

Crisis Intervention Incidents

424.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for interacting with community members and/or employees who may be experiencing a mental health or emotional crisis. Interaction with such individuals has the potential for miscommunication and violence. It often requires an officer to make difficult judgments about a person's mental state and intent in order to effectively and legally interact with the individual.

424.1.1 DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Person in crisis - A person whose level of distress or mental health symptoms have exceeded the person's internal ability to manage his/her behavior or emotions. A crisis can be precipitated by any number of things, including an increase in the symptoms of mental illness despite treatment compliance; non-compliance with treatment, including a failure to take prescribed medications appropriately; or any other circumstance or event that causes the person to engage in erratic, disruptive or dangerous behavior that may be accompanied by impaired judgment.

424.2 POLICY

The Office of Protective Services (OPS) is committed to providing a consistently high level of service to all members of the community and recognizes that persons in crisis may benefit from intervention. OPS will collaborate, where feasible, with mental health professionals to develop an overall intervention strategy to guide its employees' interactions with those experiencing a mental health crisis. This is to ensure equitable and safe treatment of all involved.

424.3 SIGNS

Employees should be alert to any of the following possible signs of mental health issues or crises:

- (a) A known history of mental illness
- (b) Threats of or attempted suicide
- (c) Loss of memory
- (d) Incoherence, disorientation or slow response
- (e) Delusions, hallucinations, perceptions unrelated to reality or grandiose ideas
- (f) Depression, pronounced feelings of hopelessness or uselessness, extreme sadness or guilt
- (g) Social withdrawal
- (h) Manic or impulsive behavior, extreme agitation, lack of control
- (i) Lack of fear
- (j) Anxiety, aggression, rigidity, inflexibility or paranoia

Employees should be aware that this list is not exhaustive. The presence or absence of any of these should not be treated as proof of the presence or absence of a mental health issue or crisis.

424.4 COORDINATION WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

The Hospital Police Chief should designate an appropriate employee to collaborate with mental health professionals to develop an education and response protocol. It should include a list of community resources, to guide the Department of State Hospitals (DSH) interaction with those who may be suffering from mental illness or who appear to be in a mental health crisis.

424.5 FIRST RESPONDERS

Safety is a priority for first responders. It is important to recognize that individuals under the influence of alcohol, drugs or both may exhibit symptoms that are similar to those of a person in a mental health crisis. These individuals may still present a serious threat to officers; such a threat should be addressed with reasonable tactics. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to limit an officer's authority to use reasonable force when interacting with a person in crisis.

Officers are reminded that mental health issues, mental health crises and unusual behavior alone are not criminal offenses. Individuals may benefit from treatment as opposed to incarceration.

An officer responding to a call involving a person in crisis should:

- (a) Promptly assess the situation independent of reported information and make a preliminary determination regarding whether a mental health crisis may be a factor.
- (b) Request available backup officers and specialized resources as deemed necessary and, if it is reasonably believed that the person is in a crisis

situation, use conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques to stabilize the incident as appropriate.

- (c) If feasible, and without compromising safety, turn off flashing lights, bright lights or sirens.
- (d) Attempt to determine if weapons are present or available.
 - (a) Prior to making contact with a non-DSH patient, and whenever possible and reasonable, conduct a search of the Department of Justice Automated Firearms System via the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS) to determine whether the person is the registered owner of a firearm (Pen. Code § 11106.4).
- (e) Take into account the person's mental and emotional state and potential inability to understand commands or to appreciate the consequences of his/her action or inaction, as perceived by the officer.
- (f) Secure the scene and clear the immediate area as necessary.
- (g) Employ tactics to preserve the safety of all participants.
- (h) Determine the nature of any crime.
- (i) Request a supervisor, as warranted.

- (j) Evaluate any available information that might assist in determining cause or motivation for the person's actions or stated intentions.
- (k) If circumstances reasonably permit, consider and employ alternatives to force.

424.6 DE-ESCALATION

Officers should consider that taking no action or passively monitoring the situation may be the most reasonable response to a mental health crisis.

Once it is determined that a situation is a mental health crisis and immediate safety concerns have been addressed, responding employees should be aware of the following considerations and should generally:

- Evaluate safety conditions.
- Introduce themselves and attempt to obtain the person's name.
- Be patient, polite, calm, courteous and avoid overreacting.
- Speak and move slowly and in a non-threatening manner.
- Moderate the level of direct eye contact.
- Remove distractions or disruptive people from the area.
- Demonstrate active listening skills (e.g., summarize the person's verbal communication).
- Provide for sufficient avenues of retreat or escape should the situation become volatile.

Responding officers generally should not:

- Use stances or tactics that can be interpreted as aggressive.
 - Allow others to interrupt or engage the person.
 - Corner a person who is not believed to be armed, violent or suicidal.
 - Argue, speak with a raised voice or use threats to obtain compliance.
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424.7 INCIDENT ORIENTATION

When responding to an incident that may involve mental illness or a mental health crisis, the officer should request that the communication operator provide critical information as it becomes available. Refer to 45 Code of Federal Regulations, part 164.512(j) (2013) and California Civil Code section, 1798.24 subdivision (d), for law enforcement exemptions to HIPPA requirements. This includes:

- (a) Whether the person relies on drugs or medication, or may have failed to take his/her medication.
- (b) Whether there have been prior incidents, suicide threats/attempts, and whether there has been previous hospital response.
- (c) Contact information for a treating physician or mental health professional. Additional resources and a supervisor should be requested as warranted.

424.8 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

A supervisor should respond to the scene of any interaction with a person in crisis. Responding supervisors should:

- (a) Attempt to secure appropriate and sufficient resources.
- (b) Closely monitor any use of force, including the use of restraints, and ensure that those subjected to the use of force are provided with timely access to medical care (see the Handcuffing and Restraints Policy).
- (c) Consider strategic disengagement. Absent an imminent threat to the public and, as circumstances dictate, this may include removing or reducing law enforcement resources or engaging in passive monitoring.
- (d) Ensure that all reports are completed and that incident documentation uses appropriate terminology and language.
- (e) The responding officer will prepare an incident report to be forwarded to the Watch Commander.

Evaluate whether a critical incident stress management debriefing for involved employees is warranted.

424.9 INCIDENT REPORTING

Employees engaging in any oral or written communication associated with a mental health crisis should be mindful of the sensitive nature of such communications and should exercise appropriate discretion when referring to or describing persons and circumstances.

Employees having contact with a person in crisis should keep related information confidential, except to the extent that revealing information is necessary to conform to DSH/OPS reporting procedures or other official mental health or medical proceedings.

424.9.1 DIVERSION

Individuals who are not being arrested should be processed in accordance with the Mental Illness Commitments Policy.

424.10 NON-SWORN INTERACTION WITH PEOPLE IN CRISIS

Non-sworn employees may be required to interact with persons in crisis in an administrative capacity, such as dispatching, records request, and animal control issues.

- (a) Employees should treat all individuals equally and with dignity and respect.
- (b) If an employee believes that he/she is interacting with a person in crisis, he/she should proceed patiently and in a calm manner.
- (c) Employees should be aware and understand that the person may make unusual or bizarre claims or requests.

If a person's behavior makes the employee feel unsafe, if the person is or becomes disruptive or violent, or if the person acts in such a manner as to cause the employee to believe that the person may be harmful to him/herself or others, an officer should be promptly summoned to provide assistance.

424.11 EVALUATION

The employee designated to coordinate the crisis intervention strategy for OPS should ensure that a thorough review and analysis of the OPS response to these incidents is conducted. The report will not include identifying information pertaining to any involved individuals, officers or incidents and will be submitted to the Hospital Police Chief through the chain of command.

424.12 TRAINING

In coordination with the mental health community and appropriate stakeholders, OPS will develop and provide comprehensive education and training to all OPS employees to enable them to effectively interact with persons in crisis.

OPS will endeavor to provide Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST)-approved advanced officer training on interaction with persons with mental disabilities, welfare checks and crisis intervention (Pen. Code § 11106.4; Pen. Code § 13515.25; Pen. Code § 13515.30).