

# BYSTANDER ENGAGEMENT



NEW SOUTH WALES

Bystanders, family and friends involved in or observing an incident may behave a certain way, including emotional distress, grief, and or aggression. The way you engage with bystanders can have a positive influence on their actions in the moment and will assist them with processing the situation. The goal of engaging with bystanders is to prevent harm from occurring to them, de-escalate emotions and allow you to perform your role.

## Competent Mindset

Consider your role and the role of other SLSNSW members. You have a responsibility to deploy your technical skills and knowledge to the best of your ability in the given situation. However, there are many variables at any scene, and you can only operate within your sphere of control.

Maintain a 'care not carry' mindset – you are there to care for people involved in an incident but not to carry them with you.

## Compassion

You are trained in emergency response, and you are dealing with vulnerable people, sometimes having their worst day. You have an opportunity to engage with bystanders in a way that recognises this impact and treats them with respect and empathy. You deal with these situations regularly and become comfortable with them, but your bystanders don't. They are scared and may feel out of control.

Consider, if this was your family member, how would you want them treated?

## Establishing Boundaries

You are only responsible for things within your control/influence. You can perform your technical role to the best of your ability and there may still be an undesired outcome.

While engaging with bystanders in a compassionate way, you need to be able to walk away at the end of the job and not take that person's story with you.

Utilising boundaries whilst engaging with bystanders can include:

- Clarifying your role and the role of other SLSNSW members involved – what you can do and what you can't do.
- Letting them know where they can access further help - refer to GP, Lifeline etc.
- Not getting involved in the details of the family, the extended family, whether they had children etc. if it doesn't serve a purpose to your role.

- Providing information, and being factual, honest, sincere, empathic.
- Remembering that you are not their friend, you are a professional, you can do this professionally and empathically without taking responsibility for it.

## Redirecting people

Try to direct people towards 'helpful' tasks that get them away from the immediate scene, such as:

- Gathering their belongings or packing a bag for the rescued person to take to hospital, if required.
- Preparing a list of medications the rescued person is on.
- Getting a drink of water for others.
- Taking small children away and distracting them, if appropriate.
- Managing other people who may be making the scene more difficult (e.g. taking the hysterical family member into another area and sitting with them).
- Contacting other people who may be able to support the rescued person and/or their family (e.g. a supportive family friend).

## De-escalation using CALM model

The CALM de-escalation model is a structured approach designed to help Duty Officers and Branch Peer Support Officers to effectively de-escalate situations involving distressed or agitated bystanders while promoting a sense of safety and trust.

CALM stands for:

- **Content:** What information you need to communicate
- **Approach:** How you communicate
- **Location:** Where you have the conversation or where do you need them to be
- **Manner:** How you appear to others

Throughout the interaction, it's essential for to prioritise safety for both you and the individual/s you're assisting. If the situation escalates or becomes unsafe, be prepared to call for backup or additional resources as needed.

Prioritise maintaining a calm, respectful, and empathetic demeanour throughout the de-escalation process. By avoiding behaviours that can exacerbate the individual's distress or agitation, you can effectively manage challenging situations while promoting safety and cooperation.

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## CALM DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUE

	DO	AVOID
<p><b>CONTENT</b> What information you need to communicate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce yourself, make eye contact and ask their name.</li> <li>Explain your role and the steps taken and next actions of the SLSNSW team involved in the incident.</li> <li>Consider any potential sensitivities and ask for permission.</li> <li>Convey an intention to help the rescued person.</li> <li>Establish clear boundaries and limits.</li> <li>Reassure them you and the team are doing all you can.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assuming others know your role.</li> <li>Jumping to conclusions too quickly.</li> <li>Predicting the outcome or providing statistics.</li> <li>Making promises or commitments outside your control.</li> </ul>
<p><b>APPROACH</b> How to communicate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate in a clear and concise manner.</li> <li>Display confident but non-threatening body language.</li> <li>Speak in a calm firm voice, slow pace of speech.</li> <li>Paraphrase or reflect back what they are saying (active listening).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being too technical or using SLSNSW specific terminology.</li> <li>Arguing or interrupting.</li> <li>Negative body language and tone of voice.</li> <li>Being defensive or aggressive.</li> </ul>
<p><b>LOCATION</b> Where you have the conversation or where you need them to be</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct people towards 'helpful' tasks that remove them from the immediate scene and aid as a distraction.</li> <li>Try to engage at eye level and maintain face to face communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Telling them to "get out of the way".</li> <li>Barking orders or speaking harshly.</li> <li>Telling people what not to do.</li> <li>Getting involved in the details of the family.</li> </ul>
<p><b>MANNER</b> How to appear to others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate respect and empathy.</li> <li>Appear calm and self-assured.</li> <li>Ignore insults and avoid being judgmental.</li> <li>Adapt your communication to meet the situation or individual.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Saying "I know how you feel..." (everyone is different, you don't know how they feel).</li> <li>Saying "I'm sorry we couldn't save him/her" (This wasn't your fault).</li> </ul>