Personal Safety in the Workplace: Managing Challenging Behavior

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Training Objectives

- To protect the safety of staff and customers
- To raise the level of staff awareness regarding the nature of behavioral health challenges
- To provide staff with the KSAs *(knowledge, skills, and abilities)* needed to manage customer interactions that become volatile, unpredictable and/or threatening
- To increase staff confidence in our ability to deal with challenging behavioral situations that appear to be related to mental illness
Nationwide, **1 in 4** employees are threatened, harassed or attacked each year

**2 million** American workers are victims of workplace violence each year

Over **2/3** of verbal and physical attacks are from strangers or clients

**85% of perpetrators** exhibit clear warning signs before attacking

**Not all of these situations are related to mental illness or substance abuse, but some are!**
Recognizing Angry or Potentially Violent Customers

- **Voice**
  - Loud and/or angry
  - Profanity or use of threats

- **Body Language**
  - Aggressive stance
  - Rapid breathing
  - Rapid eye movements
  - Clenched fists or obvious tension
  - Pacing

- **Weapon**
Non-Employee Triggers

- Customer dissatisfaction
- Feeling they have not been heard
- Feeling powerless
- Outside stress
- Mental disorder
- Substance abuse
- Anti-government feelings
Employee Triggers

- Lack of employee satisfaction
- Feeling powerless
- Deterioration in home/work environment
- Lay offs or non-voluntary reassignment
- Uncertain job security
- Mental disorder/Substance abuse
1. Be calm… You can’t control the situation until you control yourself

2. Watch your body language (and theirs)

3. If the customer raises their voice, lower your voice and listen

4. Don’t argue… Allow them to vent… Apologize when appropriate
6. Empathize

7. Ask open ended questions like “How can I help you?”

8. Pledge to do what you can to help… Move toward win-win
9. Follow through and deliver

10. Report and debrief

11. Your personal safety and that of your clients comes first. Know when to disengage!

12. DISTANCE AND COVER!
What Is Active Listening?

- Stop what you are doing and give the person your full attention… Focus!
- Listen to what is really being said (Words, intents and feelings)
- Try to empathize… Put yourself in their situation
- Use silence, nodding and paraphrasing
- Ask clarifying open-ended questions
Handling Violence

1. Can happen anywhere to anyone.
2. Take it seriously
3. Stay calm
4. Hit your panic alarm
5. Use **distance and cover**
6. Stall for time… Keep talking
7. Don’t try to be a hero
8. Don’t risk harm but watch for a chance to escape to a safe area
9. Report and Debrief
10. Aftercare… Counseling
Classifying Angry or Potentially Violent Customers

- Weapon!!!
- Threatening
- Raging
- Swearing
- Shouting
- Hostile
- Angry
- Upset
- Complaining
Frustration:

- Don’t say, “You can’t talk to me that way!”
- Don’t order them to stop yelling
- Acknowledge their anger
- Empathize… Ask how you can help them
Defensive Anger:

- Recognize when anger is defensive (emotional pain) rather than just frustration
- Let them know you understand how they feel
Kevin Fauteux (3)

Difficult Angry People (generally obstinate/abrasive):

✓ Don’t get pulled into their anger (They know how to push your buttons)
✓ Don’t insist on winning…
✓ Arguing won’t work!
✓ A win-win approach may work
Hostility (Aimed at intimidating YOU. It’s about control.)

✓ Do not threaten the hostile person’s critical sense of control, but, likewise, do not be intimidated (“I understand your anger and your problem loud and clear, but yelling and intimidation won’t work with me.”)
Rage (Uncontrolled anger):

- Needs your help to keep from losing it
- Control yourself and stay calm
- Try to set limits ("It’s going to be OK, but the rage has to stop")
- Firmly let them know the rage has gone on too long
Threats (Primary concern is your safety!)

- Do not challenge
- Acknowledge that you understand them, at the same time do not tolerate the threat. Give them an out. (“It’s not too late to solve this problem…No one has been hurt.”)
- Last recourse is to warn the person of the consequences
- Be ready to protect yourself, don’t panic and call for help
Violence (Will get what they want through force when they believe nothing else worked. *It’s now about protecting yourself.*)

- Avoid confrontation. ... Escape if you can *(Run, Hide, Fight)*

- Physically protect yourself as best you can. Do whatever it takes! *(In defense of your life many things could become a weapon.)*

- **Distance and cover**

- Remain calm - Summon help...

- Panic alarm
Kevin Fauteux (8)

Post Incident De-Briefing

1. What went right?
2. What went wrong?
3. What can we do better next time?

Post Incident Counseling

1. Managers need to be alert for the need!
2. Group CISD may be an option
Understanding a Person’s Crisis State of Mind

- Emotions, for no reason, are controlling the subject’s action
- If the subject feels that (s)he is in a crisis, (s)he is
- There has usually been a precipitating event within the last 24 hours
- People will generally turn inward, away from the usual support systems and feel isolated
- When normal coping mechanisms do not work, the person goes into crisis
- Your task is to help and guide the subject back to a normal level of functioning
Communication: Your Most Effective Tool

- 7% of communication is verbal
- 93% of communication is not communicated by spoken words

When communicating always keep this in mind:

Sometimes it is not about the words but how you say the words…

- Your posture, your mannerisms
- The words themselves
If You Can Slow The Event Down...

Time can be your friend. It may:

- Help reduce stress and anxiety
- Increase rationality
- Decrease emotions
- Person may “surrender”
- Allow you to gain more information to better enable responding law enforcement and EMS personnel to do their job
Regarding Your Interactions

Attempt to get the individual talking so that you can fully understand why they are angry.

Think about using verbal pacing techniques:

- Sensory: “I sense you are angry”
- Visual: “I see that you need help”
- Auditory: “I hear what you are saying”
Minimal Encouragers

- Verbal encouragements:
  - Yes
  - Uh huh…
  - Go on

- Non-verbal encouragements:
  - Nodding
  - Eye Contact
  - Body Orientation
Diffusion Strategies

- Appear confident
- Display calmness
- Create some space
- Speak slowly, gently and clearly
- Lower your voice
Diffusion Strategies (cont.)

- Indicate a willingness to understand and help
- Show that you are listening
- Speak simply, move slowly
- Calm the person and assure s/he feels heard before trying to solve the problem
Announce your intentions and then act on them.

Can you remove the source of anxiety/irritation?

Show that you are paying attention.

Remember – a person’s delusions/hallucinations are real to them.
Use “I” Statements

- “I need you to sit down”
- “I feel worried about your safety”
- “I would like to understand what you’re going through”
- “I am concerned that you will fall and hurt yourself”
- “I can’t let my colleagues be in danger”
De-escalation Strategies

If You See This...

Anxiety/Agitation

What Might Help...

- Ask the person to slow down
- Don’t demand answers
- Give the person enough personal space
- Reassure person there is time to sort the situation out
- Can you remove the source of agitation/anxiety?
De-escalation Strategies (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If You See This…</th>
<th>What Might Help…</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Aggressive/Inappropriate Behavior** | - Set limits on behavior  
| | - Be aware of threatening statements and take them seriously |
| **Hallucinations Delusions** | - Do not argue with hallucinations or delusions  
| | - Accept that this is what the person believes or perceives |
## De-escalation Strategies (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If You See This...</th>
<th>What Might Help...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slow Response</strong></td>
<td>▪ Allow person to formulate a response</td>
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<td>▪ Be patient</td>
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<td><strong>Difficulty Making Decisions</strong></td>
<td>▪ Limit number of decisions to be made</td>
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<td>▪ Take a directive stance that relate to a person’s safety</td>
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<td><strong>Exaggerated Response</strong></td>
<td>▪ Use clear concise questions and statements</td>
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### De-escalation Strategies (cont.)

#### If You See This...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>What Might Help...</th>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>- Allow person to vent&lt;br&gt;- Allow person to cry&lt;br&gt;- Help in problem solving and making changes in behavior that will have an impact on feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
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<td>Loneliness</td>
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<td>Guilt</td>
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<td>Disorganized</td>
<td>- Word sentences in simple terms&lt;br&gt;- Ask one question at a time&lt;br&gt;- Allow person time to form an answer/response</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illogical</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
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Avoid Doing These Things

- Staring
- Expressing irritation, anger or shouting
- Misleading the person
- Using inflammatory language
- Challenging delusions/hallucinations
- Physical confrontations
The Affects of Alcohol and Substance Abuse

- People who are under the influence may be more aggressive than normal, may be resistant to authority, may have lost their ability to reason or to act responsibly, and/or may exhibit immature behavior.

- Utilize:
  1. Assertive Communication Techniques
  2. Rules for Personal Safety
Assertive Communication Techniques

- Stay calm
- Be firm and state your requests with authority
- Use non-threatening words and tone (avoid derogatory words like "drunk")
- Show concern for the safety and comfort of the intoxicated person
Assertive Communication Techniques

- Use "Deflection" by offering alternatives such as non-alcoholic drinks & food
- Look for a "workable compromise" and make a reasonable agreement
- Don't argue or offer resistance to verbal assault, use "fogging techniques" - agreeing with the possibility of what the person is saying
- Call for help or 9-1-1 if the situation deteriorates
Rules for Personal Safety

- Protect yourself with **distance and cover**, avoid being surrounded and maintain an open line of flight.

- Never physically engage the person you are confronting.

- Never argue with an intoxicated person; it may lead to a physical confrontation.

- Never agree to meet the intoxicated person elsewhere or outside.

- **If your physical safety is threatened, call for assistance**.
- There may be occasions, particularly with the mentally ill, when you are unsuccessful.

- Your safety and the safety of others should always be of primary concern.