

# Training Staff with Varying Abilities and Special Needs

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In your role as a *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> Certified Instructor, it is likely that at some point you will encounter a situation where a staff member you are training is challenged in ways that affect the participant's ability to learn content, demonstrate skills or apply some aspect of the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> program. For example, a training program might include:

- Participants with limited reading abilities
- Participants with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia
- Participants who are hard of hearing or with limited vision
- Participants with physical disabilities or health issues, including pregnancy
- Participants in wheelchairs or on crutches

These challenges usually can be categorized into two general areas:

1. Challenges and limitations in learning or using the preventive portions of the program
2. Challenges and limitations in learning or using physical components of the program

In situations such as these, Certified Instructors must determine how to best help the person learn the program content, or, if necessary, what reasonable accommodations can be made for the participant with special needs. Certified Instructors will also have to decide whether or not the participant will pass the course, and what role the staff member will perform within the organizational team.

In keeping with the Crisis Prevention Institute's emphasis on prevention, these issues are best addressed prior to a training session and at the organizational policy-making level. The following guidelines suggest some key issues to consider, and provide some ideas for how to manage such situations.

## **Challenges and limitations in learning or using the preventive portions of the program**

Most staff members can benefit from the preventive skills taught in the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> program, and should be able to integrate them into their daily work. However, some staff members may have difficulty completing the Post-Test or demonstrating their abilities to implement the skills in situational application. Some of these concerns might be related to learning disabilities, limited reading or writing skills, speaking English as a second language, or even test anxiety.

### *Training Methods*

A proactive approach to maximizing training participants' learning abilities is to consistently use the "demonstrate-participate-explain" teaching model. These teaching methods are designed to address the variety of learning styles that exist among adult learners. Some people are visual

learners--they learn best by watching the Instructor perform a technique, and then modeling the technique themselves (demonstration-participation). For example, in the Paraverbal Communication Exercise, participants hear the Instructor use two distinctly different vocal approaches before practicing Paraverbal Communication.

Other people learn best by experiencing a situation (participation). For example, when participating in the Personal Space Exercise, participants experience first-hand how the invasion of personal space can increase anxiety and escalate a crisis situation.

Some individuals learn best by listening to the Instructor discuss how a particular concept affects crisis intervention (explain). For example, participants benefit from talking about ways that staff can improve their empathic listening skills relative to the specific work they do.

By consistently using the demonstrate-participate-explain teaching model while teaching the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> program, Instructors are proactively assisting staff to learn the skills most effectively, and in ways that are suitable to their learning styles.

#### *Program and/or Testing Adjustments*

There may be times when a Certified Instructor might need to adjust *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> program materials or Post-Test to accommodate various learning styles or special needs. This is one of the reasons that the grading of the Post-Test is largely at the discretion of the Certified Instructor and the standards that the Instructor and his or her organization agree upon.

While staff members may be permitted to take the Post-Test in a variety of ways, what is most important is that the Certified Instructor is confident that staff members understand the material and the variety of skills necessary for them to improve their interventions and to make good decisions that will provide the best possible care, welfare, safety and security for everyone in the workplace.

With regard to successful program completion, the definition of a "passing" grade and the requirements to receive signed Participant Completion Cards should be clearly outlined in organizational policy. Some facilities define these in a letter to participants or in conversation with a supervisor prior to the training program.

While the Completion Card may indicate that the staff member has fully participated in the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> training program, other documentation--such as a letter or staffing policy--may direct the staff member's particular role in a crisis situation.

In all cases, by signing a Completion Card, the Certified Instructor documents that the staff member was present for the entire course and the Instructor should feel confident that, at a minimum, the staff member fully understands the concepts and skills taught in the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> training program. Some organizations set other criteria for successful completion, such as competency testing and practical application as part of the testing process. Again, this should be defined in organizational policy.

### *Special circumstances and suggestions*

Here are some common circumstances that might affect a staff member's ability to learn the program's preventive concepts, and some suggestions to consider.

- Training participants with learning disabilities or limited reading/writing skills

There are a number of ways to address these issues. The Certified Instructor can: 1.) Provide the participant with a note-taking partner during the training; 2.) Allow the participant additional time to take the Post-Test; 3.) Provide a quieter environment with less distractions where the participant can take the test; 4.) Offer the participant the opportunity to take the test a day or two later with more time to study; 5.) Offer the participant the option to complete the test with you verbally, rather than in writing.

It is also possible that a staff member may not understand the intent of a test question because of the way in which the test question is phrased. In these cases, it is appropriate for the Certified Instructor to rephrase the question for the participant.

Consider making a general announcement at the beginning of your training that welcomes staff members to contact you in private if they have special needs that may relate to their successful completion of the training and testing required. Discuss these needs privately with the participant so you can make reasonable accommodations.

- Training participants with English as a second language

Some staff members who speak English as a second language may have increased anxiety about the written aspect of the test, and many of the previous suggestions may apply. Depending on your language skills or the availability of someone who might help translate, other options might include: 1.) Allowing the participant to phrase their answer in their native language; 2.) Providing a translator to help the participant write the test answers in English; or 3.) Providing course materials and Post-Tests in both languages. (CPI provides course materials in seven languages.)

- Training participants with test anxiety

It is possible that even when a participant knows the material well, the anxiety of the test-taking situation can cause him or her to freeze up. These participants may do just fine if they have a little more time to study, or if they take the test in a different environment. Simply inviting them to re-take the test a few days later may ease this anxiety. If you are aware that a participant may experience test anxiety, offer these options privately before administering the Post-Test. If you notice someone experiencing anxiety during the test, offer the different options at that time. Be cautious not to announce various options to all participants, or you may cause this anxiety where it may not have otherwise been.

- Training participants who need additional mentoring/coaching

Sometimes staff members need more mentoring and individual attention in order to understand the concepts. Using additional training tools, such as a videotape training program (for example, Volume I of the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> videotape training series), may also be helpful to reinforce program concepts for participants.

## **Challenges and limitations in learning or using the physical components of the program**

### *Training methods*

Staff members who are hard of hearing or sight-impaired; physically challenged; use a wheelchair, crutches or a walker; or have special health conditions, including pregnancy; have all successfully participated in *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> training programs. Reviewing "due care for participants," using the "demonstrate-participate-explain" teaching model, and being familiar with organizational policy will be important in providing a positive learning experience for all participants.

Some situations involving physical limitations may be obvious when a participant enters the training room, sometimes the staff member will inform you about a special need and other times the situation may not become apparent until you begin practicing the physical techniques. In order to help you plan for these situations in advance, at the beginning of class Certified Instructors should request that individuals with physical limitations contact you in private, early in the program. This gives the Instructor an opportunity to discuss training standards with these participants and to think about ways to accommodate their needs during practice.

Certified Instructors should also ask the participants to gauge their comfort levels during the program, and should monitor the participants while teaching to ensure that they are safe. Instructors have also experienced instances when staff who feel they may have limitations in participation find, after watching demonstrations, that their limitations do not impede their ability to participate. Instructors have also experienced instances when staff--who originally felt they may have limitations in participating--find that they aren't impeded.

If someone has an outwardly visible condition but doesn't discuss the issue with the Certified Instructor before the program, the Instructor should monitor the situation, but avoid making assumptions about the participant's ability to perform. The Certified Instructor may find that the person adapts well and is able to demonstrate proficiency in the physical techniques.

Whether or not a staff member has informed you of a physical limitation in advance, you may find that difficulties with the physical portions of the program arise as you begin practice. In these cases, some strategies and issues to consider include the following:

- Allow time. Sometimes it takes a little while for people to get used to the motions or to close physical contact. They may seem hesitant at first, but avoid jumping in too early. An abrupt intervention can make participants more nervous or self-conscious.
- If participants are unable to demonstrate the use of a physical technique within a reasonable amount of time, try to ascertain the reason for their difficulties. If the difficulty is a result of a physical limitation, determine if the limitation is temporary or permanent.

- A person in a wheelchair has a different perception of personal space than most of us. Be aware that someone's wheelchair becomes "an extension of space and self."
- Seek the advice of a physician before adapting a control technique for someone with a physical limitation. For instance, do not try to maneuver the arm or leg of a person with limited range of motion due to cerebral palsy without the consultation of the appropriate medical personnel.

#### Special circumstances and suggestions

- Training participants with temporary limitations

If the limitation is temporary, it is often possible to make reasonable accommodations when teaching the physical components of the program. A "reasonable accommodation" is one that addresses the limitation, while at the same time allows the Certified Instructor to see that the participant can utilize the technique.

Often, the participant is more concerned about the strain or possible injury that might result from multiple repetitions when practicing a physical technique than he or she is concerned about the ability to perform the movement once or twice. In such cases, reasonable accommodations might include:

- Allowing a participant to block with only one arm/leg (Example: if there is an injury or limitation on one side)
- Organizing the groups so that a participant only practices being the staff member's role on one side of the Acting Out Person (Example: to avoid irritating a hip injury)
- Exempting the participant from playing the role of the Acting Out Person (Example: if someone has lower back problems or is pregnant)
- Performing the motion slowly (Example: if a person is concerned about a chiropractic condition)

In all cases, however, it is important to remember that the Certified Instructor's own judgment and suggestions should not take the place of a medical provider's directions or advice.

Allow these individuals to participate to the best of their abilities and be supportive in helping them make accommodations along the way. If they are not able to demonstrate reasonable competency at the time of the training program, keep in mind that they could always complete the program in the future when their limitation improves. In the meantime, the Certified Instructor may only be able to provide them with Completion Card for Units I-VII and X until they are able to complete the entire program.

- Training participants with permanent limitations

If the limitation is permanent, keep in mind the following:

- Many people are used to their limitation and are able to make their own adjustments. For instance, if someone wears an insulin pump on their right side, they become very adept at moving their body in ways to avoid contact with it.
- Talk to these participants and ask them how they would adapt or adjust for their situations. This will help them think through situations that may occur in the future.
- Help them problem-solve by relying on physical "principles" more than "style." For example, a grab release doesn't have to look exactly like the Classroom Model picture; it is more important that the Certified Instructor help participants understand how they can use the personal safety psychological and physiological principles and adapt the principles to their physical limitations. (Example: the staff member who uses a wheelchair can still block, move, use the element of surprise, locate a weak point, use leverage, and momentum--it just looks different.)

### *Physical Limitations and Nonviolent Physical Crisis Intervention Training*

Most people with physical limitations benefit from learning the personal safety techniques. With regard to Nonviolent Physical Crisis Intervention however, the focus shifts from whether the person can protect himself or herself, to whether they can provide care and safety for others as well. Specifically, the issue becomes: Can this participant demonstrate competency in performing Nonviolent Physical Crisis Intervention and provide for the safety of the client, other team members, and him/herself? To start, it's appropriate for the Certified Instructor to ask the person to reflect on this question him/herself. If the person questions his or her own ability, the Instructor might also suggest that the person seek the advice of a physician to find out if practicing or using Nonviolent Physical Crisis Intervention is acceptable. Also, the Instructor might check with the staff member's supervisor: Does the staff member's job description require physical intervention skills?

If participants with physical limitations would like to learn Nonviolent Physical Crisis Intervention, it is not necessarily the Certified Instructor's role to prevent them from participating. The Instructor's responsibility is to evaluate what level of competency the participants have achieved, and provide the appropriate type of Completion Card.

If a staff member is unable to demonstrate the ability to perform Nonviolent Physical Crisis Intervention in the classroom, it is unlikely that he or she will be able to use the techniques safely and effectively with a client in a real situation. The staff member's role in a crisis situation may be more appropriate as an auxiliary team member.

If in the end, an individual is unable to demonstrate competency with the physical controls, Certified Instructors can still provide the staff member with a Completion Card for Units I-VII and X.

Note: If a staff member is able to demonstrate the ability to do Nonviolent Physical Crisis Intervention with only minimal adjustments, be sure to include those considerations into the Crisis Response Team plan (Example: "When using the Team Control Position with a client, Joe will always move toward the left side of the client. Or, when using the Children's Control Position, Mary will step toward the front of the client to monitor her face, etc.)

### *Program Completion Decisions*

Assessing training participants' competency to perform a strategy in class--and in a real-life situation--is a critical responsibility of the Certified Instructor.

Many of these decisions need to be made on a case-by-case basis, and it may be a good idea to involve the input of supervisors and other team members. Developing policies at the organizational level and/or using the competency- based testing tool may be a way to help Certified Instructors make these decisions easier.

It's important to realize that even if a participant does not receive a Completion Card for Nonviolent Physical Crisis Intervention, the staff member's role on the organizational team is still an important one.

### *Planning for the Organization's Team*

Not every staff member has to be involved in physical intervention. The "Auxiliary Team Member Duties" section of the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® program includes a variety of roles persons with limitations may be better suited to perform. Certified Instructors should discuss the importance and duties of these roles with the staff member, supervisors, and other team members, and plan for this within their team protocol. Allocate roles to staff members that allow them to use their best skills. (Example: "When intervening with a client, Tom will be responsible for verbal intervention, Kathy will focus on clearing the room of other clients, Mike will assess the room for any dangerous objects, and Sam will monitor the client for signs of distress, etc.") Also, plan for any adjustments or accommodations that the team members need to be aware of during physical intervention (Example: Team cues for team members who are hard of hearing or visually impaired).

With all program participants, including those with special needs, Certified Instructors should be supportive, but also set limits based on training standards and what each individual staff member can demonstrate in the classroom.

### *Other Challenges: Applying Course Content on the Job*

At times, Certified Instructors may have legitimate concerns regarding staff members who pass the Post-Test, but about whom the Instructors have concerns whether or not the staff members will apply the material safely and effectively in interventions with clients in the work setting.

Situations like these should be monitored, and Certified Instructors should implement ways to improve staff understanding and abilities to use program skills in situational applications. Here are some things to consider:

- Training is a process. The initial *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® program is only the first step. Regular refresher courses along with practice develop staff members' sensitivity, reinforce the philosophy, and expand on their skills.
- Addressing areas where staff do not apply skills. Schedule a session where staff perform role-plays or the necessary skills. Be aware of areas where staff do not use the skills, because they will be key issues to emphasize during refresher courses. Also, try to

determine why they are not using the skill. Do they understand how to use the skill? Do they recognize the importance of the skill or what might occur if they don't use it?

- Situations with specific staff members. If the situation is specific to one particular staff member, the Certified Instructor can discuss this with a manager, and see if there is any way to schedule the staff member to work with someone who can be a mentor and positive role model. If the staff member could benefit from more frequent training, the Certified Instructor might give him or her a three-month expiration date and invite the staff member to refresher courses in order to maintain an active Completion Card.

Preparation, planning, and prevention will go a long way toward making the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> program training successful. Repetition, practice, and increased exposure to the program will help staff members implement the skills in their daily work life. Participation and the involvement of persons with limitations need to be addressed at the organizational policy level prior to training. With your assistance, these staff members will be able to make a significant contribution toward providing quality care at your organization.

For additional assistance in addressing situations where a staff member has difficulty learning or using some aspect of the *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*<sup>®</sup> program, please contact Instructor Services at 1-877-877-5390.

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