



**Division of Criminal  
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# **De Escalation of Aggressive Behavior**

# INTRODUCTION

- Safe and secure environment for all is the goal of NYS DOCCS
- With an increase in the need of mental health services for the incarcerated population, the need for more intense training increases as well
- Techniques discussed today will assist all staff is how to properly manage and ideally prevent crisis situations
- Although this is geared specifically towards SMI individuals, this training can be used with General Population individuals too

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define the term “behavior.”
2. List the seven (7) behavioral warning signs.
3. List the fourteen (14) nonverbal/verbal calming techniques.



# Objective #1

Define the term “Behavior”

# BEHAVIOR

- The actions or reactions of persons or things in response to external or internal stimuli
- An outward expression of an inward feeling

# POTENTIAL REASONS FOR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

- Response to psychotic symptoms
- Conflicts with others
- Bad news from home
- Any change in routine
- Fear
- Trauma
- Drug use



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## Objective #2

### 7 Behavioral Warning Signs

# BEHAVIORAL WARNING SIGNS

- Signs can be subtle
- May be highly specific to the individual
- All staff needs to continually assess and reassess
- Recognize typical vs. atypical behaviors
- Look for indicators that something may be wrong



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# 7 BEHAVIORAL WARNING SIGNS

## #1): PACING

- Walking back and forth without a purpose
- What could the reason(s) be for pacing?
- How do we find out the reason(s)?



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# 7 BEHAVIORAL WARNING SIGNS

## #2): FEARFUL LOOKS

- Facial expression or posture that may lead you to believe the individual is afraid of everything/everyone around them



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# 7 BEHAVIORAL WARNING SIGNS

## #3): EXTREME QUIETNESS

- One who usually interacts with others is now quiet and withdrawn
- Doesn't respond when spoken to
- Is unwilling to participate in programming



# 7 BEHAVIORAL WARNING SIGNS

## #4): ARGUMENTATIVE

- One who is usually easygoing is now looking for confrontation
- A seemingly small issue may get quickly blown out of proportion



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# 7 BEHAVIORAL WARNING SIGNS

## #5): MUMBLING

- Speaking in low tones which may sound like gibberish
- Is it possible they are manipulating their speech so others move closer in order to hear them?
  - Why would they do this?



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# 7 BEHAVIORAL WARNING SIGNS

## #6): CLENCHED FISTS

- Classic warning sign of potential aggression to follow
- What typically comes after making a fist?



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# 7 BEHAVIORAL WARNING SIGNS

## #7): CHANGE IN USUAL BEHAVIOR

- Knowing the individuals on your unit makes assessing behavior easier
  - Daily habits
  - Normal tone/pace of voice
  - Who they associate with
  - What is normal vs. abnormal



## **Objective #3**

**14 Nonverbal/Verbal  
Calming Techniques**



# COMMUNICATION

- Two most common ways people communicate are verbally and nonverbally
- What we don't say may be as important as what we do say
  - Facial expressions
  - Body language
  - Personal space

# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #1): SELECTIVE FOCUS (nonverbal)

- Not giving immediate attention to undesirable behavior
- Focus on the cause of the behavior
- Revisit the action(s) that were deemed undesirable



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #2): EYE CONTACT (nonverbal)

- Maintain visual awareness of entire room or just an individual
- Make meaningful eye contact
  - Too long - intimidating
  - Too short - timid



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #3): PROXIMITY (nonverbal)

- Physical distance that's supportive, non-threatening, safe and effective
- Do incarcerated individuals have “personal space”?
- Is it appropriate to give a little extra space during times of crisis?



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #4): LIMITATION OF AUDIENCE/STIMULI (nonverbal)

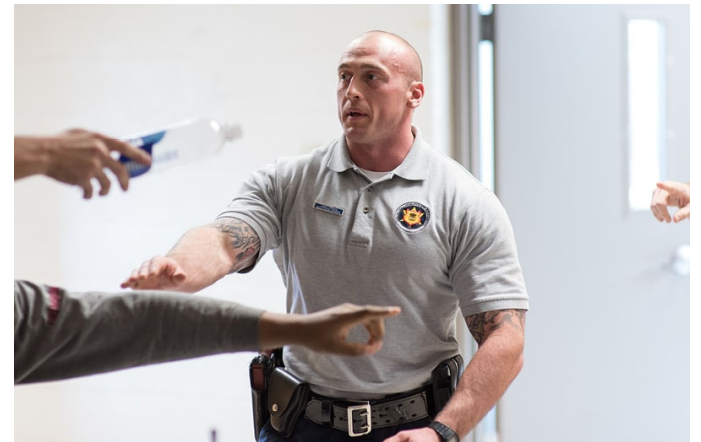
- Removing the individual from others or the source of agitation
- May be easier to calm down an individual in a one-to-one
- Allows the individual to save face



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #5): BODY LANGUAGE AND POSTURE

- How do you present yourself?
- Can show strength, confidence, concern, control
- Relaxed, nonthreatening posture can transmit positive, concerned, calming effects
- Know when relaxed is too relaxed...



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #6): MODELING (verbal)

- Demonstrates control of your emotions
- Speak simply and calmly
- Ideally, the individual will model your controlled tone



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #7): ACTIVE LISTENING (verbal)

- Listening intently to as much information as possible
- Repeat back what was said
- Remain patient and attentive



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# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #8): VENTING (verbal)

- Allowing individuals to say what they want without sanction in order to express their frustration(s)
- Be aware of your own personal triggers



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #9): DISTRACTION/REDIRECTION (verbal)

- Attempt to direct conversation to a less volatile topic
- Where do these topics of conversation come from?



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #10): REASSURANCE (verbal)

- Reminding individuals of past successes
- Indicating that they may have the ability to handle their current issue(s) can give a sense of accomplishment



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## 11): EXPLORATION OF POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES (verbal)

- Discussing what “could” or “might” happen if their actions/behavior continues
- Choose your words carefully to not come off as threatening



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #12): DISLOCATION OF EXPECTATIONS (verbal)

- Not reacting to “baiting”
- Be aware of personal triggers
- Respond by modeling with calm and controlled tone/pace



# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #13): CLARIFYING THE EMOTIONAL STATUS (verbal)

- Identify the root cause of their behavior
- Do not sympathize with the individual but understand (empathize) what they are feeling



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# 14 CALMING TECHNIQUES

## #14): ONE-TO-ONE (verbal)

- May be easier to calm an individual down without an audience
- Good rapport building technique
- Private conversation must be conducted in a safe location



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# CONCLUSION

Through learning and practicing specific skills on how to assess potential aggressive behaviors, you will gain an understanding of how to prevent, de-escalate and manage aggressive behavior and crisis situations.