

Policy 14

Guide for Temporary Workers in dealing with difficult behaviours

1. Don't invade Service Users space. People like to have their own bit of territory, such as their own chair. Stay an arm's length away. Avoid corners yourself and cornering the person. Always knock on their door.
2. Get to know the signs of rising tension. These could be rocking, stuttering, colouring of the face, pacing, hand-wringing.
3. Keep neutral body postures. Keep your hands in sight, no clenched fists, no hands on hips, no pointing, no leaning over people, make eye contact but don't stare. You are trying to make your own non-verbal communication non-threatening. They say that 90% of communication is non-verbal. Smile!
4. Let everybody win. If you can defuse a situation you have won. If the person that you are caring for has not lost face, has kept their pride, they have won too.
5. Establish a warm environment. This can mean a lot of things, from literally turning a heater on, to sitting by it to talk things out, to being sensitive about colour schemes or the effect of uniforms/the clothes you wear.
6. Self-awareness. If you are in a grotty mood don't pretend you are feeling great or that it doesn't matter. Just being aware of your mood can help you make adjustments to how you deal with any given situation.
7. "Walk, don't run". Apply this in loads of ways, for example, lower your voice, move slowly, avoid sudden movements.
8. Count to ten. This really does work. When first faced with a situation, start counting to ten. As you do this, check your mood, assess the situation, decide on a first course of action, confirm it to yourself, then do it. You will be more likely to gain control because unwell people are very often frightened people and do not know what is going to happen next. Service Users will develop confidence in you to come up with safe solutions.

9. Use humour. A good one-liner can be worth all the other tips put together. Avoid negative humour like sarcasm, put downs, jumping to conclusions.
10. Empathise. This means "I know how you feel". You can't always but if you think you do, then use it.
11. Sympathise. This means "I agree with you". Someone may well be right to show anger or distress. Develop this by talking about ways of doing something about it.
12. Once you get someone talking, let them let off steam, don't try to stop them. Ask open-ended questions like "How did that make you feel?", rather than closed-ended ones like "Did you do that?"
13. Use phrases along the lines of, "Lots of people feel that way when they are ill" or "You are not alone in thinking like that" or "That's not you, that's the illness".
14. Split up the people involved in an argument. This sounds obvious but take one off for a chat. If this is not possible, get them both talking to you, not so much at each other.
15. Sit out a threat. Never ever accept any kind of invitation to join in an argument or fight. This will be appreciated because you become safe. By setting a limit, you reassure. Threatened violence to a named individual is always to be taken seriously. Ask for any weapons or implements to be put down, not handed over.
16. Women are as good at defusing as men. There are more differences in individual ability within the sexes than there are between them.
17. Physical contact. Don't wake someone abruptly or aggressively as this carries a high risk of an equal response. Don't touch the back of the neck or take a grip on the arm.
18. Know how to call for help in an emergency.

End of Policy