

De-Escalation Primer

How staff response can create therapeutic moments vs. potential crises

Our working definition of behavior is the response of a person to the environment; an outward expression of inward emotion or need. Behaviors are based on a complex set of factors.

Individual
Triggered

Individual's
Behavior

Staff
Response

Potential Crisis

Therapeutic Moment

Communication is critical in staff response



Body Language is safe and supportive.

How we position our bodies, proximity, stance, and facial expression are key.



Voice Tone is calm and empathic.

Quiet not hard, soft not loud, comforting not challenging, curious not judgmental.



Word Choice is recovery-oriented language.

Engaging not dismissive, positive not negative, thoughtful not unkind, encouraging not belittling.

Purposeful Actions



Arrange the environment by offering space and limiting stimuli.



Intervene by focusing on the individual and not the behavior; use validation and provide options from the individual care plan.

De-Escalation Techniques

Are rooted in the Trauma-Informed Care Model

Selective Focus *Selectively choosing not to bring attention to the undesirable behavior.*

Eye Contact *Show a helpful presence by making brief eye contact (less than a second).*

Touch *Briefly placing a hand on the top of the wrist, tip of the elbow, or top of the shoulder to convey caring.*

Limitation of Audience/Stimuli *Reducing the stimuli by encouraging the person who is escalating or other people to leave the area.*

Calming Time *Voluntary use of coping skills.*

Reassurance *Remind the person of past successes, confirm they can be successful, and guarantee them that you will help.*

Redirection *Engaging the person in an alternate activity.*

Distraction *Making brief comments/questions in order to direct the conversation to a less upsetting topic.*

Ventilation *Venting allows for a release of feelings/frustrations in a manner and language of their choice.*

Exploring Outcomes *Helping an individual consider likely-natural outcomes of their intended behavior in a non-threatening and non-confrontational manner*

Dislocation of Expectations *Avoiding reacting defensively to verbal aggression or threats.*

Clarifying the Emotional Status *Responding to the person's expression of anger or verbal threats by voicing your perception of what the person is really feeling.*

