

# Crisis Communication for First Responders

Detective Support and Vice Division  
Crisis Response Support Section  
Mental Evaluation Unit

# Define the term “Crisis”

- ▶ A crisis involves a disruption of a person’s normal or stable state. It occurs when a person faces an obstacle that, for a time, overwhelms his or her customary methods of problem solving.

# What type of personal reactions occur during a crisis?

- ▶ Emotional upset: anxiety, anger, and shame
- ▶ Physical upset: behavioral changes
- ▶ Cognitive disturbance: disruption in normal problem solving abilities

# Three Types of Crisis

- ▶ **Situational Crisis**
  - An unexpected crisis that arises suddenly in response to an external event or a conflict concerning a specific circumstance. The symptoms are transient and the episode is usually brief.
- ▶ **Maturational Crisis**
  - A transitional or developmental period within a person's life, such as puberty or “mid-life crisis,” when psychological equilibrium is upset.
- ▶ **Cultural/Social Structural Crisis**
  - Disruption of social status or family.

# Principles of Crisis Intervention

- ▶ Immediate Intervention
- ▶ Limited Goals
- ▶ Focus on Goals through Problem Solving

# Establish Officer Safety...FIRST!

- ▶ Operate from a position of tactical advantage
- ▶ Begin “the process” of de-escalation *AFTER* you establish that there is no immediate threat, such as:
  - 415 Suspects
  - Possible Jumpers
  - Barricaded Suspects
  - Mentally Ill Subjects (i.e. Suicide-by-cop, etc.)

# The Basics...

## I. Time

- ▶ Time is on your side
- ▶ There is no need to rush...slow down
- ▶ It may take time to resolve the situation peacefully...be patient...

## II. Space

- ▶ Give the subject space, yet maintain control.
- ▶ Convey to the subject that you will respect his/her space.
- ▶ Remove distractions (limit number of officers, turn down radios, clear non-essential people from scene).

# III. Background Information

(Medications, Diagnosis, Family/Friends, Issues etc...)

- ▶ Obtain information from the subject, PR, neighbors, relatives, witnesses...
- ▶ Establish one point of contact (a person to whom the subject responds).
- ▶ Ask only one question at a time, such as:
  - Why are you here?
  - Do you want to hurt yourself?
  - Who do you think you are talking to? (*test the subject's perception*)
  - I believe that you feel you are hearing voices...

# III. Background Information *(Cont'd)*

- ▶ Identify Hooks & Triggers
  - Focus on those things to which the subject responds
  - Avoid those things that aggravate the subject
  
- ▶ Repeat yourself, as necessary, to build rapport and compel the subject to follow your direction.

# III. Background Information *(Cont'd)*

- ▶ Display patience and sincerity when speaking to the subject.
- ▶ Limit emotionality.
- ▶ Do not make promises you cannot keep.
- ▶ Keep the promises you make, but only after subject has met his/her obligation.

*If the subject is talking...you are winning!*

# Finally...

## Handcuffing Persons With Mental Illness (Manual §4/217.36)

Officers **must** handcuff a person with mental illness who is taken into custody when the person is not restrained by a straitjacket or restraining straps.

Use only official handcuffs and ensure handcuffs are ***double locked***.

***Exception: Officers may use discretion when the age or physical condition is such that the personal safety of the mentally ill person and/or the officer will not be jeopardized.***

# Listen, Empathize, Ask, Paraphrase & Summarize

## ▶ Listen

- Slow down
- Pay attention to verbal/non-verbal clues
- Listen to the whole message
- Allow subject to vent as appropriate
- Remain flexible/receptive

# LEAPS *(Cont'd)*

## ▶ Empathize

- Maintain an “understanding” attitude
- Reassure the subject that their problem can be solved step-by-step

# LEAPS *(Cont'd)*

## ▶ Ask

- Ask direct and open-ended questions
- Evaluate the subject's decision-making capabilities

# LEAPS *(Cont'd)*

## ▶ Paraphrase

- Paraphrase and repeat the subject's key points back to him/her, for example:
  - So you're telling me that you're depressed because you lost your job...
  - What I'm hearing you say is...
  - I see..
  - Tell me about it..

# LEAPS *(Cont'd)*

## ▶ Summarize Key Points

- Communicate and engage all parties during a crisis, i.e., incident commander, tactical, CNT and perimeter personnel, and most importantly, the subject
- Identify what you have, such as:
  - Mental Illness
  - Drugs/Alcohol Abuse
  - 415
  - Neighbor/Family Dispute

# LEAPS *(Cont'd)*

- ▶ **S**ummarize Key Points *(Cont'd)*
  - Actively communicate with the subject
    - (verbal/non-verbal)
  - Determine Instrumental and Expressive Needs
    - What brought the subject to this point?
    - Why are we here?
    - What does the subject want?

# Common Roadblocks to Effective Crisis Communication

- ▶ Interrupting!! Take your time...
- ▶ Interjecting your own views
- ▶ Expecting a response
- ▶ Letting the subject exclusively direct the conversation

# Common Roadblocks to Effective Crisis Communication *(Cont'd)*

- ▶ Ignoring/missing non-verbal clues/expressions, such as:
  - Clenched Fist
  - Avoiding Eye Contact, etc.
- ▶ Judging the subject or his/her actions
- ▶ Avoiding the subject's concerns, such as food or a can of soda, etc.

# Final stage – Resolution

- ▶ Maintain priority of officer and public safety
- ▶ Establish the subject's resolve to surrender without casualty
- ▶ Manage/monitor the heightened emotions of the subject and officers that can result from a protracted operation and surrender.

# Stay Up-to-Date on Mental Health Trends and Training

- ▶ Facebook

- LAPDMEU

- ▶ Twitter

- @LAPDMEU



# Mom Sues Police After Son Dies While Taken Into Custody

Incident Date: October 2005  
West Palm Beach, Florida

# Key Learning Points

- ▶ Time, Space, and Background Information
- ▶ LEAPS – **L**isten, **E**mpathize, **A**sk, **P**araphrase, and **S**ummarize

# Upcoming 2015 MHIT Schedule

- ▶ September 15 through September 18 (DP 10)
- ▶ October 6 through October 9 (DP 11)
- ▶ October 20 through October 23 (DP 11)
- ▶ November 3 through November 6 (DP 12)
- ▶ November 17 through November 20 (DP 12)
- ▶ December 8 through December 11 (DP 13)

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