

# JAIL BULLETIN

NUMBER 53

May, 1989

The Jail Bulletin is a monthly feature of the Crime Commission Update. The Bulletin may be used as a supplement to your jail in-service training program if officers study the material and complete the attached "open book" quiz. The Bulletin and quiz may be reproduced for use by your staff. We welcome any jail training materials you would like to contribute to the Bulletin.

The contents of the "Jail Bulletin" represent the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect official views or policies of the Nebraska Crime Commission or the Nebraska Jail Standards Board.

## CRISIS INTERVENTION - INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Often times, correctional employees are confronted with a situation where an inmate becomes disruptive and/or assaultive. Nonviolent crisis intervention is a safe behavior management system that enables correctional employees to maintain control during the most violent times.

The development of a crisis situation generally follows a behavior sequence:

### Inmate Crisis Development

1. Anxiety: observable and unusual change in behavior (i.e., pacing back and forth, sudden mood swing, nervousness).
2. Defensive: inmate begins to lose rationality, often becoming belligerent. Both verbal and nonverbal clues that he/she is beginning to lose control become present (i.e., challenging authority and power struggle.)

### Staff Attitude

1. Supportive: respond to the inmate that you realize he/she is anxious and would like to help reduce the anxiety.
2. Directive: take control of the situation. Stay on topic and set limits.

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| <p>3. Acting out person: inmate loses control of his/her behavior. May be emotional and/or have physical outburst. Total loss of rationalization (i.e., screaming, swearing, high energy output). Intimidation may result which can be a physical threat made by the inmate or emotional manipulation directed toward staff or other inmates.</p> | <p>3. Nonviolent crisis intervention: Allow venting if possible. Isolate the inmate from the audience or inmate from area. Keep your voice at a reasonable tone. If inmate starts to quiet, state directives that are non-threatening. Be ready to enforce the limits you have set. If inmate does not quiet and intimidation and/or physical outburst occurs, nonviolent physical intervention is needed. Get assistance from staff at this time. Intervention by individual staff may result in personal conflict. Be familiar with restraining techniques to ensure your and other's safety.</p> |
| <p>4. Tension reduction: after an inmate's outburst, energy begins to subside. Inmate begins to regain rationality and may realize the acting out was inappropriate.</p>  | <p>4. Communication: After you see the inmate is calming, attempt to communicate with him/her. Communication with the inmate may result in a learning experience from the crisis situation.</p>   |

In a crisis situation, there are several do's and don'ts for verbal intervention to have its maximum effects.

Do

- Remain calm
- Isolate the acting out inmate from other inmates
- Set Limits
- Listen
- Be aware of body language

Don't

- Overreact
- Get in a power struggle
- Make false promises
- Ignore the situation
- Be threatening

Effective communication skills are important tools to reduce tension during a crisis situation. The use of active listening can aid in reducing an inmate's anxiety before outbursts occur. Below are some uses of active listening and examples of staff responses.

Uses

- o To convey to the inmate an interest in what he or she is thinking.
- o To encourage the inmate to expand further on his thinking.

Responses

- o I see! Uh-huh
- o Go on, tell us more.

- o To help the inmate clarify the problem in his own thinking.
- o To get the inmate to hear what he/she said, the way it sounds to others.
- o To get the main points from the discussion.
- o To respond to the inmate's feelings more than his words.
- o Summarize agreements/disagreements for further discussion.
- o Express consensus of group feeling.
- o Then how you see the problem is . . .
- o You've decided this because. . ., Let me understand, you are saying we should . . .
- o What you're trying to say is . . .
- o You feel that. . ., It is important that. . .
- o We agree, but we still need to figure out . . .
- o After talking, we all agree that . . .

There are three factors to remember when speaking with an inmate:

- TONE - your tone of voice should be calm and supportive.
- VOLUME - the volume of your voice should be moderate. Avoid whispering or shouting.
- CADENCE - deliver your message smoothly, avoid jumpy or excited sentences.

It is also important to remember that non-verbal communication will affect the way the inmate views the staff during a crisis situation. Below are three factors to remember:

- PERSONAL SPACE - When speaking with an inmate, do not invade his/her personal space. If you are too close, the inmate will perceive this as threatening. Approximately one leg length apart from the inmate is a good margin of safety.
- BODY MOVEMENT - Do not move too quickly or too slowly when speaking with an inmate. A charge at the inmate may heighten his/her anxiety level and cause him/her to physically act out. Also, moving too slowly may be perceived by the inmate as an uninterested staff and he may act out to get attention.
- GESTURES - Pointing, waving hands, or shaking your head in a "disgusted" manner intimidates the inmate. Gestures such as these may provoke an inmate to physically act out.

To maintain control and keep crisis situations to a minimum in a correctional facility, employees should be able to evaluate inmate's behavior. Therefore, it is important to be familiar with precipitating factors that may cause an inmate to act irrationally.

**Loss of Personal Power** - The inmate may be trying to prove that he/she can still act as an individual. The inmate may need to show that he/she can still control what is going on.

**Maintain Self-esteem** - Inmate may be trying to save face in front of his/her peers.

**Fears** - Not knowing what is going on or knowing results.

**Failure** - Falling short of a goal set by staff or peers. Not being able to complete a task.

**Attention Seeking** - To reinforce a response, or wanting attention from staff or other inmates.

**Displaced Anger** - Other factors outside of the facility that cause inmate to act out.

**Psychological/Physiological Causes** - Drug induced behavior, hunger, pain, depression.

It is important to remember that correctional staff must always maintain self-control during a crisis situation. During a crisis situation, staff may suffer from fear and anxiety. There are both productive and non-productive reactions to crisis situations.

#### Unproductive

- o Inability to react
- o Overreact
- o Verbally act out abusively (vulgarity)
- o Physically act out abusively

#### Productive

- o Increased speed and strength
- o Increase your alertness
- o Decrease reaction time

There are ways correctional employees can control their own fear:

- o Understand what makes you afraid;
- o Be familiar with techniques to protect yourself;
- o Get assistance from other staff members to control a situation; and
- o Learn techniques to control inmates.

After an inmate regains rationality and tension is reduced, the inmate may go through a post-venting period where therapeutic rapport is beneficial. Below are six steps for therapeutic rapport.

1. Control - both inmate and staff must be under emotional and physical control.
2. Orient - Find out the facts of what went on;
3. Pattern - is a pattern of past behavior evident;
4. Investigate - find alternatives to the behavior;
5. Negotiate - agree to a verbal contract the inmate will understand; and
6. Give - give control back to the inmate.

It is also quite normal for a staff member involved in a crisis situation to go through a post-venting period. The staff member involved may want to meet with the rest of the staff to discuss the intervention and behaviors. Try not to think of this as a "gripe" session but rather as a constructional conversation among professionals on how to better prepare for a similar situation and to positively reinforce those involved.

Correctional employees who use these techniques will be better able to provide the best possible care of disruptive or assaultive inmates during violent moments.

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References: Texas Department of  
Corrections, Pre-Service Training  
Division, Lt. J. M. Miles

## QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of in-service training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement in-service training if an officer studies the Bulletin, completes the quiz, and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during annual jail inspection.

SUBJECT: CRISIS INTERVENTION

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER: 53

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. The development of a crisis situation generally follows a behavioral sequence. Which of the following behaviors are examples of how an inmate may act during a crisis situation?
  - A. Anxiety
  - B. Defensive
  - C. Loss of Control
  - D. All of the above
  
2. When an inmate exhibits anxious behavior, the best attitude for staff to have is:
  - A. Directive
  - B. Ignore the situation
  - C. Overreact
  - D. Supportive
  
3. Active listening can aid in reducing anxiety. Which of the following does not exhibit active listening?
  - A. "I see! Uh-huh."
  - B. "You feel that . . ."
  - C. "Just be quiet, it's not important."
  - D. "Go on. Tell us more."
  
4. There are three factors to remember when speaking with an inmate, match the following:

A. Tone	_____	Deliver message smoothly
B. Cadence	_____	Avoid whispering or shouting
C. Volume	_____	Be calm and supportive
  
5. When speaking with an inmate it is important to be very close to the inmate so that the inmate feels you are interested.  

_____ TRUE	_____ FALSE
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6. It is important to point at the inmate when speaking with him/her to convey that you are interested in the situation.  

_____ TRUE	_____ FALSE
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ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR.

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