

## **The Crisis Escalation Cycle and Effective Interventions**

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Being, or becoming, an effective intervener in a crisis situation requires utilizing active listening skills. Active listening involves encouraging the speaker, restating the speaker's basic ideas, reflecting statements highlighting the underlying feelings of the speaker, and summarizing statements to pull together the speaker's pertinent ideas and facts.

In crisis situations, the behavior of individuals can be classified as calm, anxious, angry, hostile or violent. Interveners need to recognize the emotional state of the individual in crisis and appropriately tailor their own verbalizations, behaviors, and attempts at intervention to match the emotional state of the person. Interveners should make every effort to remain calm and non-rushed and to speak to the individual respectfully, listening carefully to what the person has to say and utilizing the active listening skills described above.

If the individual is anxious – pacing, wringing their hands, tearfulness, raising their voice, etc. – the intervener needs to maintain his own calm demeanor, utilize active listening skills, and recognize that the individual's ability to hear what is being said has decreased. The intervener can use body language to communicate such as leaning in toward the person, maintaining eye contact (but not staring at the person), using hand gestures, etc.

If the person is angry and yelling, the intervener should attempt to keep the individual talking by speaking few words, and nodding repeatedly to convey that they are hearing what the individual is saying. Venting anger is tiring and the individual will usually wear themselves out. When the intervener speaks, it should be in short sentences providing guidance, limited choices, and indicating that they hear the individual and understand his complaint.

Should the anger become focused on another person, the situation has escalated to hostility and active limit-setting interventions are needed beginning with non-verbal gestures of shaking your head, mouthing the word no. When possible, a verbal limit with a simple statement "I cannot allow you to continue to threaten harm to someone". The non-verbal behavior of the intervener needs to continue calmly with no sudden movements and no escalation in the tone of their voice or rate of their speech.

Obviously, when a person is exhibiting violent behaviors, the goal is to protect yourself and others from harm.