

# Société Alzheimer Society

BRANT, HALDIMAND NORFOLK,  
HAMILTON HALTON

<b>Policy Name:</b> Supporting Individuals Presenting in a Heightened Emotional State, Distress, or “Crisis”	
<b>Policy Number:</b> ORG-1.13	<b>Pages:</b> 4
<b>Last Reviewed:</b> December 2023	<b>For Review:</b> November 2025

## Purpose:

To provide guidelines for staff to support individuals presenting in person or virtually, in a heightened emotional state or distress or “crisis” situation and de-escalate the situation.

## Policy:

Due to the complex nature of working with people, there may be instances where an individual may present, in person or virtually, in a heightened emotional state, or distress or “crisis”. A “crisis” is a situation whereby the individual is unable to cope, or problem solve using their usual skills or functioning abilities. Everyone has experiences that make them feel upset, disappointed, or fatigued. When these types of feelings are combined with certain life events or situations, they often lead to mounting tension and stress. Each situation is unique and will require a flexible approach to the individual and situation. However, there are fundamental steps that can be used effectively to support the individual and deescalate the situation.

Any ASBHNHH staff can have an impact and assist other staff by responding appropriately and promptly. ASBHNHH is not a crisis service. Staff are not required to, and should not attempt to, undertake a therapeutic intervention. However, staff need to assess, to the best of their ability, and refer if necessary. Staff may consult with teammates or request additional assistance if required.

## During A Situation:

1. Take a quick inventory of the situation and continuously assess. Ask yourself:
  - Is the individual physically safe?
  - Is the individual at risk of suicide or self-harm?
  - Is the individual under the influence of drugs/alcohol?
  - Are there any risks of aggression/violence?
  - Does the individual have other support networks?
  - Do I need assistance from a teammate(s)? If so signal or message teammate(s) for assistance.
2. Use active listening. Active listening is the practice of preparing to listen, observing what

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verbal and non-verbal messages are being sent, and then providing appropriate feedback for the sake of showing attentiveness to the message being presented. Tips for Active Listening:

- Show that you are listening such as making eye contact with the individual, leaning slightly forward, etc. Nod your head, smile, and make small noises like “yes” and “uh huh”, to show that you are listening and encourage the speaker to continue.
- Maintain an open posture and avoid crossed arms or legs.
- Pay attention to what the other person is saying with their body language. Even on the phone, you can learn a lot from the other person’s voice, which might sound subdued or upbeat.
- Listen without judging or jumping to conclusions.
- Demonstrate concern for the person's feelings. A position of not knowing but empathy for the situation and wanting to help (i.e., proceeding to an action) often can reduce feelings of distress for an individual.
- Allow the individual time to speak or vent their feelings.
- Stay focused.
- Ask questions. If you are unsure if you have understood correctly, wait until the speaker pauses and then say something like “Did you mean that x...” Use open-ended questions such as, “How did that make you feel?” “What did you do next?”
- Paraphrase and summarize - sometimes called reflecting. This is repeating what has been said to show that you understand. For example, “Sounds like you are saying...”
- Avoid criticism or frustration.
- Do not interrupt. A pause or a few seconds of silence does not mean that you have to jump in. Letting the other person speak will make it easier for you to understand their message, too.
- Do not start planning what to say next.
- Do not impose your opinions or solutions.

## **When the Situation is Calmer:**

1. Give support and information if appropriate. Consider if there are appropriate services that you may be able to refer the individual to assist their present circumstances.
2. Encourage the person to get appropriate professional help. For example: Suggest they may benefit from counselling to help them manage their feelings/situation. If the individual is a current client of ASBHNHH ask if they would like a call or an appointment

with their assigned worker. Take the individual's name and telephone number and let the assigned worker know to connect with the individual.

3. Encourage other supports. For example, check if the individual has a person in their network that can support them at this time or that they can talk to if they are feeling upset or unsafe. Who can they talk to when times are tough?

**If you believe the individual is at serious risk:**

If you suspect the person is in immediate danger, such as, imminent risk of physical harm or exploitation, including but not limited to self-harm, call 9-1-1.

Inform the individual of your concern - "I am very worried about your ability to keep yourself safe", or, "I am very worried about actions you've expressed about harming another person."

Inform the individual that you will call either a distress line that specializes in Mental Health or police services - "I think it would be important to call someone who may be able to help, either distress line or the police services, they can take you to the hospital, or come to your house and check on you to make sure that you're safe".

**Remember** the individual has the right to determine and control their own affairs to the full extent they are capable, such as, choosing whether to accept or refuse intervention.

If the individual is resistant and does not want you to call, you can say "I have a duty of care to you as our client and am very worried about you being able to keep yourself safe". Do not make promises that you cannot keep (promising how other services will respond, or that they will be fine, is beyond your control, however, you can say that they "will likely ...").

If the individual refuses and wants to leave or disconnects, you cannot prevent them. If you are very concerned for their wellbeing, you should contact your local Police Services Mental Health Line and provide them with as much information as you can about where the individual went (in what direction etc.) and the individual's current state of risk.

If the individual concedes to you calling emergency services, you should wait with the individual until the service arrives (in person) or stay on the line until the service arrives. If the individual is at home, have them stay on the line, but unlock their door to allow for first responders to enter the premises. Ensure the individual is in a safe quiet space during this time.

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## **Communication/Reporting of Incidents**

When a high level of risk situation has been identified it is essential that the most Senior Leader or designate is kept informed. ASBHNHH staff should have either a face-to-face discussion or telephone contact with their Team Lead immediately afterward.

An incident report should be completed at the earliest opportunity.

## **Ongoing Professional Development**

ASBHNHH staff should be encouraged to proactively seek and engage in regular de-escalation training opportunities.

### **Scope:**

The policy applies to all Society personnel.

### **Policy Review:**

The Senior Leaders in the Society will review this Policy biennially. If there are legislated changes required, these changes will be made as close as possible to the effective date of the legislative change.