De-escalating people in crisis
Nonviolent verbal intervention

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“De-escalation”

- To decrease in intensity, magnitude, etc
  Random House Dictionary

- To decrease the size, scope, or intensity of (a war, for example)
  The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (4th Ed.)
Will my actions bring me closer to the person, or further away?

First things first:
1. Think safety
2. What’s the problem?
3. What choices and options are there?
4. What’s my role?
When do people become violent?

DeBecker’s “JACA” formula:

- Justified
- No Alternative
- No regard for Consequences
- Able

Adapted from DeBecker, G. (1997). The Gift of Fear
What’s going on?

- Sometimes effective
- Likely a learned behavior
- **People are doing the best they can to get their needs met**
  1. Love and Belonging
  2. Power
  3. Freedom
  4. Fun

Escalating person’s view

Angry person

You

What they want (unmet need)
Collaborative view

Working together

To achieve

What they want / need

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**Figure 1. The Spiral of Change**
First things first...

Escalating person – increase in energy

Am I in physical danger?

Yes
- Assume the worst
- Isolate
- Call for help
- Call 911(?)
- Crowd control
- Physical environment
- Escape route / exit
- Personal space

No
- De-escalation
- Check out yourself
- Check out the environment
- Work on nonverbals
- Verbal de-escalation

Crisis plan
Olver’s Self-assessment. Can I:

- avoid criticizing?
- avoid being judgmental?
- keep from trying to control the other person?
- keep myself removed from the conflict?
- believe that people using anger have the right to make decisions about how they meet their needs?
- try to see the situation from the angry person’s point of view and understand what needs s/he is trying to satisfy?
- remember to put my professional role ahead of personal feeling
Environment

- Cramped room?
- Overcrowded
- Other staff visible
- Staff same gender, race?
- Other clients involved
- Person kept waiting / ignored
- Exit?
- Tables / chairs
- Weapons
Non-verbal communication

- Project confidence not confrontation. Keep gestures small. Remember that non-verbal communication comes before verbal

- **S**pace
- **A**ssertive posture
- **V**oice steady
- **E**ye contact
- **S**afe stance

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Risk factors for violence

- Past history of violence
- Suicidal tendencies
- Med compliance / changes
- Substance abuse
- Patterns
- Triggers, e.g. divorce
- Demographic factors
Person’s Problem

Fear, Anger, Frustration, Paranoia, Confusion, Humiliation, etc.

Am I in physical danger?

Yes

No

911/ Emergency plan

Red Zone

Reflective statements

Not defending rules

Not arguing

Offering to help

Using kind language

Providing options

Acknowledging

Apologizing

You

Checking yourself

Unmet needs

Person’s Problem
Reflective statements

- Mirror back to the speaker what you’re hearing is going on
- Allow further explanation of “the issue” by not inserting your “stuff” (rules etc.)
- Avoid: criticizing, questioning, arguing, blaming, shaming, threatening, rationalizing, warning, directing, giving advice, reasoning, withdrawing, lecturing, judging
- Listen for: feelings, themes, motivations
Practice

• You’re stupid!
• Why do I have to do this?
• This is dumb!
• Who are you to tell me what to do?
• This is bogus, I don’t need to be here!
• You’re an idiot!
• What’s your problem?
• What are you looking at?
• You’re a liar!
• Why do I have to fill out these stupid forms?
• You’re not doing your job
• It’s your fault
Practice

- You can’t keep me here
- You social workers are all the same
- What are you, a psychologist or something?
- What, you’ve never had a drink or two?
- I don’t need you telling me what to do
- I’m ok just the way I am, thank you
- You’re so dumb!
- You’re ugly
- Get out of my face!
- Watch it big guy!
- So you think you’re tough, huh?
- What are you, like, mister perfect or something?
References and recommended reading

### Signs and signals of a stress reaction

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Adapted from *International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, 2001*