

Creating a safe environment

Be aware of:

- Other people in the room
- Objects; such as chairs, tables, items on a table
- The space around you, like exits or openings, and if you are blocking the person so that they feel trapped. Keep a safe distance from the person
- Where is the closest phone or person who can make an emergency phone call if needed.

Volunteer Guidelines

- Creating a plan for volunteers in case of a conflict will help them feel more comfortable
- Develop a code word if a volunteer is feeling uncomfortable or unsafe
- Always have two volunteers working alongside each other

Signs of conflict escalation:

- A person clenching his or her fists or tightening and untightening their jaw
- A sudden change in body language or tone during a conversation
- The person starts pacing or fidgeting
- A change in the type of eye contact
- The “Rooster Stance”- chest protruding out more and arms more away from the body
- Disruptive behaviors - such as yelling, bullying, actively defying or refusing to comply with rules

Conflict De-escalating Techniques

This is a list of options and not a step-by-step manual on how to de-escalate a situation.

Your priority is your safety and the safety of the people within your pantry. If you are feeling unsafe, please move to a safe space and call for additional assistance.

Communication is the key to crisis de-escalation

- Calm yourself before interacting with the person. If you're upset, it is only going to escalate the situation. Do not respond in a hostile, disciplinary or challenging manner.
- Speak to the person slowly and confidently with a gentle, caring tone of voice. Don't get defensive even if the insults are directed at you.
- Try to look as non-threatening as possible
- Appear calm and self-assured even if you don't feel it.
- Making a personal connection. Something as simple as asking “what's your name” can diffuse a situation quickly and allow you to make a connection.
- While the person is talking, don't think about what you'll respond with. This will take away from you listening to the person.

Active Listening

When people are paid attention to they feel validated; they feel important. Paying attention doesn't just mean saying “I'm listening”. It means looking at the person, making eye contact if it's culturally appropriate, and listening with the entire body. Nodding your head, asking for clarification when needed, paraphrasing and asking open-ended questions are signs that you are listening to what the person is saying.

Shifting the conversation

This can help us look to the future, create hope and make you seem less threatening

- Using “what” and “we” helps include the person in the future plans
 - For example: “Let's see what we can do in the future to make you more comfortable”

Disrespectful behavior vs. threatening behavior

24 Hour Crisis Services Hotlines by County

Chautauqua County Crisis Services Hotline
1-800-724-0461

Cattaraugus County Crisis Services Hotline
1-800-339-5209

Erie County Crisis Services Hotline
716-834-3131

Niagara County Crisis Services Hotline
716-285-3515

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline- 1-800-273-TALK(8255)