



Equipping Individuals, Leaders,
& Organizations facing Challenge & Change

Observe for signs of significant distress:

- Looking glassy eyed and vacant - unable to find direction
- Unresponsiveness to verbal questions or commands
- Disorientation (e.g., engaging in aimless disorganized behavior)
- Exhibiting strong emotional responses, uncontrollable crying, hyperventilating, rocking or regressive behavior
- Experiencing physical reactions (shaking, trembling)
- Exhibiting frantic searching behavior
- Feeling incapacitated by worry
- Engaging in risky activities that expose themselves or others to additional immediate danger

First:

- Communicate calmly and with warmth and relational connection
 - Use a soft, even voice
 - Smile
 - Allow the person to dictate the distance between you
 - Have an open posture
 - Sit squarely or stand with a relaxed L-stance (shoulder 90 degree to the other person's shoulder)
- Establish relationship
 - Introduce yourself
 - Ask the person what they would like to be called
 - Do not shorten their name without permission
 - In some cultures, it is important to use Mr., Mrs., or Miss
- Employ active listening techniques
 - Keep questions simple and explain why you are asking
 - Give the person time to think through requests
- Find commonality or a simple point of agreement
- Speak with respect
 - Use please and thank you
 - Use positive language
 - Do not make promises
 - Normalize and validate statements made
 - Do not promise everything will be ok



Stabilization & Grounding:

Practical tools that focus attention to the senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touch) for the purpose of slowing the fight-or-flight response of the body and stabilizing distress.

Note: Grounding techniques are beneficial for varied levels of stress response (always keeping personal safety in mind). These techniques simply create opportunity for the body to re-regulate to functional physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual levels.

- Intentional breathing exercises: This helps to slow down the heart rate and calm the nervous system.
Ex: Breathe in for a count of 2, hold for 2, breathe out for 2, repeat
- Sensory Focused Activities- what can be heard, felt, seen, tasted in the present environment
 - Carry peppermints or sour candies
 - Have something with texture/squishiness- cloth, bubble wrap, plastic, stress ball
 - Load phone with instrumental music & pictures of pets/animals
 - Eye contact - (culturally acceptable)- paired with intentional breathing
 - Physical touch- always with permission. Hand on hand, hand on shoulder
- Muscle relaxation: This involves tensing and releasing each muscle group in the body, starting from the feet and moving up to the head. This can help to reduce tension and physical symptoms of distress.
- Mindfulness: This involves paying attention to the present moment without judgment, using the breath as a focus. This can help to calm the mind and reduce rumination on distressing thoughts.
- Imagery: This involves using the imagination to create a calm and safe place in the mind. This can help to provide a sense of comfort and escape from the distress.

Safety:

Highly distressed or agitated individuals may act in a way that compromises the safety of you or others.

They may:

- Challenge or question authority
- Refuse to follow directions
- Lose control and become verbally agitated
- Become threatening

Do not hesitate to seek assistance if an individual does not respond to your attempts to stabilize and ground them.