Times of crisis can cause distress, leading to increased anxiety and depression. These feelings can be enhanced due to the lack of clear and concise communication and decreased engagement with loved ones and the community. When clinical care teams are engaging with patients in times of crisis, it’s important to:

* Encourage patients with physical or behavioral health conditions to continue with their treatment plans during an emergency.
* Educate and teach patients how to self-monitor their existing conditions, as well as the onset of new symptoms that may be related to the COVID-19 crisis.

At times, patients feel extreme emotional distress, which creates a clinical challenge for patient engagement and education. De-escalation is a technique used to help reduce the intensity of anxiety and conflict.

**Identifying Escalation**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Emotional Signs** | **Behavioral Signs** | **Cognitive Signs** |
| Crying | Rocking or swaying | Defensive statements |
| Yelling | Shaking extremities | Overgeneralizing, never/always statements |
| Mutism | Body tension/clenched fists | Black-or-white thinking |
| Arguing | Pacing or skittish behaviors | Blaming |
| Inappropriate laughter | Rapid breathing | Obsessions/preoccupations |
| Fear | Pressured speech | Refusing to listen |
| Confusion | Poor eye contact |  |

**De-Escalation Techniques**

* Identify/explain who you are and how you’re connected to a shared goal or objective.
* Know the patient’s background (e.g., behavioral health, homelessness, family history, etc.).
* Use active listening and encourage cooperation. Use verbal and non-verbal acknowledgement of what the patient is communicating.
* Use reflective statements (e.g., “Tell me if I have this right…[summarize what you heard].”
* Avoid medical jargon.
* Be clear and concise.
* Set boundaries, but do not argue.

**Clinician/Provider Behavior**

* Be a mirror:
	+ If you reflect a calm, cooperative and normal tone, the patient will start to mirror this behavior.
	+ Proper tone can help de-escalate by conveying empathy, or a non-emotional response.
* Display neutrality:
	+ Keep a neutral facial expression and/or tone.
* Maintain a non-defensive posture:
	+ Relax your body and tone of voice. Keep your arms and hands in front of your body, open and relaxed.
	+ Minimize gesturing, pacing and fidgeting, since these are signs of nervousness and increase agitation in others.
* Maintain eye contact:
	+ Focus on consistent eye contact with the patient, but do not force eye contact.

**Patient Self-Management and Resources**

* Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19.
* Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep and avoid alcohol and drugs.
* Make time to unwind, and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade. Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories.
* Connect with others. Share your concerns and how you’re feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships.
* Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking.
* [Mental Health and Coping During COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/coping.html)
* [SAMHSA Behavioral Health Disaster Response Mobile App](https://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-Behavioral-Health-Disaster-Response-Mobile-App/PEP13-DKAPP-1):
	+ Access to resources, including tip sheets.
	+ Directory of behavioral health providers.
	+ Interventions to help survivors of infectious disease epidemics.

**Clinician Self-Care Activities**

Responding to healthcare emergencies such as COVID-19 can take a physical and emotional toll on healthcare providers. This stress is called Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), and it’s important to engage in proper self-care activities while caring for others. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the following:

* Be aware of the symptoms, including physical (e.g., fatigue, illness) and mental/emotional (e.g., fear, withdrawal, guilt).
* Find and allow time for you and your family to recover from responding to the outbreak.
* Create a menu of personal self-care activities you enjoy, such as spending time with friends and family, exercising or reading a book. Make efforts to engage in these activities.
* Take a break from media coverage of COVID-19.
* Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for your family and patients as you did before the outbreak.