

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION & CRISIS DE-ESCALATION: PROXEMICS & SUPPORTIVE STANCE

AUTHOR(S):	Foundation for Jewish Camp & Westchester Jewish Community Services (Some information included from Crisis Prevention Institute.)
SUMMARY:	While you cannot control other's behavior, you can control yourself in relation to others in ways that can impact your relationship and interaction. Understanding and learning to use the "supportive stance" promotes safety for staff and campers. This technique involves maintaining a distance of at least one leg length and positions the respondent's body at an angle to the other person at an "L-shape" angle. This position communicates respect by honoring personal space, is non-threatening and non-challenging, and contributes to staff's personal safety.
TOPIC(S):	Communication Skills, Leadership Development, Non-verbal Communication, Mental Health, Crisis De-escalation
LEARNING OBJECTIVE:	While you cannot control other's behavior, you can control yourself in relation to others in ways that can impact your relationship and interaction. Participants will be able to increase safety for themselves and others by understanding and using the "supportive stance."
AUDIENCE:	8-30 Staff members
TIMING:	20-30 minutes (or 3 activities which could each be 10 minutes separately)
APPENDICES:	CPI Graphics (page 3)
MATERIALS:	1 chair

OPENING GAME: STAND / SIT / SLEEP IMPROV EXERCISE

If there is time, start by warming up with the improve game "stand, sit, sleep." The object of the game is for three players at a time to improvise a scene in which no two players are ever in the same position.

Start with a chair in the center of the 'stage' area and bring up three volunteers. As the facilitator, takes a suggestion from the rest of the participants for a setting or topic for the scene they are about to see. (Make it camp-related!) Throughout the scene, one player stands on stage, one sits on the chair, and one lies down. (This can be modified to have someone kneeling, squatting, etc.)

The players begin a scene, based on the group's suggestion, justifying their positions. One example: A counselor stands making a s'more, camper sits playing guitar, and another camper lies down stargazing by the fire circle.

After several seconds, one player must change positions and communicate a reason for doing so that fits with the scene. For example, the person sitting may kneel down to get something off a shelf, the person standing may sit down to eat, or the person lying down may jump to their feet in anger.

As soon as one player changes position, another must assume that player's position. If the sleeping one stands, for instance, the stander should lay down. Ideally, their movements should overlap so they are never in the same position. Again, the change should be justified in the context of the scene.

After the first few moves, the players should accelerate the scene by decreasing the amount of time between changes. The facilitator should call out any time two or more players are in the same position.

The scene ends when it reaches a climax. By the end of the scene, no player should be remaining in place for more than a second!

Bonus Tips: To make the game much more challenging, add more people and more positions. For instance, six people could play "Stand, Sit, Kneel, Lean, Bend, Sleep/Lie Down."

PRACTICING PROXEMICS: PERSONAL SPACE

- Have participants choose a partner, preferably someone they do not work with regularly, then have them form two lines facing each other, approximately 8 – 10 feet apart.
- Choose a participant for demonstration purposes. Explain that you are going to walk directly toward them, face-to-face, and instruct them to put their hand up and say "stop" when they feel uncomfortable or their personal space being entered.
- Walk toward the participant, stopping when they raise their hand and say "stop."
- Following your demonstration, have the group in one line maintain their ground (they are the participants that raise their hand when uncomfortable). On your cue, have the participants in the other line walk directly toward their partners. For maximum affect, **instruct participants to maintain eye contact and refrain from talking.**
- Repeat the exercise, reversing the roles. (Those in the group who stood their ground will now do the walking, and those that did the walking now stand their ground.)
- Ask the group for how they felt as they were in the role of *being approached*, and also describe the behaviors *you* observed (possible signs of anxiety).

Review Proxemics:

- Personal space: Area around the body seen as an extension of self.
- Invasion of personal space can increase anxiety level.
- For most in American culture, 1.5 to 3 feet apart is the personal space for comfort.
- When getting close to someone to de-escalate a crisis, the goal is to diffuse the situation - not to intimidate the person.
- As a group, generate a list of potential factors which could influence personal proxemics
 - Some examples: culture, gender, size, appearance, facial expressions, past experiences, perceived threat, comfort level, authority issues
- Emphasize that each individual has their own personal space, and any intrusion into that space increases anxiety and could consciously or subconsciously be perceived as a threat.

SUPPORTIVE STANCE: INTRODUCTION AND PRACTICE

Taking a "Supportive Stance" is a way to approach people in possible crises in ways that will encourage them to feel safer and less threatened.

How?

- Maintain a distance of at least one-leg length between you and the other person
- Position your feet slightly apart in an L-shape
- Place your body at an angle to other person

Why?

- Demonstrates respect for the other individual's personal space
- Is non-challenging & non-threatening

- Offers the appearance of an escape route
- Contributes to safety for you and the other person

Try it out!

- Have folks stand in two lines facing each other as partners a few feet apart.
- Have one line approach their partners, stopping one leg length away and pause.
- Next, the same partner should take a large step toward partner and hold for 6 seconds.
- Finally, the same person in a single movement should take a small step toward their partner and hold for another 6 seconds, then take one step back and pivot to the side, forming an L-shape stance with partner. This is the CPI supportive stance.
- Ask for volunteers to describe their feelings based on the behaviors.
- Reverse roles and have the other line give it a try.
- Encourage improv role play with realistic camp situations and get reflection on how it feels to do and to receive.

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

REASONS FOR USING STANCE:

1. Safety
2. Respect
3. Non-challenging (or threatening)

The CPI Supportive StanceSM

