CRISIS PREVENTION INSTITUTE™

Seven Principles for Effective Verbal Intervention

Effective Verbal Intervention

Dealing with individuals who are belligerent, hostile, or noncompliant can be an everyday occurrence.

Your effective response to this defensive behavior is often the **key to avoiding** a physical confrontation with an **out-of-control individual**.

These seven principles for verbal intervention will **help you intervene** in the **safest, most effective** way possible.

1 Remain calm.
This may be easier said than done, especially when a person under your care is screaming, making threats, or using abusive language. Remember that the verbally escalating person is beginning to lose control. If the person senses that you are also losing control, the situation will probably get worse. Try to keep your cool, even when challenged, insulted, or threatened.

2 Isolate the Individual.
Onlookers, especially peers of the verbally escalating person, tend to fuel the fire. They often become cheerleaders, encouraging the individual. In addition, the presence of an audience makes it more difficult for the person to back down, for fear of losing face in front of others.

Try to isolate the person with whom you are verbally intervening. You will be more effective one-on-one than in a group setting.

3 Watch Your Body Language.
As a person becomes increasingly agitated, they will pay less attention to your words and more attention to your body language.

Be aware of your use of space, posture, and gestures. Don't get too close to the person, and avoid gestures that might seem threatening. Make sure your nonverbal behavior is consistent with your verbal message.

These seven principles for verbal intervention will help you intervene in the safest, most effective way possible.

4 Keep It Simple.

Be clear and direct in your message. Avoid jargon and complicated choices. A person who is beginning to lose rational control will not be processing information as well as they usually do. Complex messages will increase their anxiety and probably make their behavior more difficult to manage.

5 Use Reflective Questioning.

Put the person's statements in your own words and then check with them to see if you have understood what they meant. By repeating or reflecting the person's message in the form of a question, you'll give them an opportunity to clarify that message. This reflective questioning is also a powerful way to let the person know that you care enough to listen carefully to their words.

6 Use Silence.

Surprisingly, silence is a very effective verbal intervention technique. Silence on your part allows the individual time to clarify their thoughts and restate their message. This often leads to valuable insight and clearer understanding of the true source of the person's conflict.

7 Watch Your Paraverbals.

Paraverbal communication refers to the tone, volume, and cadence (rate and rhythm) of your speech. Many identical statements can have completely opposite meanings, depending on your paraverbals. For example, the question, "What's wrong?" could be stated in a caring, supportive way or in an impatient, condescending way. Avoid double messages by making sure that your paraverbal communication is consistent with the words you use.

Don't Give Up

While there is no guarantee that a person under your charge will not physically act out, following these seven principles will help you reduce the anxiety and defensiveness that often precede dangerous behavior. These preventive measures will help increase the *Care, Welfare, Safety, and Security*℠ of everyone in your facility.

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