

Tip sheet for intervening with someone in crisis

1. **Be calm-** this is the most important thing. If you are not, the person will pick up on this, and your help won't be effective. It's easier said than done, and requires emotional/cognitive balance, and mental strength on your part. The work that goes into this **MUST** be done before you try to help people in crisis. Trust in yourself, and your team, is demanded. Practice, practice, practice..
2. **Before you go in, do the work and adjust your perspective- this child is not giving me a hard time s/he is HAVING a hard time. Your own attitude change IS A DE-ESCALATION STRATEGY!**
3. **Change the scene, if you can.** Often it's helpful to move to another location, especially if the situation occurred at or near where you are attempting to help. Simply changing what the distressed person is seeing, hearing, smelling, etc., can help de-escalate things.
4. **If possible, help one-to-one.** Most often 2 or more helpers can overwhelm and trigger someone in distress. Of course, if risk is exceedingly high, you may need someone else present. However, when possible support works best the less people present.
5. **Body language.** Watch it. It will trigger the other for sure if you are anxious, and showing it. And someone who is escalating will attend more to your body language and posture, than to your words. **More often than not, CONTENT IS OVERATED!!**
6. **Keep it simple.** Similarly, do not use jargon, or complicated communication. People in crisis simply can't or don't attend to lengthy verbalizations. **This is "heart math", persuasion and care in a moment when logic and facts don't matter.**
7. **Reflective listening.** This too takes so much practice, and an ability to be "outside of yourself". You have to be able to tolerate a great deal of internal discomfort, focusing on the other person instead of your own distress, to do this well.
8. **Match intensity.** If you are "fake calm", or use a voice that sounds forced and disingenuous (Think of someone saying, "Just calm down", in a soft, fake voice), the other will pick up on this immediately- and they will either not calm, or escalate further.
9. **Use silence.** This works just like it does with mindfulness- it gives the other needed space to process their own thoughts, feelings, and helps them clarify.
10. **Non/Para verbals are most crucial.** This means your tone, rate, volume of speech, and breathing are key in communicating safety and calm to the other.
11. **If you can give a family and child nothing else, give them your respect.**
12. **Be in the "No-contempt Zone" for those you are trying to help.**

13. **And “No” is not an answer.** Leave a family with the possibility of help, with the possibility of hope. If you cannot offer exactly what they want, (eg., inpatient placement) then seek, offer an alternative that provides safety.
14. **Your “clients” are everyone in the room, caregivers, school staff, law enforcement, etc.** Everyone involved has a need in a crisis. Including you.
15. **But you need to be an emotional badass to do this work.** Your needs come earlier, or later, but not during the intervention.
16. **Unless personal safety is a concern, then act immediately to protect yours.** Know the risks going in- warning signs, referral reason, area, pet presence, etc., and also trust your gut.
17. **Look for strengths, and signs that those involved want things to get better.** Almost everyone wants relief, and to feel better.
18. **It’s not about “meeting criteria” for out of home placement, or hospitalization.** The question is, given the risks involved, what would it take to keep this youth and family safe.
19. **When in doubt, consult a peer, or supervisor whenever possible.**
20. **Last, but not least all of this should almost be second nature to you, BEFORE you try to help people in crisis.** This means you need to get control of your own doubts, fears, competence questions, etc., before you help others in crisis. And if you have to look at this cheat sheet while you’re assisting another, you need more practice and balance!