

# **Conflict Resolution and De-Escalation Training**

**Adopted from the New York State OMH Worker Safety Training  
And New York State OMH Fundamentals of Crisis Intervention**

# Introduction

- Working with people who are homeless can be challenging.
- When people struggle with mental health concerns, co-occurring substance use issues, medical concerns and the stressors associated with homelessness, they can become frustrated and conflicts can arise.
- This training provides workers with the skill set to manage conflict and de-escalate people that have become distressed.



# Program Topics

Introduction  
to safety  
and risk

Safety  
assessment

Intervening  
in a crisis

Managing a  
Crisis

# Ten Rules to Promote Safety



Respect offer it and expect it

Offer space

Be Aware assess each person, each day, each situation

Trust your instincts

Try not to make things worse

Communicate a desire to help

Defuse using verbal skills

Use the Safety Plan

Evaluate and process all incidents

Use your own good judgement

# AWARE



Assess

Where? What? Who? When?

Ask and Approach

Respond

Evaluate

# Defining Violence

Violence may be defined as...

- Behaviors by individuals that intentionally threaten, seek to cause or cause actual harm on others
  - The harm can be physical or psychological.
  - The harm may be caused to intentional targets or innocent bystanders

# OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE



# Situational Factors

- What are some of the circumstances of living with a mental health concern and/or co-occurring substance use issue, in the shelter system, that could contribute to the person losing control or feeling victimized?



# Risk Factors

- Risk factors may be biological, psychological and social/environmental
- Factors are inter-related
- Any given variable in isolation is less significant than the factors in relation to another

# RISK FACTORS

Symptoms

Diagnosis

History of  
Violence

Substance Abuse



Age / Gender

Family  
Background

Neuro/biological  
Factors

Other Social  
Factors

# Factors That Mitigate Risk

- Involvement with treatment
- Taking medication as prescribed
- Involvement with self-help groups
- Employment
- Strong social supports, including family, friends and peers
- Outreach services
- Monitoring (e.g. clinical, criminal justice)

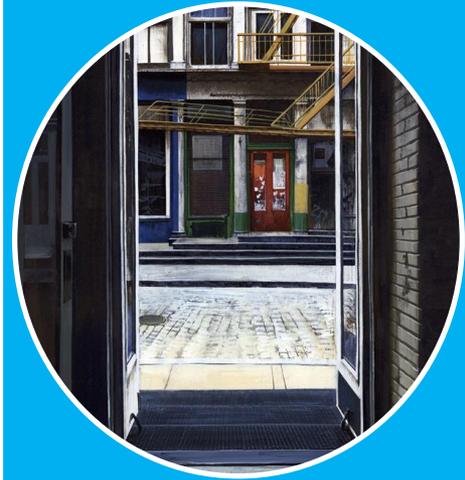
# Summary

- Many sources of risk exist in the community
- We must recognize our own response to violent threats
- Anyone has the potential to lose control depending on the circumstances

# **Safety Assessment**

# Assess

- Remember Rule # 2 Maintain safe space
- Make first observations from a safe distance



Where  
Exits?  
Help?



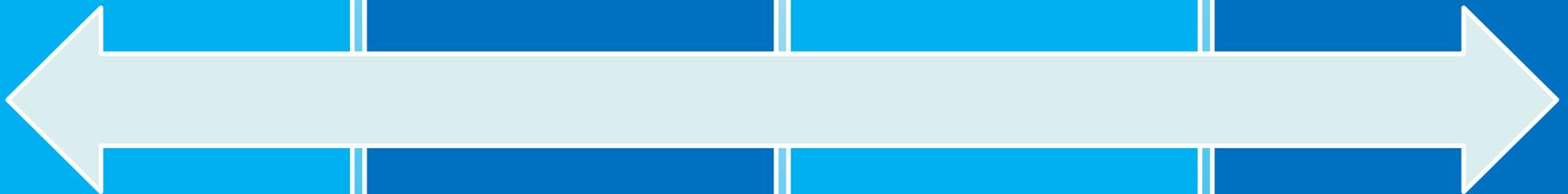
Who  
Else is there?  
Needs to  
leave?



What  
Potential  
weapons?  
Relationship  
with person?  
Level of  
intensity?



When  
To ask for  
help?  
To look for  
back up?  
Walk away?

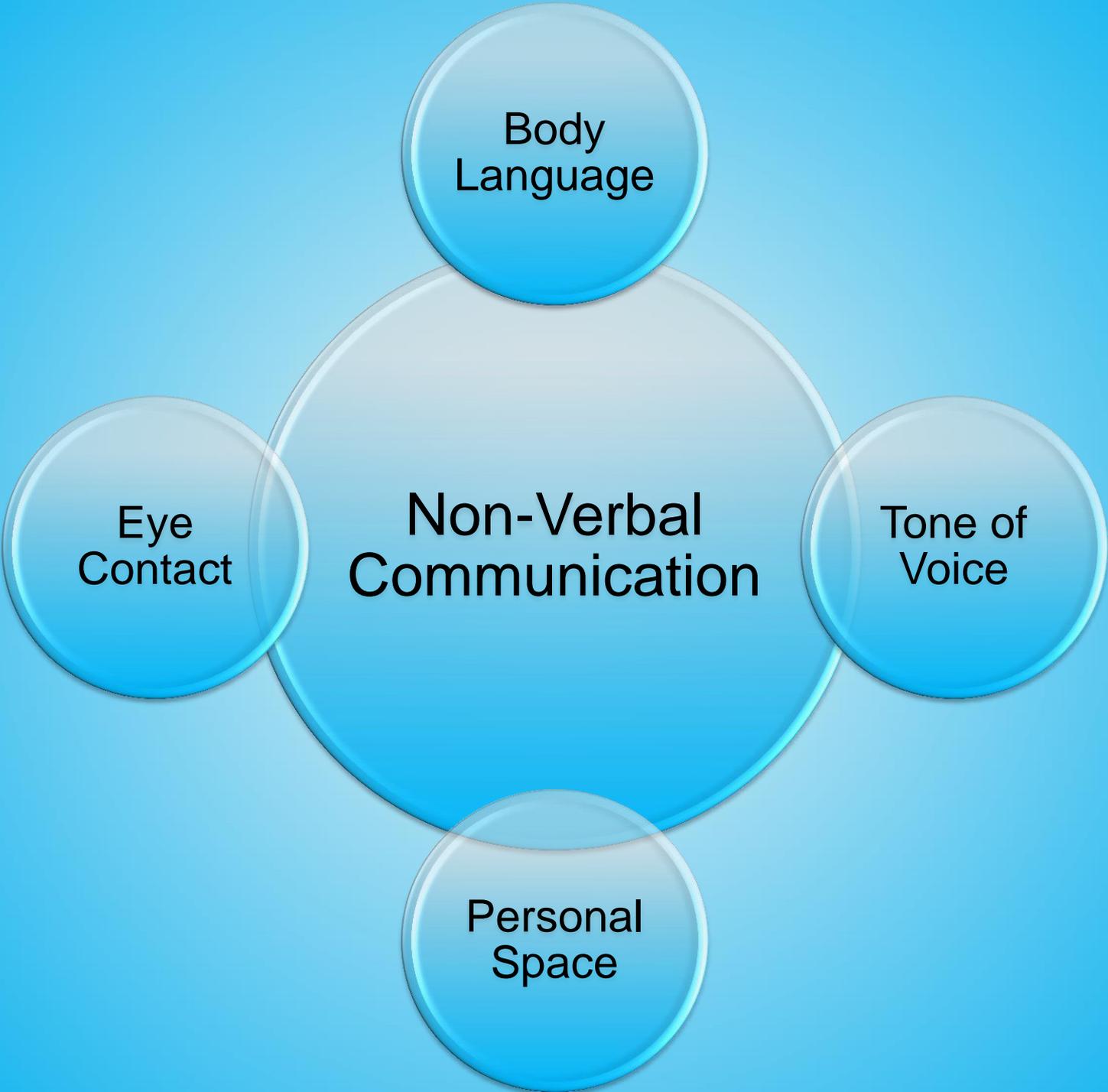


# Ask

- Ask for help
- Ask yourself
  - Afraid?
  - Angry?

# Person in Situation

- Behavior in context
- RULE NO. 3 – AWARE
- RULE NO. 4 – TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS
- RULE NO. 5 – TRY NOT TO MAKE THINGS WORSE!
- Assessing the Person – Observable Indicators/Cues and Clues



Body  
Language

Eye  
Contact

Non-Verbal  
Communication

Tone of  
Voice

Personal  
Space

# Non-Verbal Communication Body Language

- Over half of all communication is done through body language/facial expression.
- Body language and facial expression may convey sadness, hopelessness, ambivalence, apathy, fear, or anger.
- Clenched fists, pacing, agitation, crossed arms, etc., may suggest the possibility of violence before it occurs.
- If the individual's words do not match nonverbal behaviors, careful attention should be paid at what is being communicated.

# Tone of Voice

- An individual's tone may convey ambivalence, sadness, anger, hostility, etc.
- Our tone of voice is just as critical, a harsh, hard, or commanding tone may convey apathy and insensitivity
- Although firm and clear directions should be given, whenever possible, these directions be given with a general tone of understanding and empathy

# Personal Space

- Safety must be taken in consideration when determining the appropriate and safe distance during an encounter
- The physical distance maintained may either escalate or de-escalate an encounter
- The level of personal distance can vary from culture to culture, and from individual to individual
- Close personal space (family members or close friends) is 1.5-4ft. Social distance (an acquaintance or someone you don't know well) is 4-12ft.

# Eye Contact

- Eye contact on the part of the person in crisis may convey mistrust, anger, or hostility.
- Appropriate eye contact will help engage the individual and can communicate a sense of respect, understanding, and empathy.
- Inappropriate eye contact, such as staring, raised eyebrows, etc. can convey disrespect, or a threatening and intimidating attitude.

# **Assessing the Probability of Violence**

**What questions would you ask to assess the potential for violence?**

# Assessing the Potential for Violence

- Does the person have a history of violence?
- Is there ongoing violence or evidence of violence?
- Has the person made threats of violence?
- Is there a weapon on the scene?
- Is the person barricaded?
- Does the person have hostages?

# Evidence of Violence

- Is there ongoing violence?
- The situation may be dangerous even if violence is not directed at people
  - Violence which is clearly directed at a specific person presents a more serious situation
- Is anyone involved in the situation already injured?
- Has the person attempted suicide?

# Potential for Violence

- Is there a weapon at the scene? Note any weapons even if that weapon is not immediately involved in the situation.
- Is the person barricaded in a room or house?
  - Are there pills, weapons or other dangerous items in the room?
  - Does the room have any windows?

# Potential for Violence

- Is the person holding a hostage?
- Is there a history of violence?
  - Arrest for violent crimes,
  - Hospitalizations for dangerous behavior
  - Spouse or child abuse
  - Self reported violent behavior

Are indicators that the person may be more likely to resort to violence, especially if the current circumstances are similar to those in which the past violence occurred.

**The best predictor of violence is a known history of violent behavior**

# Potential for Violence

- Is the person intoxicated?
  - The effects of alcohol or other substances reduces inhibitions, including those which might normally suppress violence
- Are there threats of violence?
  - A well defined plan and the presence of delusions which support violence present a serious situation

**Current alcohol or substance use is highly correlated with the potential for violence**

# Respond

- Use knowledge and skills
- Use self

# Evaluate

- Damage
  - Personal injury
  - Property
  - Psychological injury (to whom?)
- Policy and staff skill
- Restoration
  - Safety, health, therapeutic relationships

# Culture and Safety

- How can lack of cultural competence affect safety?
- What can be done to avoid problems?

# Cultural Influences that Can Affect Safety

- Personal space
- Autonomy – need for
- Privacy – letting outsiders in
- Expression of emotions (anger)
- Respect – how demonstrated
- Authority / Gender Issues?
- Interpretation of behavior? Unusual?
- Beliefs about mental illness

# **Intervening in a Crisis**

## **MODULE 4**

# General Considerations

- In this section we will focus on some of the general and broad considerations of safety regarding interacting with people that are angry, afraid, or losing control

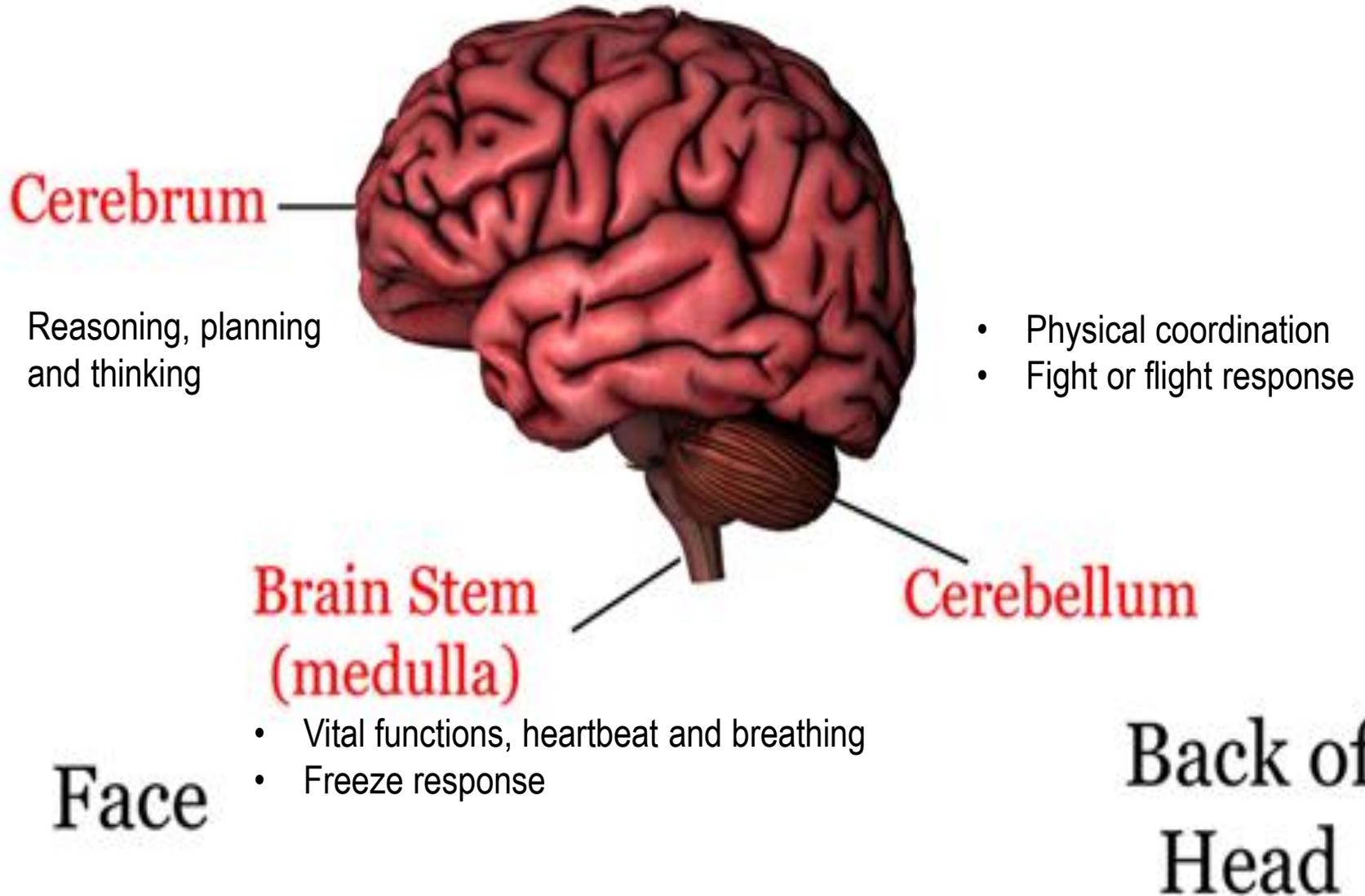
# Active Listening

- 80/20 rule
  - Listen at least 80% of the time
- Use open-ended questions
  - Who, What, Where, When & How?
  - Why? Isn't always a productive question.

Remember crisis may be precipitated by...

- The onset or relapse into a mental health condition
- Alcohol or substance use
- A medical condition
- Situational stress

# Parts of the Brain



# During Crisis...

- The person's ability to think, reason and plan are compromised.
- They are left with survival strategies:
  - Fight – Flight - Freeze
- Empathetic communication will be helpful in defusing crisis.

# Effective Communication

- Passing information between one person and another that is mutually understood.
  - Can be challenging with those that are upset
  - It's important **not to rush**
- Majority of communication is non-verbal

# Benefit of Time

Emotions



Rational Thought

Time



Slow down: Time is on our side. Emotions subside with the passage of time. The longer the situation proceeds without violence, the more likely it will end peacefully.

# Defusing the Crisis

- C – Connect
- A – Affective empathy
- L – Listen
- M – Mirroring or Matching

## Making the Connection

- Attending – to the person's words, voice and body language
- Accurate restatement - of the person's essential message content
- Accurate Reflection – of the person's moment to moment feeling

# Affective Empathy

- Empathy means to accurately and sensitively understand the other person's experience, feelings and concerns.
- If you are being empathetic you will be able to accurately sense the person's feelings as if they were his or her own without becoming lost in the other person's concerns.

## Connecting - Words and phrases that will not be helpful...



## **Connecting - Phrases that can be helpful**

- Slow down, what you have to say is really important to me and I want to be able to listen.
- I can see you are having a difficult time, I am here to help.
- I am going to walk with you through this.

# Empathic stems

- "What a day you've had"
- "Maybe you feel...."
- "Sounds like a \_\_\_ day"
- "That is a lot to deal with"
- "That is the last thing you wanted"
- "That's confusing when that happens"
- "It's hard for you to know what to do..."
- "Right now it feels like there is no hope"
- "You wish things were different"

# Listening

- Focus total mental power into the other person's words
  - Exclude other distractions and concentrate on the person
- Fully attend to all of the verbal and non-verbal messages
  - Attending to what the person is doing is as important as what the person is saying. When you put the two together, they tell you a great deal about how congruent the person is.
  - Congruency means that what the person is doing, saying and feeling fits together and makes sense in the given moment in the given situation

# Listening

- Sensing the other's readiness to be engaged:
  - By asking open-ended questions such as “How?” or “What?” we allow the person to tell his or her tale which gives us information.
  - In the initial stages of the intervention, stay away from “Why?” questions. “Why?” questions put the person on the defensive.

# Listening

If an individual isn't responding:

- Start with close-ended (yes/no) questions
- Move to simple multiple-choice
- Then consider open-ended
  - What happened today?

# Mirroring

- Paraphrase
  - Restating the information in your own words
    - “So what you’ve told me is that... and you feel....  
Do I have that right?”
- Convey Empathy
  - Not sympathy

# De-Escalation – Step by Step

- **Listen** for the emotion
- **Label** the emotion (“You sound angry, frustrated etc...”)
- **Wait** for a response (“Yes, I am angry, sad, frustrated”)
- **Respond** (“I can hear in your voice.”)
- **Ask** (“What happened today to make you so angry, sad, frustrated?”)
- **Listen** without judgment
- **Respond** (“I hear you.”)

# Worker Focus

- Self awareness: what are you likely to do?
- Directed behavior
  - Back off?
  - My needs?
  - Managing emotions
  - “Recycle”
- Communicate a desire to help

# Recipient Focus

- Active Partnerships
  - Roles & responsibilities all parties
- Integrity and Respect
  - Polite requests
  - Saving face
  - Focus on the person

# Approach

- Strength – based approach
  - Use supportive language
  - Focus on person's strength/abilities
  - Focus on positive
- Problem solving
  - Not too soon
  - Take your time/follow the process

# **Closing**

## **MODULE 5**

# Planning Points to Consider

- What changes will be necessary to develop safety routines in your workplace?
- What items will you add to your safety Toolkit?

# Value Safety

- The principles of safety training can help reduce incidents of violence and victimization
- A value of safety is imperative
- Practice, practice, practice

- Questions/Answers/Discussion

Thank you!