

Deescalation Skills & Mindset

How do we bring our best self to this work?

- It is important to arrive well rested, fed, hydrated, and self-aware.
- Take some time before the start of your shift to ensure you are present.
 - Get ready to put your phone away. Drink coffee. Breathe for a moment.
 - Being present with who you are interacting with is important. You want the person to know that listening is your priority.
- Let the other volunteers know where you are at mentally and physically.
 - Some days you won't be able to support other's emotionally, and that's ok!
- Be aware of what things make you feel more stressed.
 - Such as loud voices, certain characteristics, addiction, or escalated situations.
 - If you find yourself in a situation where you don't feel comfortable, be quick to ask for help from someone else.

One of the best gifts you can give is to hold space for someone, to listen compassionately.

When someone shares with you something intense from their lives, validate their experience. You can say "That must have been really difficult for you" or "Thank you so much for telling me". People don't need solutions or answers as much as compassion.

Be sincere, respectful, and honest. Respect breeds respect.

Have confidence in yourself. You will not always say the "right" thing. People can feel if you are interacting with kindness and respect and their connection with you will grow. Rapport is organic and is nurtured in every moment. *People are going to remember how you make them feel, not what you say.*

Trauma informed care

- Trauma Informed Care (TIC) is a structure and attitude that emphasizes understanding, compassion, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma. Trauma Informed Care also looks at physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both guests and volunteers, and provides tools to empower folks on the pathway to stability.
- Becoming "trauma-informed" means recognizing that people have many different traumatic experiences which often intersect in their lives. Well-meaning people can re-traumatize guests who need understanding, support, and individually-conscious care. Seek support if you feel you are unsure of how to respond calmly to a guest.

Keep power dynamics in mind.

You are in a position of power as a volunteer. Minimize that feeling as much as you can by being aware of body language, the geography of the scene (Do they have an open exit? Do you? Can you move to a more relaxed place?), and ensuring that you engage with the guests with respect and with a calm tone of voice.

Body language: how you look and sound to others.

Physical

- Keep in mind that we are animals first, and we are looking to body language to identify friend or foe.
- Open arms, relax legs, turn slightly (be aware of where you are facing, stay open if you can), keep hands visible (helps with paranoia), and be aware of too much eye contact (match the person's comfort level.)
- Where is your eye level compared to theirs? Meet them at their level when you can. Crouch down if they are beneath you. Don't tower over someone!
- Stay able to move quickly, but get comfortable.
- Give appearance that you have time to talk with them. Casual & connective.
- Body language should send the same message that your words are trying to send.

Tone

- Sincerity and calmness are important.
- If someone is upset and don't seem like they are hearing you, tone can help them begin to hear your meaning before they are able to fully follow.
- Someone shouting? You can try amplifying yourself initially and slowly lowering your voice, and they could mirror you and slowly lower as well.
 - "I want to hear you, but it is hard at this volume."
 - They could be stuck at that energy level and need help coming out.
 - "I hear that there is something going on (loud), I want to help (lower), let's go over here and talk (regular volume)."

Touch

- DO NOT ASSUME YOU CAN TOUCH ANYONE. Get consent first by offering touch, verbally and explicitly, every time. What is ok in one moment may have changed in the next.
- Unhoused people are often only being touched if they are being assaulted, harassed, or stolen from. Be sensitive and compassionate.
 - Same thing goes when touching people's stuff.

Grab a Buddy when Deescalation is Necessary

- Grab a buddy to come with you, or at least stay in the sight of someone who knows what is going on.
- You may need support or to tag out if:
 - You could trigger someone for reasons out of your control. Eg, you look or sound similar to someone they have trauma around.
 - You end up feeling triggered, uncomfortable, offended, or emotionally sensitive.
- Respect the “tap out”
 - It is often easier to see situations clearly from the outside of it.
 - If your buddy is triggering the guest, or perhaps is becoming emotionally reactive themselves, tap them on the shoulder and say “Hey, I got this.”
 - When tapped, respect the feedback and offer of support, and step back.
 - Debrief after the situation is handled, have patience until then.

Do Not Run/Rush Into a Situation

- You might miss other things happening in the environment or physical barriers.
- You can increase the stress of the situation.
- You need to both appear and feel calm when you arrive.
 - If your heart rate is raised, so is your anxiety level.
- Pause to take a breath before engaging.
- Being centered and grounded inspires that same feeling around you.

Think About How You Can Be Most Helpful In Any Situation

- Are there other people already helping?
 - Don’t create a crowd. Keep it to no more than 2 people helping directly.
 - Maybe your role will be to keep people out of the ruckus.
- Our guests often know each other. They can sometimes help more than you. If so, observe and offer support when necessary.
- Think about what tools and skills can you contribute and offer when appropriate.

Being Self-Aware

- It is alright not to be able to offer emotional support to guests. Let others know where you’re at and help guide any guests to someone who has stated they are able to offer that level of support.
- Think about what it feels like when you become anxious or uncomfortable. Listen to these as flags and seek support with the earliest signs you can identify.
- Everyone has buttons that can be pressed, try to get to know yours.
- Take time to reground yourself after engaging in an escalated situation.

Think about the Geography of the Scene.

- Have an easy, open exit for you and the guest.
 - They may feel trapped and be unable to relax and listen, even unconsciously.
- One tool in deescalation, often a “reset button”, is moving to a new area.
 - Invite the person to go for a walk, smoke, to get some food or water.
 - There will be high pressure points at the site: bag check in, sleeping area, bathrooms, etc.
- Always let other volunteers know about any behaviors you encounter and try to deal with. Take someone with you or stay in sight of a volunteer aware of the situation.

Redirecting Behavior

- Do not start with “you are doing this wrong”. Remove combative language.
- Use “I” statements.
 - Don’t declare what the other person is feeling, tell them what you are observing
 - This makes it difficult for someone to argue, it is your experience, not something they can object to easily
- Be collaborative and try to problem solve
 - This helps you join and engage with them.
 - Remember they are the expert in their own lives. Offer any help that you think appropriate, but find out from them what support they need.
 - Help people access their own internal support, that fierce and confident inner voice, and help supply the external support
- If someone has a wound, or issue in general, ask if they want assistance and respect what they say.
- Ask if they have a friend around who can offer support.

Set Clear and Concise Boundaries

- Start with a positive, guest centered, and compassionate statement.
- Set a clear and concise boundary. “I need you to ...”
 - Remember to speak calmly and firmly. Explain your reasons why this is important, but remember to stay concise.
- Try to meet people where they are at. Compromise when able and stand strong when you must.
- End with another kind and compassionate statement. Thank them for helping you ensure the safety and comfort of all guests and volunteers.

Handling Altered Realities

- Stay compassionate first. They will hear the tone of voice you use and will likely only be receptive to a respectful and kind approach.
- Do not debate reality with someone.
- Some people may make paranoid statements.
 - 👉 Do not lie & don't reaffirm their reality either.
 - 👉 If you say the conspiracy doesn't exist, you may become a threat to them too.
 - 👉 Instead, find and address the underlying emotional state/undertone
 - 👉 They are probably feeling fear or anxious.
 - 👉 Say "I would feel...", "that sounds hard", etc, and try to redirect.
 - 👉 Take people seriously and respect their emotional state.
 - 👉 "I believe you, *and* this is what I am experiencing."
- Avoid arguing with anyone!

Get to Know Who You are Interacting With

- Think about what that person's baseline might be and remember their baseline *will* be different than yours.
- Once you get to know someone, you can tell if certain behaviors are normal for them.
 - 👉 If something seems new or concerning, that is fair to mention. Both to the guest, the lead and other volunteers.
- Come from a desire to collaborate. Together you can brainstorm and figure out how to move forward.

LGBTQIA+, Gender, and Sexuality Awareness

- LGBTQIA+ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, plus.
 - 👉 An inclusive acronym that includes most sexual and gender identities.
- People who identify as other than cis-gendered (someone who's gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth) and/or heterosexual often experience trauma at even-higher rates.
- Asking someone the pronouns they use (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs) can help them feel seen and begin to build rapport and trust.
 - 👉 Show compassion and work to address people as they want to be addressed
- Do not assume gender based on appearance. Respect someone's self identification.
- Respect breeds respect. Remember to come from a place of compassion.

Maintain Healthy Personal Boundaries

- We are all compassionate, but we can only give them a place to stay for the night.
- Don't give money or rides to guests.
- No political or religious talk, personal abuse or drug use stories, etc.
 - 🌀 Even if you are engaging in a 100% consensual conversation, someone else could overhear and begin to feel unsafe or uncomfortable.
 - 🌀 We are humans here to help each other. Focus on that.

Medical

If you see something that seems medically concerning, let your shift lead know.

- Always wear gloves when there is any possibility of contamination.
 - 🌀 How to remove gloves without contaminating yourself:
 - 🌀 Pinch cuff of 1st glove and slowly remove. Ball in remaining gloved hand
 - 🌀 Remove second glove by slipping clean finger under glove and turn glove inside out when sliding off.
- Seizures
 - 🌀 Clear space around person and put soft things around them
 - 🌀 Put them on side if possible
 - 🌀 DO NOT PUT ANYTHING IN THEIR MOUTH OR RESTRAIN THE PERSON
- Sharps
 - 🌀 Stay with sharp and ask someone else to go get the sharps container
 - 🌀 Set sharps container next to sharp on ground
 - 🌀 Wearing gloves, pick up sharp and place in container, always moving away from body
- Wound Care
 - 🌀 Always remain in your comfort zone when helping guests.
 - 🌀 If it is beyond a bandaid, contact a medical volunteer, or shift lead to reach out to CAHOOTS.

CAHOOTS - Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets

- Contact shift lead about any situation that might require assistance.
- Call the non-emergency police and fire dispatch:
 - 🌀 Eugene: 541-682-5111
 - 🌀 Springfield: 541-726-3714
- Press 1 at each voice menu (1-1-1)
- Describe the situation and ask for CAHOOTS. Keep in mind the police will be dispatched if there is any risk of violence or self-harm.

NOTES



Egan Warming Center



The mission of the Egan Warming Center is to ensure that homeless people in Lane County who want to be inside during extreme cold weather have a place to go. We value respect for the dignity of all humans, especially those that are homeless. We aim to create a space that is physically and emotionally safe for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, mental or physical disability, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Deescalation Quick Guide

- **Be empathic and nonjudgmental.** Whether or not you think those feelings are justified, they're real to the other person.
- **Respect personal space.** If possible, stand 1.5 to three feet away.
- **Use nonthreatening nonverbals.** Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice.
- **Remain calm, rational, and professional.** How you respond will have a direct effect on whether the situation escalates or defuses.
- **Focus on feelings.** Facts are important, but how a person feels is the heart of the matter. Watch and listen carefully for the person's real message.
- **Redirect confrontational questions.** Answering often results in a power struggle. When a person challenges your authority, redirect their attention to the issue at hand.
- **Set boundaries.** Redirect behavior with clear, simple, and enforceable boundaries. Offer concise and respectful choices and consequences.
- **Choose wisely what you insist upon.** It's important to be thoughtful in deciding which rules are negotiable and which are not.
- **Allow silence for reflection.** It can give a person a chance to reflect on what's happening, and how they want or need to proceed
- **Allow time for decisions.** When a person is upset, they may not be able to think clearly. Give them a few moments to think through what's been said and how to proceed.