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DE-ESCALATION

DEFINITION

- De-escalation is the act of using techniques and skills, including verbal and non-verbal communication in a strategic manner to prevent the escalation of conflict or potentially dangerous behaviors. The individual or individuals may be, experiencing **distress**, is upset in **conflict**, having a **mental health crisis** or **traumatized**.

GROUP QUESTIONS?

- Why may the people you work with be in crisis or distressed?
- What kinds of trauma have the people you work with experienced?
- What common mental health issues may require de-escalation?

WHY IS DE- ESCALATION NECESSARY

- To prevent an escalation of a given situation
- To support or assist someone experiencing distress
- As an alternative to law enforcement intervention
- To stabilize an individual in crisis
- To prevent someone from harming themselves or others
- As an intervention used while waiting for the appropriate support (crisis responders etc.)

GROUP QUESTIONS

- In what kinds of situations have you found it necessary to de-escalate?
- Any personal stories (no names or descriptors)?

WHEN DE- ESCALATION IS INAPPROPRIATE

- In situations which require law enforcement intervention
 - Active shooter
 - Imminent threat of bodily harm to self or others
- When the situation is outside of the scope of your capabilities or comfort
- When the individual has repeatedly demonstrated an unwillingness to listen or be compliant
- When the individual has demonstrated the ability to self-soothe
- When trust has been lost or broken
- When the individual is becoming very agitated
- When you are exhausted
- When attempts to de-escalate become a stressor
 - Too many people etc.

WHAT ARE SOME LOCAL
RESOURCES THAT YOU
COULD USE WHEN DE-
ESCALATION IS
INAPPROPRIATE?

QUESTIONS

FRIEDRICH GLASL'S STAGES OF CONFLICT ESCALATION

- Stage 1: Tension
 - Tensions are noticeable and become conscious, different opinions collide. The situation is still harmless, differences of opinion are commonplace and **can be resolved through discussion.**
- Stage 2: Debate
 - The disagreement becomes more fundamental, the parties try to convince each other through rational arguments. The individual may insist on their point of view. Uncompromising black-and-white thinking and verbal violence. (**The person is escalating**)
- Stage 3: Actions instead of words!
 - **Talking no longer helps, actions are necessary!** The verbal communication steps into the background, possible conversations are frustrated and broken off without result. The empathy for each other gives way to **distrust and negative expectations**, which intensifies the conflict even more.

FRIEDRICH GLASL'S STAGES OF CONFLICT ESCALATION

- Stage 4: Coalitions
 - It becomes about winning or losing and **is no longer about the original thing**, but about winning the conflict. (Perspective is lost).
- Stage 5: Loss of face
 - Attacks **will begin directly and personally**, including “blows below the belt”. **The loss of morality and mutual trust** goes hand in hand with the loss of face. The sight of the person trying to de-escalate creates negative feelings, even disgust.
- Stage 6: Threat Strategies
 - Through **threats and counter threats**, the person in conflict tries to win the upper hand. They make demands of you or threats such as: “If you don’t do, then I will.” **This has now become a power struggle.**

FRIEDRICH GLASL'S STAGES OF CONFLICT ESCALATION

- Stage 7: Limited destruction
 - This is the first stage, where humanity has ended, and all tricks are used to do harm. There is no more bargaining or reasoning. You may no longer be perceived as a helper or human being, but as a thing without feelings. **Values and virtues take a back seat.**
- Stage 8: Total annihilation
 - The **ultimate goal is the** physical-material, mental-social or spiritual destruction of the other person.
- Stage 9: Together into the abyss
 - This is the point of no return from which there is no going back, **there is a total confrontation between the two parties. Self-destruction is accepted by the person you may be trying to de-escalate.**

FRIEDRICH GLASL'S MODEL OF DE-ESCALATION

- **Stage 1-3:** Self-help is still possible (They may be able to resolve on their own)
- **Stage 2-3:** Help through **friends**, family or **professional moderation**
- **Stage 3-5:** Help through external **professional process support**
- **Stage 4-6:** Help through external socio-therapeutic process support (Formal)
- **Stage 5-7:** Help through external professional mediation (Outside of scope)
- **Stage 6-8:** Assistance through voluntary or mandatory arbitration (Out of scope)
- **Stage 7-9:** Help only possible through a power intervention from above (supernatural)

SCENARIO

- Story of working with a young adult in the Delaware Correctional System
- De-escalation Gone wrong

THE ROLE OF TRUST IN DE-ESCALATION

- Though it is true that trust typically built up over time, If you are genuine when you listen, this can build rapport and help someone feel like they can trust you.
- It will be more likely to de-escalate someone with whom you have built trust

DE- ESCALATION STRATEGIES

- **Be Empathic and Nonjudgmental**
 - Do not judge or be dismissive of the feelings of the person in distress. Remember that the person's feelings are real, whether or not you think those feelings are justified. Respect those feelings, keeping in mind that whatever the person is going through could be the most important event in their life at the moment.
- **Respect Personal Space**
 - Be aware of your position, posture, and proximity when interacting with a person in distress. Allowing personal space shows respect, keeps you safer, and tends to decrease a person's anxiety. If you must enter someone's personal space to provide care, explain what you're doing so the person feels less confused and frightened.
- **Use Nonthreatening Nonverbals**
 - The more a person is in distress, the less they hear your words—and the more they react to your nonverbal communication. Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice. Keeping your tone and body language neutral will go a long way toward defusing a situation.

DE-ESCALATION STRATEGIES

- **Keep Your Emotional Brain in Check**
 - Remain calm, rational, and professional. While you can't control the person's behavior, how you respond to their behavior will have a direct effect on whether the situation escalates or defuses. Positive thoughts like "I can handle this" and "I know what to do" will help you maintain your own rationality and calm the person down.
- **Focus on Feelings**
 - Facts are important, but how a person feels is the heart of the matter. Yet some people have trouble identifying how they feel about what's happening to them. Watch and listen carefully for the person's real message. Try saying something like "That must be scary." Supportive words like these will let the person know that you understand what's happening—and you may get a positive response.
- **Ignore Challenging Questions**
 - Engaging with people who ask challenging questions is rarely productive. When a person challenges your authority, redirect their attention to the issue at hand. Ignore the challenge, but not the person. Bring their focus back to how you can work together to solve the problem.

DE- ESCALATION STRATEGIES

- **Set Limits**
 - As a person progresses through a crisis, give them respectful, simple, and reasonable limits. Offer concise and respectful choices and consequences. A person who's upset may not be able to focus on everything you say. Be clear, speak simply, and offer the positive choice first.
- **Choose Wisely What You Insist Upon**
 - It's important to be thoughtful in deciding which rules are negotiable and which are not. For example, if a person doesn't want to shower in the morning, can you allow them to choose the time of day that feels best for them? If you can offer a person options and flexibility, you may be able to avoid unnecessary altercations.
- **Allow Silence for Reflection**
 - We've all experienced awkward silences. While it may seem counterintuitive to let moments of silence occur, sometimes it's the best choice. It can give a person a chance to reflect on what's happening, and how they need to proceed. Silence can be a powerful communication tool.
- **Allow Time for Decisions**
 - When a person is upset, they may not be able to think clearly. Give them a few moments to think through what you've said. A person's stress rises when they feel rushed. Allowing time brings calm.

WHEN TO ESCALATE

- When escalation appears imminent, trust is not possible, or you have exhausted all other reasonable options, you may need to escalate by seeking more appropriate support such as:
 - 911
 - Crisis Responders

SOURCES

- *Crisis Prevention Institute – De-escalation tips*
- *9 Stages of Conflict Escalation Friedrich Glasl*
- *Guide to Trauma-Informed De-Escalation During Actions and Protests*

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