De-escalation Best Practices
StreetWorks, Training 3

SUMMARY
Environmental and situational factors play as important a role in a crisis as the actions of the participants. The proper response to a crisis must reflect both the actions of the person in crisis as well as those other factors.

KEY POINTS
- Before, during and after a crisis, it is important to be youth focused, trauma-informed, with a focus on harm reduction.
- A person can be in crisis before we recognize they have been triggered or that we are in a current crisis situation with them.
- Knowing a person's baseline behavior, or their "normal," can be helpful when trying to recognize an escalating situation. For example, we cannot assume that loudness equates to anger, some people may normally be loud.
- You cannot de-escalate a crisis situation if you cannot keep yourself safe.
- *Environmental and situational factors*
  - *Be aware of your surroundings:* For example, is there an easy way out of the physical location for both you and the youth? Who else is nearby?
  - Know the location of other staff and ensure they know your location.
  - Recognize there is often a power differential, which can cause a youth to be more fearful and anxious.
  - Certain geographical locations will be safer for both parties. Don't assume you know where the youth will feel most comfortable. *Ask! Give options.*
- *Ensure safety for youth, for yourself, and for your agency.*
  - Be prepared for the crisis, think about it ahead of time so you are not just reacting in the moment. Be prepared for different scenarios. Ensure your agency has policies in place for crisis situations.
- Typically, sexually exploited youth have experienced trauma and crisis (often on a regular basis) which often propels or keeps them in a heightened, hypervigilant state. This can cause them to be experiencing fight or flight mode as their baseline.
  - When one person is in flight or fight mode, it can easily push the other person into fight or flight mode. Recognize your own bodily symptoms and be prepared to know how and when to de-escalate yourself.
- Assume you do not know the youth's situation or what resources they will feel safe using.

VISIBLE SIGNS OF AGITATION OR ESCALATION

Physiological Signs
- Involuntary hand shaking or clenching
- Breathing heavy
- Flushed skin
- Dilated pupils

Behavioral Signs
- Deliberate shaking of finger, foot, or head
- Sudden movement or jolts
- Talking louder than usual or changes in voice pitch or tone
- Fixed stare at you or something else
- Scanning the room/environment
- Yelling or swearing
- Increasing resistance to requests
- Challenging or questioning comments

- *Empowerment is key:* Giving options as often as you can will build trust and will help avert a dangerous crisis situations.
- Just because a youth's participation with you or your agency ends, it does not mean their crisis is over.
- Be the person a youth will want to turn to when they are ready to seek help.
- Debriefing with the youth, with peers and with a supervisor are necessary for healing and constant improvement.
- There are informal, as well as formal, professional debriefings options. Be sure your agency has a debriefing model they follow.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Understand How to Identify a Crisis
1. Crisis is not always an extreme case of physical violence or a mental breakdown. Can you explain what other types of crisis situations there are?
2. How can you identify if a youth is in crisis? Or if you are in a crisis situation with the youth?
3. What are some signs a youth may be becoming agitated or have been triggered into flight or fight mode? Can you reason with someone when they are in fight or flight mode? What can you do?
4. Making sure you do not overly respond and react to every behavior as if it is an attack is important. What are some things youth may do to test your reactions?
5. How do you know when you are being triggered, or induced into, fight or flight mode? What are your bodily symptoms? What are your triggers?

Understand Role and Responsibility in a Crisis
1. What are some environmental and situational factors that can play a part in escalating a youth?
2. What can you do, in your role, to help ensure environments like physical locations will help a youth stay de-escalated?
3. What is trauma-informed care? How can this empower and build a sense of control for the youth?
4. What types of harm-reduction techniques or activities will help de-escalate a youth?
5. Sometimes harm-reduction is the only thing helping professionals can do. Based on the training and on the PowerPoint slides, what are the key provisions to the harm-reduction approach?
6. The trainers mentioned the importance of ensuring youth know that even if they have acted out, they can still come to you in the future. What might you say or do to make sure a youth feels comfortable turning to you even if there have been negative behaviors exhibited in the past?

Understand Importance of the Work Done Prior to and After a Crisis
1. How can you personally prepare for a crisis before you are in a crisis situation?
2. Can you think of ways that your agency can better prepare for crisis situations?
3. Based on this training, what are some ways de-escalation can happen before a crisis situation elevates to being a dangerous situation?
4. After a crisis situation, debriefing for the youth, for yourself and for the agency is of the utmost importance. What are some ways to positively debrief with the youth? If you are not the right person to debrief with the youth, who will you turn to in your agency?
5. Who will you debrief with in your agency? What are important topics to discuss during a debriefing?
6. Is your agency ready for crisis situations? How will debriefing with a supervisor help improve your health? The health of the organization?

FURTHER RESOURCES

- *Online article:* Consensus-based definition from Shelter for the Storm: Trauma Informed Care in Homelessness Services Settings. 2010. http://www.traumacenter.org/products/pdf_files/ shelter_from_storm.pdf