

How Does Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety Empower First Responders?



Improves the way law enforcement interacts with people facing mental health and addiction challenges.¹



1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness²



1 in 4 people shot and killed by police officers between 2015 - 2020 had a mental health condition³

Increases mental health and substance use literacy.¹

Common warning signs of emotional distress include: ⁴

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Pulling away from people and things
- Having low or no energy
- Having unexplained aches and pains, such as constant stomachaches or headaches
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Excessive smoking, drinking, or using drugs, including prescription medications
- Worrying a lot of the time; feeling guilty but not sure why
- Thinking of hurting or killing yourself or someone

Early warning signs of psychosis:⁵

- Suspiciousness, paranoid ideas, or uneasiness with others
- Trouble thinking clearly and logically
- Withdrawing socially and spending a lot more time alone
- Unusual or overly intense ideas, strange feelings, or a lack of feelings
- Decline in self-care or personal hygiene
- Disruption of sleep, including difficulty falling asleep and reduced sleep time
- Difficulty telling reality from fantasy
- Confused speech or trouble communicating
- Sudden drop in grades or job performance



Teaches skills to safely address person-first language & language that feeds stereotypes.¹

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE⁶

Instead of this...	Try this
Mentally ill	Person living with a mental health challenge or use the diagnosis if the person prefers that language (e.g., major depressive disorder)
Crazy/insane/disturbed	Person living with a mental health challenge/trauma
Depressed/schizophrenic	Person living with depression/schizophrenia
Manic-depressive	Person living with bipolar disorder
Addict/junkie/druggie	Person with a substance use challenge or disorder
Alcohol	Person with an alcohol use challenge or disorder
Ex-addict/clean	Person in recovery

LANGUAGE THAT FEEDS STEREOTYPES⁶

Instead of this...	Try this
Mental illness	Mental health challenge or crisis
Drug/alcohol abuse	Substance use challenge or crisis
Committed suicide	Died by suicide or lost to suicide
Failed suicide	Attempted suicide

Models de-escalation techniques useful when responding to people in crisis safely and effectively. ¹

Most of the communication in a crisis is nonverbal. **55% is body language, 38% is the voice tone and 7% is the actual words spoken.** Becoming self-aware, practicing non-verbal skills, and responding with wisdom can assist in reducing stress during a crisis.⁷

Active listening is critical during a crisis. When done effectively it helps the person feel understood and validated. In addition, active listening demonstrates that you are present, builds trust, and is naturally calming. A good question to ask ourselves is, "Am I listening to understand or to respond?" Effective listening incorporates the following nonverbal techniques and responsive techniques:



Technique ⁷	Try this
Silence	Don't rush to fill the void, allow the person to take the time and collect their thoughts before speaking.
Voice Tone	If needed, we should speak in a calm, respectful, and non-threatening tone.
Facial expressions	Should demonstrate genuine interest. Be mindful of your facial gestures and hand movements.
Minimal encouragers	Encourage the person to continue speaking by saying, "Uh-huh" or "Go on" or nodding your head.
Door openers	Encourage the person to share or expand on the topic. You can say, "Tell me more about that" or "That makes a lot of sense."
Reflective responses	Short statements that demonstrate understanding and helps the person connect with their feelings. For example: "Seems like you are disappointed" or "You sound defeated." Reflective responses are intended to make emotional insight and not just to repeat what they are saying.
Empathic statements	These statements validate the person's experiences and/or feelings. For example: "That must be hard for you" or "I can see how that was frustrating."

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