

## **Guidelines for Dealing with Individuals Possibly Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis**

There may be multiple causes for a customer/resident's confused, agitated or bizarre behavior. These behaviors may be due to a medical/biological issue (e.g. dementia), acute intoxication (drugs/alcohol), a normal stress response (fight or flight) or a mental health episode. We cannot assume to know why someone is behaving the way they are. However, there are strategies that can help you cope with a customer who may be experiencing a mental health crisis.

- If at any point you are threatened (either verbally or non-verbally) while interacting with someone who is having a mental health crisis or who is unwilling to leave, do the following:
  - Call security in the building where you work for assistance with removing the individual: ie. **City Hall Security 4219 or 5522** (Personalize this section to fit your location)
  - If you are working offsite or in the field and feel threatened/uneasy about the situation: **Leave the area immediately and call your supervisor and/or the police**
  - If the individual is experiencing an acute crisis and seems in danger of harming themselves or others: **Call 911**
  - To assist individuals with taking the first step toward regaining stability and connect to mental health resources: **Call 211**

## **Strategies to help cope with someone who may be experiencing a mental health crisis**

1. **Be confident yet reassuring.** Manage your emotions (fear, surprise, shock) by remaining calm. Monitor your micro expressions and physical posture. Breathe slowly. Maintain an even tone, pitch and vocal projection. Reassure the customer that you are there to help.
2. **Deploy good active listening skills.** Listen carefully without judgement, paraphrase and summarize to help the customer feel listened to.
3. **Establish rapport.** Ask their name and express genuine care or concern for the individual.
4. **Give personal space.** Give the customer space. Avoid having the customer feel "boxed in." Avoid placing yourself between the customer and the exit path.
5. **Use "closed ended" questions.** These questions are those that have short answers.
6. **Avoid complex directions/questions.** Avoid questions and directions with multiple parts or answers.

7. **Limit distractions.** A person experiencing a mental health crisis may find it harder to focus, process information and concentrate. Limit distractions like loud noises, crowded areas and interruptions.
8. **Avoid drawing unnecessary attention.** Don't match their acting out behavior by yelling, using a loud voice or staring/glaring.
9. **Don't take it personally.** A customer experiencing a mental health crisis may be rude or disparaging. Understand that their behaviors are symptoms of a mental illness.
10. **Avoid power struggles.** Although you may be in the position of power in your role, try not to emphasize your authority but instead act more as a helper, assisting them to find the product or service they need or want for themselves.
11. **Set Boundaries.** Respond to the person's immediate behavior and needs. Don't be confrontational. If needed, set limits with the person as you would others. For example, "If you scream, I will not be able to talk to you and help."
12. **If someone is delusional/hallucinating, don't correct them.** Instead, focus on the distress it may be causing. For example, if the customer's delusion is that of being followed and they are clearly scared or distressed, you can say, "*I can see why you'd be scared if you believed someone is following you. What can I do to help you feel safer?*" Comply if reasonable and doesn't pose a disruption, then refocus on why they need your service.
13. **Evaluate Threats.** On occasion, a person with a severe mental illness may make threats. Be aware they rarely carry them out. People with a serious mental health disorder are more likely to be the target of violence than the perpetrator. However, if at any point you feel like you're in danger, call security in the building where you work or if you're in the field, leave the area where you're working and call your supervisor and/or the police.
14. **Recommend resources and services.**
  - IMPACT 211 provides a central access point for people who need help to take the first step toward regaining stability. During times of personal crisis or community disaster, the free, confidential helpline and online resource directory make it easy for residents of Southeastern Wisconsin to get connected to information and assistance. In Milwaukee, Waukesha, Kenosha, Racine, Ozaukee, Washington, Dodge, Jefferson, and Walworth counties, help is available by dialing 211. <https://www.impactinc.org/impact-211/>
  - Contact Milwaukee County Crisis Intervention Services Crisis Line 414-257-7222, 24/7 which provides access to The Crisis Assessment Response Team (CART) which includes a trained clinician and a law enforcement officer. Working side by side, they help connect individuals in crisis with the resources needed to

remain in the community. The CART program started through BHD's partnership with the Milwaukee Police Department and is now expanding to respond to mental health and suicide crises across Milwaukee County. CART currently operates in collaboration with the Milwaukee Police Department, West Allis Police Department and Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office.

- Contact the non-emergency police number (414-933-4444) to contact police, but 911 is not warranted.