

Foundational Principles to Crisis De-escalation

In a crisis, deciding what to do is both critical and challenging. We must be intentional. Our goal is to avoid reacting based on our own emotions. Instead, respond thoughtfully to a person in crisis.

In these moments, the person who is helping someone in crisis should focus on two key questions.

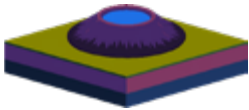
1. How am I feeling right now?

- In stressful situations, our bodies naturally respond with fight, flight, or freeze.
- The most important skill in a crisis is to pause and respond thoughtfully, rather than react emotionally.

2. How does the person in crisis feel and what do they need?

- Understanding their feelings or needs helps us address what is driving the behavior, not just the behavior itself.

Once you assess the situation, use these key strategies for each stage of a crisis.



Dormant Stage

Calm, everyday functioning

Strategies

- Engage naturally and build rapport
- Learn about the person's strengths, preferences, and triggers



Venting Stage

Crisis triggered by difficulty coping

Strategies

- Assist: help reduce stress by supporting the task causing frustration (e.g., noise levels, hospital routines, or unfamiliar surroundings)
- Show Support: express care or give specific, encouraging praise
- Redirect: offer a brief, appropriate distraction or break



Fuming Stage

Stress and behavior are escalating and may become unsafe

Interventions

- Steam Off: use active listening and validation to help the person release emotions (e.g., calm tone, nodding, soft eye contact).
- Appeal to Self-Interest: connect with their goals to work together (e.g., "I know you want to go home this weekend, let's figure this out.")
- Direct Statements: use brief, clear commands to start or stop behavior (e.g., "Sammy, put the chair down.")



Eruption Stage

Behavior and stress are at a dangerous level

Interventions

- Prioritize safety: Follow the protocols of your agency. If you are in the community, call 911 or 988.
- Follow Protocol: adhere to your agency's safety guidelines