

# Crisis Intervention

Tactics for successful verbal crisis de-escalation

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# Objectives

At the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Understand and identify the main characteristics of a crisis
- Understand and use 10 tips for effective verbal de-escalation of a crisis

How would you define a crisis?



Examples of crisis?

# Definition of Crisis

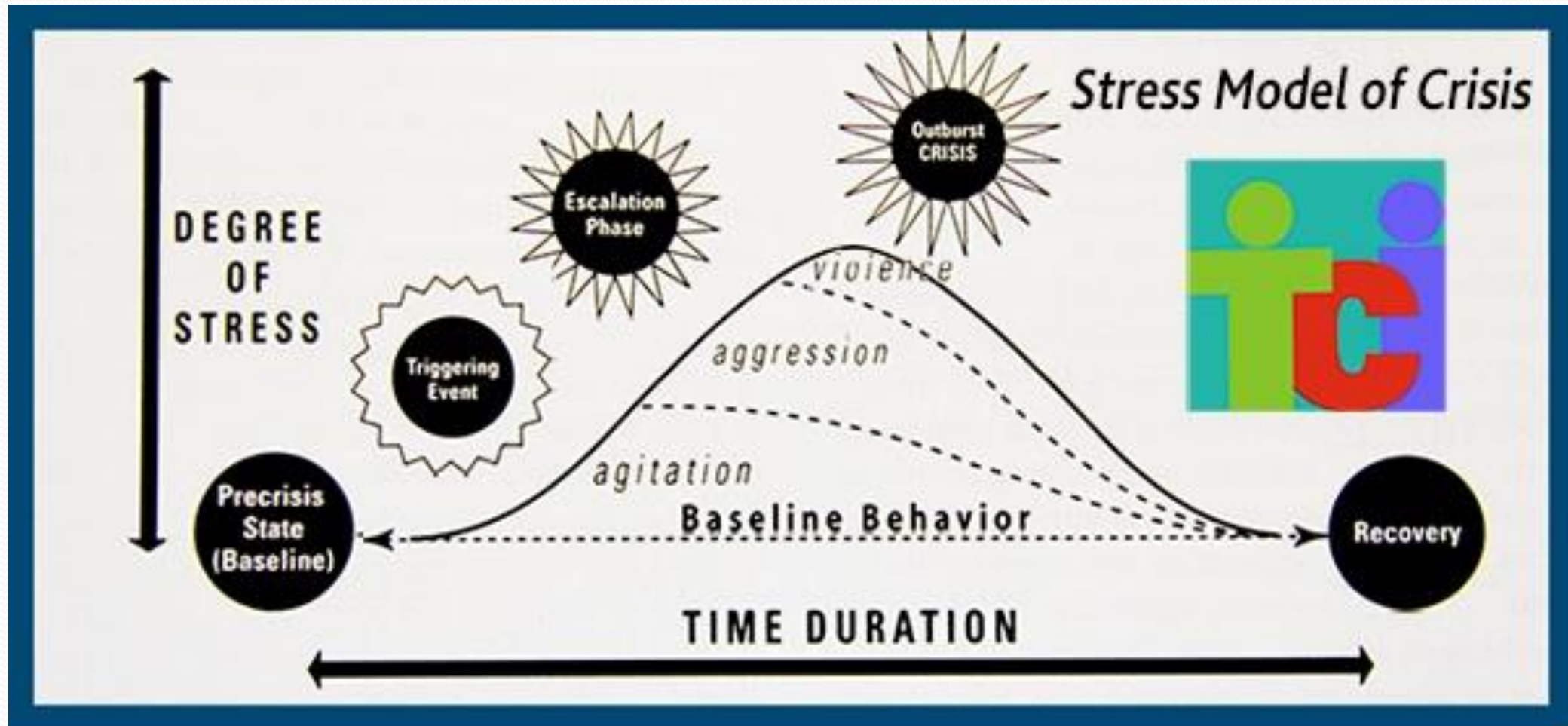
- Crisis are short-term and overwhelming
- When facing
  - Untenable obstacles to life goals
  - Significant disruptions to existing life styles
  - Disruption of normal and stable state where the usual methods of coping and problem solving do not work
- Typically, the person has very little experience in dealing with such unacquainted situations



# Stages of Crisis

- A crisis can be defined by 4 behavioral stages
  1. Baseline – Calm, or baseline behaviours when not stressed
  2. Triggered – Change in behaviour (e.g. pacing, sudden quietness, elevated pitch)
  3. Escalation & outbursts – Behaviours that are irrational (i.e. shouting) and the beginning of potential physical violence
  4. Tension Reduction – This is a behaviour in which emotional and physical energy starts to decline
- When one or more behaviours of concern are present, we can conclude that we are in the presence of a crisis that needs to be de-escalated

# Stages of Crisis





# Understanding Aggressive Behaviour

- Cause of aggression:
  - Unmet needs (Maslow's hierarchy)
  - Desire for power, control & status
  - Response to intense feelings (trauma)
  - Rewarding consequences ("I'll get my way")
- Risk Factors leading to aggression:
  - Lack of support networks
  - Substance use/abuse
  - Poverty
  - Domestic violence
  - Peer influence
  - Complex trauma



# Case Study 1

- What do you think triggered Emma's noncompliant and aggressive behaviour? There is no right or wrong answer. Any guesses?



# Tips for a safe de-escalation

- The Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) recommends 10 tips that when used properly, can help de-escalate a crisis without the use of violence
1. Be Empathic and Nonjudgmental
  2. Respect Personal Space
  3. Use Nonthreatening Nonverbal
  4. Avoid Overreacting
  5. Focus on Feelings
  6. Ignore Challenging Questions
  7. Set Limits
  8. Choose Wisely What You Insist Upon
  9. Allow Silence for Reflection
  10. Allow Time for Decisions



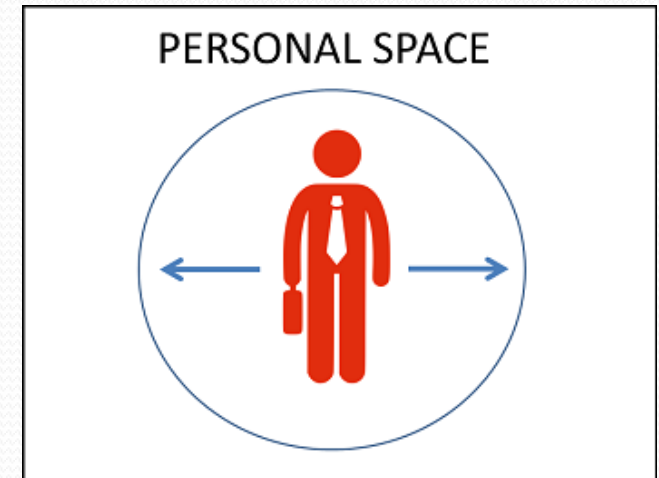
# Tip 1: Be Empathic and Nonjudgmental

- Resist the temptation to match the other person's energy
- Being under stress can be extremely difficult for some people – we need to empathize
- Do not judge the person – you do not know why they are in crisis
- Your behaviour will impact the other person's behaviour – but showing empathy will show the person in crisis that you care
- How do we show empathy?
  - Paraphrase what the person is telling you so they know you are listening
  - Use Phrases such as....
    - Use Coupling Statements and Praises
  - Some phrases should be used with caution....
    - “I understand”, “I know”; Ineffective Coupling Statements like...



# Tip 2: Respect Personal Space

- Remember that even in calm situations, people expect to have personal space
- Give as much personal space as possible and never use a head on approach. It is better to be at an angle of the person in crisis. This is a “Supportive Stance”\*
- It may sound simple but it will prevent a defense lash out from the person in crisis



\*Crisis Prevention Institute

# Tip 3: Use Nonthreatening Nonverbals

- This is related to your tone, body language, and facial expressions
- It is better to use a monotone voice that doesn't sound condescending or threatening
- Your tone should be relaxed
- Use a non-threatening posture (Open vs. closed posture)
- Make sure you don't show facial expressions of anger or even discomfort (Mirroring)

Can you show me an example of a non-threatening posture?

# Tip 4: Avoid Overreacting

- Stay calm during the crisis/Positive mind set
- Depersonalize
  - “If they weren’t saying or doing it to me, it would be the next person working”
- Monitor feelings (e.g. anger, sadness) and body signals (e.g. stance, postures, gestures)
- Know your buttons
- Be mindful of thoughts of desperation. You need to stay calm during these times
- Practice self-reflection
  - Listen to feedback, process emotions, commit to improvement



# Tip 5: Focus on Feelings

- When people are in crisis they don't always think logically. There are chemicals in the brain that alter our thinking
- The best way to help someone is to make sure that they know you understand their feelings even if those feelings don't seem logical

You can say things such as: “It is OK to cry” or “It is OK to feel angry”





# Tip 6: Ignore Challenging Questions

- You do not need to respond to questions such as: “Who do you think you are?”
- Remember that challenging questions are not about you. They come from the distress position in which the person is at
- It is not personal, remain calm and collected



# Tip 7: Set Limits

- Limits can help redirect a person in distress
- If the person is yelling you can say “Once you stop yelling we can come up with a solution”
- There are three effective characteristics of limits:
  - Clear (Simple always wins)
  - Reasonable
  - Enforceable

Can you share an example of a limit that has those three characteristics?

# Tip 8: Choose Wisely What You Insist Upon

- “Pick your battles”
- Think about what are your negotiables and your non-negotiables
- You must think if enforcing a rule will create more damage
- In this aspect you need to think what is the most effective way to de-escalate without focusing too much on getting everything you want



# Tip 9: Allow Silence for Reflection

- Most people are afraid of awkward silence during stressful times, but fear not!
- There are times to stop talking and only be present with the person. An example of this is when the person is grieving
- Silence can help a person reflect and think
- These are examples that can help:
  - Giving the student total and complete focus
  - Making eye contact and having a friendly and open expression on your face
  - Listening closely
  - Withholding judgment



# Tip 10: Allow Time for Decisions

- Rushing things will not get you anywhere
- Support the person in crisis as they try to figure things out
- Allow time to debrief with your team on lessons learned about the de-escalation
- Times of crisis are not the best to make decisions. Therefore, it is crucial that you don't rush the person to make a decision that may not be the best for them



# Case Study 2

- What was different this time around?

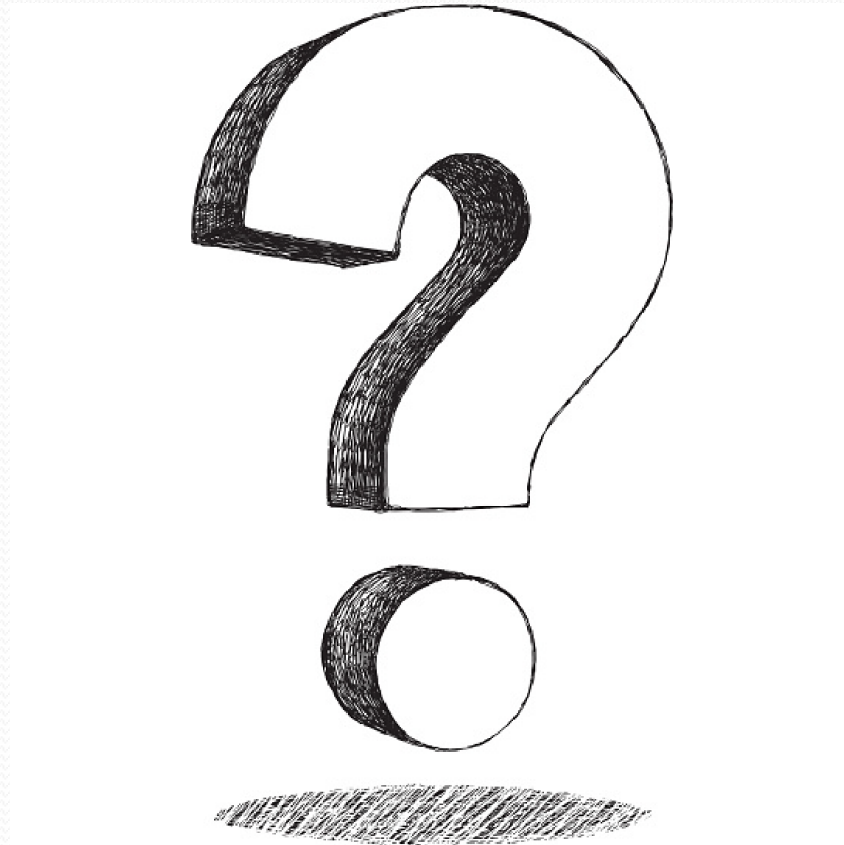


# What did we learn?

- Based on what we discussed today, can you think of an example of a crisis that you have faced in which you would use these tips?
- How? Please provide examples



# Questions?



# Additional Resources

<https://www.crisisprevention.com/en-CA/Blog/October-2017/CPI-s-Top-10-De-Escalation-Tips-Revisited>

Chang, V., Decker, C., & Scott, S. (2018). *Developing helping skills: A step-by-step approach to competency*. Boston, MA, USA: Cengage Learning.

Wood, J., & Schweitzer, A. (2017). *Everyday encounters: An introduction to interpersonal communication* (5th ed.). Toronto: Nelson Education Limited.