

## SAGE Response to a Psychosocial Crisis

**Self-DeEscalation** Encountering a potential emergency situation can engage our bodies' natural stress response which will move us away from our ability to think clearly. In order to be effective, we can take 3 quick steps to interrupt this reaction:

- **Breathe.** Breathing is the easiest way to interrupt the stress response. Because your body is preparing to move quickly, fight, or hide, most people's breathing changes. If you're holding your breath, let it out! If you're breathing too rapidly, slow it down! If you're not getting enough oxygen with each breath, deepen it!
- **Grounding.** When the stress response kicks in, you may lose the ability to sense where your body ends and the rest of the world begins. To reset this, you can touch something- touch your hand to your leg, touch your fingers together, feel your feet on the ground.
- **Self-talk.** Have a short phrase you say to yourself in an emergency situation. Make it 3-5 words. Some examples might be, "I'm OK," "it's going to be alright," "1,2,3,4,5" etc.

**Assessment** Now that you're as calm as you can be, you can assess the situation. Here are some things to ask yourself:

- *Level of Danger:* Is what's happening imminently dangerous/life threatening, for example is someone currently being harmed or about to be harmed? Is there a medical emergency? Is it safe for me to try to help?
- *Environment:* Can I make changes to the environment – e.g. reduce noise/other stimuli or redirect traffic? Can I minimize the threat to the person? Is there something they are afraid of that I can remove?
- *Resources:* What are my resources (both internal and external)? Are there people around who can help or who know this person?
- *Connection:* Can I establish a connection with this person? Can I introduce myself and offer help?
  - Questions you may ask the person to further assess the situation:
    - Can you tell me what happened/what's going on?
    - Ask orienting questions: What can I call you? Do you know where you are? Do you know what day it is?

**Give Help.** If you assess that the person needs assistance and that you have the ability to give it, your first goal is to help make the person as comfortable as possible and not escalate the situation (for example, be aware of your body language, what you are saying, and how the person is responding). Here are a few tips for assisting:

- *Nonverbal communication*
  - Try to keep open body posture open.
  - Give the person as much eye contact as they feel comfortable with.
  - Keep hands visible.
  - Keep a neutral expression. Let go of those furrowed brows.
  - Keep voice at a steady volume and pace, unless you must raise it to give directions to ensure safety. Think about removing energy from the situation, not adding to it.
- *Verbal Communication*
  - Introduce yourself
  - Ask basic questions (not all at once):
    - Is it ok for me to try and help you?
    - What would you like to be called ?
    - How can I help you feel safe ?
    - Address physical needs & readily available resources: Do you need water? A blanket? A snack? Is there someone I can call for you?
    - What has helped you in the past?
    - What isn't supportive:
      - telling someone to 'snap out of it'

*Developed by The Oakland Power Projects of Critical Resistance.*

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- being sarcastic
- being over-involved or over-protective
- trivializing the person's experience (e.g. 'put a smile on your face'.... 'lighten up')
- belittling or dismissing the person's feelings: "you don't seem that bad to me"
- speaking to the person in a patronizing tone of voice
- Listen without judgement and respect their experience (e.g. never tell someone in crisis that what they are experiencing is not real)
- OARS can be a way to further assess a person and help with some crisis symptoms
  - *Open-Ended Questions* -e.g. Can you please tell me more about that?
  - *Affirmations* -e.g. That sounds like it would be terrifying/upsetting/etc.
  - *Reflections* -e.g. I think I heard you say \_\_\_\_\_, was that correct?
  - *Summarizations* -similar to reflecting but more for larger chunks of conversation -e.g. I want to make sure I didn't miss anything. I heard that (summary) and also (summary). Is that correct?
- If you assess that the person needs more help than you alone can provide, then
  - If others are present and willing to help:
    - Delegate roles, e.g. who has a car, a phone, a community first aid app, some water, a blanket
    - Call out for
      - people with experience with the crisis symptoms
      - anyone who knows the person
      - people to hold off calling the cops
  - If those present can't/won't provide help the person in crisis needs and wants, if the crisis is more than those present can handle, or if the person in crisis requests medical help, then consider alternatives to calling 911. Since the police are the first responders for "mental health" emergency calls when 911 is called, and since they usually do not have crisis training, calling 911 can potentially cause more harm to the person in crisis.
- Be proactive: Know what resources are available in the communities where you spend time - work, home neighborhood, etc. Are there medical professionals on your block? Do you know if the people around you have specific medical needs? If so, who are the people they feel safe with?
- NOTE: If there is a serious medical emergency like unconsciousness, no breathing, no pulse, bleeding you can't control, etc., get/provide immediate medical help. This can include performing CPR or administering naran while waiting. If it's not as severe, then you can drive the person to the hospital or call an ambulance, etc. For an ambulance, call the local fire department if possible rather than 911.

**Emergency Services Buffer.** If 911 or other emergency services have been called, take these steps to protect the person from further harm:

- Ask person if they have concerns around:
  - Calling 911 or police involvement (e.g. immigration, warrants). If so, ask if they need you to take any documents, their ID, their phone, weapons, etc.
  - being 5150ed (an involuntary hold in a psychiatric facility for 3 or more days)
- Ask person who to call to notify that emergency services are on the way.
- Ask what name they want to use in front of police.
- State to the police (and repeat as needed), 'This person needs medical attention'.
- Stay with the person and act as their advocate with the police.