

SKILLS FOR COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH PEOPLE EXPERIENCING PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

PART 2

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WORK TO WELLNESS

 **BC MUNICIPAL
SAFETY** Association

**FGT**
FIORE GROUP
TRAINING INC.



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Introduction to Skills For Communicating effectively with people experiencing psychological distress

Part 2 of this toolkit addresses the increase of distress we expect to see in workplaces during this stressful time. The pandemic has increased stressors for many, leading to increased risk for conflict and violence in the workplace. For example, we know that increased financial strain and periods of significant change are risk factors for violence. In Part 1, we learned that the majority of people are feeling stressed and some are not able to stay as calm as they previously could. There are some risks of incidents and conflicts escalating in our workplaces.

Most encounters with distressed people can be resolved peaceably with the proper awareness, approach, and skills. These encounters are opportunities to support each other and to help another person calm down, feel a sense of control, and get help.

Here are some quick tips:

4 STEPS TO IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING DISTRESSED PEOPLE:

STEP 1

Self awareness and self care: You are an important part of every personal encounter; take care of your own well being first.

Doing what matters in times of stress -an illustrated self help guide for times of stress
<https://www.who.int/publications/item/9789240003927>

STEP 2

Approach every communication openly with empathy, curiosity and care. Try to imagine- and then learn- what might be going on for a person to lead them to the level of distress you are seeing. If you practice this regularly, your communication with others will help them feel understood and stay calm.

STEP 3

Use active listening skills. (Page 7)

- Listen to what the person is saying. Make eye contact and use open body language (face them, arms uncrossed) without thinking of a response.
- Paraphrase and repeat what you heard back to the person "I hear that you are frustrated by not being able to meet directly with Cathy. Is that right?"
- Acknowledge the person's feelings; do not offer solutions until this is done and the person agrees you got it right.
- Give the person as much control as possible; such as asking permission to offer suggestions to help them. "Would it be okay if I try to help solve this? I may have some suggestions and would like to help you."

STEP 4

Learn to detect signs of distress and respond according to the level of distress.

Refer to the "How To Support Others at Work" (Page 3 & 4) continuum image (Page 4). The level of a person's distress is one clue as to how to help without escalating the situation. Your response should fit with their level of distress.



How to Support Others at Work

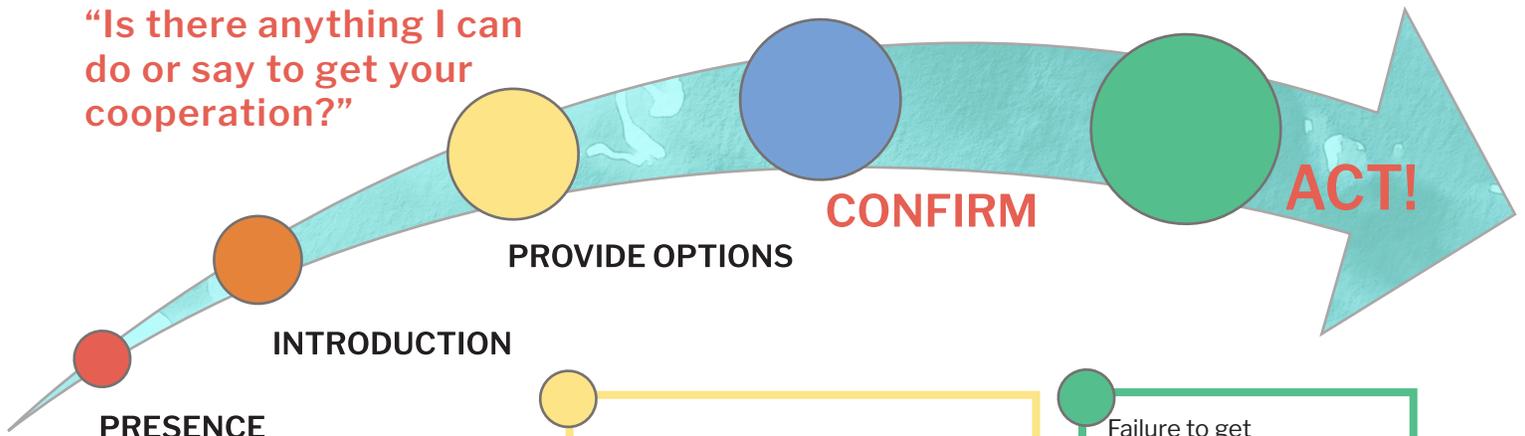
You are likely to encounter people in various states of distress in your work or community experiences. It is helpful to learn how to quickly assess risk for violence. This chart offers some clues that can be helpful. It does not replace the need for formal violence prevention training. Consider taking a course to learn violence prevention/de-escalation skills.

HEALTHY	REACTING/SOME DISTRESS	ILL/HIGH DISTRESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster relationship/communication with coworkers and the public • Express care & commitment • Model self-care • Know usual behaviours for colleagues • Foster a healthy workplace • Know about mental health resources • Be a proactive problem solver • Talk about mental health and wellness often • Learn about safety procedures for violence prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIGNS: Changes in behaviours such as: increased disrespectful comments; raised voice, swearing, not listening, physically jumpy/agitated movements • TO DO: Introduce yourself and your role, maintain connection: eye contact, ask their name and give yours • Express care & commitment • Actively listen • Learn about and provide appropriate support; ask questions • Use simple instructions • Direct and follow organization guidelines for next steps: i.e. when to involve manager or to call security • Consult & involve experts i.e., HR • Be kind to yourself if you are not able to help; not everyone can be helped and not every situation can be resolved in this way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIGNS: Shouting, shaking, red face, pacing, tense, glaring, threatening self or others, not knowing their name or where they are; any physical outburst of anger is high level of distress • TO DO: Assess safety of self and others and take action if needed: get to safety if you need to. If the person needs protection, call for support • Introduce yourself, express care & commitment (concern); state that you want to help • Be calm, patient; use active listening skills; offer practical comfort i.e. somewhere quiet to talk • Use simple instructions • Respect personal space • Ask what they need and help them get it; do not leave them alone • Refer person to experts i.e., HR • Be kind to yourself if you are not able to help; not everyone can be helped and not every situation can be resolved in this way



Conflict Resolution/Verbal Judo

“Is there anything I can do or say to get your cooperation?”



PRESENCE

Your presence alone may be enough to cause a person to comply – however, the manner of your approach is critical. You should always identify yourself verbally and your tone must be polite, calm and professional.

If you get to this stage, you should provide the person with information regarding why they should to shouldn't be doing what they are doing. Again, do so professionally, calmly and politely. Provide the WHY behind what you are telling the person. Do not tell the person that your that your company “ has a safety policy” (as an example), rather inform the person the reason behind the policy in the first place. Often, if people understand the rationaliities behind the request for compliance, they might not be happy but will often comply.

PROVIDE OPTIONS

If you get to this stage, you should provide the person with some options as to how to resolve things. Again, do so professionally, calmly and politely. Do not make it sound like a threat-time and a persons's reputation can often be good motivators. Consider calling your supervisor since people often take the same direction differently if it is delivered by a supervisor.

If you get to this stage, you should try to confirm the persons intentions based on their continued non-compliance by clarifying what your understanding of their concerns are. Again, do so professionally, calmly and politely. A great question to ask is, “ Is there anything I can do or say to get your cooperation?’ Followed by -(because if there is not, you leave me no alternative but to call my manager/ deny you access/ask you leave/ call the police etc.) What you do next is decided not by you but what the other person then decides. This gives the person a last opportunity to resolve things by complying.

CONFIRM

Failure to get cooperation at this stage will require you to take action. You need to call your supervisor, manager, security or the police. Advise the person of the action you plan to take and stop back from the situation to maintain your safety. If the person leaves, monitor where they go (If you can do so safely) in order that you can provide information to those who then arrive to assist you.

ACT!

“**3**
COMPONENTS TO
ALL FACE-TO-FACE
COMMUNICATION:

7% what we say

38% how we say it (tone)

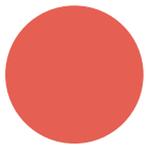
55% body language

”

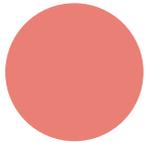
* **Verbal Judo: The Art of Gentle Persuasion (Page 9)**

– Written by George J. Thompson PH.D.

Dealing With Difficult People



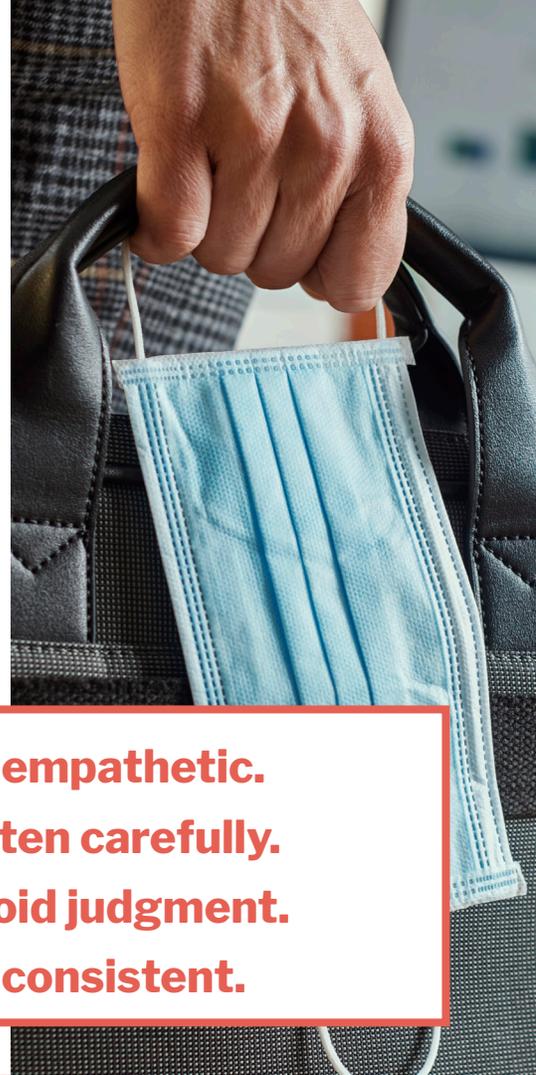
When someone is upset with you, it is easy to make the situation worse. The solution is to respond calmly and to **stay in control**.



Don't let your instinctive **FIGHT, FLIGHT or FREEZE** response get the better of you. **Breathe deeply and stay relaxed**.



Find out why he, she or they is **upset**. **Ask questions. Use non-threatening body language**. Provide information about policies and the reason they exist.



Be empathetic.
Listen carefully.
Avoid judgment.
Be consistent.

M^anaging Your Response – Safely

1

Demonstrate Empathy

6

Enforce Reasonable Limits

2

Simplify Messages

7

Avoid Overreacting

3

Respect Personal Space

8

Don't Touch

4

Observe Body Language

9

Ignore Challenges to Authority

5

Permit Venting

Remember: Stay Safe. If you feel threatened, leave the area and if necessary, call for help.



“
**EVERY
POTENTIAL INCIDENT
AT WORK INVOLVES
THREE COMPONENTS:**

- *The actual situation itself*
- *The person's observed or known behaviour*
- *The employee's perception of the situation.*

”

- SHOW THAT YOU'RE LISTENING

Use your own body language and gestures to show that you are engaged.

- Nod occasionally
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Make sure that your posture is open and interested
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments

- PROVIDE FEEDBACK

As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect on what is being said and to ask questions.

- Reflect on what has been said by paraphrasing. “What I’m hearing is...,” and “Sounds like you are saying...,” are great ways to reflect back
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. “What do you mean when you say...?”, “Is this what you mean?”
- Summarize the speaker’s comments periodically.

Active listening is a skill that all of us should use more often. The better you are at listening, the more information you’ll receive.

Active Listening Skills

Active Listening is when you make a conscious effort to hear and understand people so that you get the complete message. There are several things you can do to become an active listener.

- PAY ATTENTION

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Look at the speaker directly.

- Put aside distracting thoughts
- Don’t mentally prepare a response
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations



- DEFER JUDGMENT

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

- Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions
- Do not interrupt

- RESPOND APPROPRIATELY

Active listening is designed to encourage respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting them down.

- Be candid, open and honest in your response
- Assert your opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person in a way that you think they would want to be treated

Skills and Strategies for Public Roles

There are many strategies and skills that will help you work effectively and safely with the public.



Develop Emotional Intelligence

When you are in a public role, you will encounter lots of different people. Because every one is different, it's important to develop emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand your emotions and what they are telling you, and it helps you understand the emotions and needs of the people around you. To develop it, start by building your self-awareness. Be conscious of what your emotions are telling you, and how they affect the people around you. Then focus on developing empathy so that you can understand the perspective of the person you're talking to.

Also, become expert at managing your emotions. This is especially important when you are interacting with someone who's angry, tense, or upset. When you manage your emotions, you stay calm and cool, you are better able to resolve the situation.

Develop Conflict-Resolution Skills

Occasionally, you will need to deal with someone who is angry, upset, or frustrated. Good conflict-resolution skills will not only help you defuse the situation, but, if you handle the opportunity with sensitivity, skill, and respect, you can use it to make a difference in this person's life. Listening is one of the most important skills that you can use during a tense situation. Make sure that you develop active listening skills, so that you can hear what the other person is saying, and respond appropriately.

Often, conflicts with others are not the result of your actions. Try not to take their anger or frustration personally. Instead, stay calm, apologize when warranted, and focus on how you will help resolve the situation. At times, people might be rude, or even abusive. When you do not have the skills to handle these types of situations, this can be intimidating. However, learning to be assertive and self-confident can help you handle the situation with professionalism and respect.

Often, when people are acting with aggression or hostility, they simply want to be heard. In these situations, stay calm and listen. Let them know that you understand and ask them how they would like to see the situation resolved. Sometimes you will be able to meet their needs, while other times you will need to compromise.

Communicate Effectively

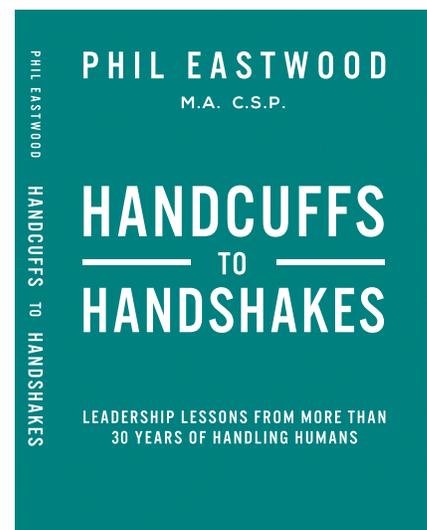
Good communication skills are important when you are in a public-facing role. You might communicate with people face-to-face, or by email, chat, social networks, or telephone. When you communicate with consumers, be aware that they may have limited knowledge about your organization or industry. Do not use jargon or technical terms that they might not understand. Instead – and

without being patronizing – use words and phrases that they're familiar with. Non-verbal communication is just as important as what you say out loud. Make sure that you smile, look people in the eye, and use body language to convey the message that you are listening. Also, make sure that your tone of voice is appropriate for the situation.

Know Rules and Policies

When you know your organization's policies and procedures, and you understand why the rules are there, you can navigate difficult situations and keep your organization's goals, values, and expectations in mind.

“Active listening is a skill that all of us should use more often. The better you are at listening, the more information you'll receive.”



Active Reading

1. *Trust Your Canary*

– Written by Sharone Bar-David

2. *Never Split The Difference*

– Written by Chris Voss

3. *Verbal Judo: The Art of Gentle Persuasion*

– Written by George J. Thompson PH.D.

4. *How To Win Friends And Influence People*

– Written by Dale Carnegie

5. *The Good Fight*

– Written by Liane Davey

6. *Radical Candor*

– Written by Kim Scott

7. *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*

– Written by Travis Bradbury & Jean Greaves

8. *How To Tell Anyone Anything*

– Written by Richard S. Gallagher



Resources:

WorkSafeBC Workplace Violence Prevention Resources
[https://www.worksafebc.com/en/search?q=workplace%20violence&sort=relevancy&f:language-facet=\[English\]](https://www.worksafebc.com/en/search?q=workplace%20violence&sort=relevancy&f:language-facet=[English])

Conflict Resolution Training
<https://www.jibc.ca/areas-of-study/conflict-resolution>

Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training
<https://www.crisisprevention.com/Our-Programs/Nonviolent-Crisis-Intervention>

Workplace Violence Prevention Training:
<https://www.fioregroup.org/zero-violence-advanced/>

Braidwood Enquiry, speaks to the need to focus on verbal de-escalation skills
<https://www.cpkn.ca/en/course/crisis-intervention-and-de-escalation>

