ Do not raise your voice. Talk when they have stopped to breathe.
- ▶ Respond only to informational questions.
- ▶ Try to give them safe options to choose.
- ▶ Suggest alternative behaviors and give consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- ▶ Trust your instincts!