

	<b>HARRISONBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT</b> General Orders	<b>Policy Number:</b> 422
	<b>Chapter:</b> Field Operations	<b>Total Pages:</b> 5
	<b>Section:</b> Crisis Intervention Incidents	<b>Issue Date:</b> 07/02/2021
	<b>Issued By:</b> Kelley Warner, Chief of Police	<b>Effective Date:</b> 07/02/2021
	<b>Replaces:</b> All General Orders Previously Issued Relative to Subject	
<b>VALEAC Standards:</b>		

## A. POLICY AND PURPOSE

This policy provides guidelines for interacting with those who may be experiencing a mental health or emotional crisis. Interaction with such individuals has the potential for miscommunication and violence. It often requires an officer to make difficult judgments about a person's mental state and intent in order to effectively and legally interact with the individual. The Harrisonburg Police Department is committed to providing a consistently high level of service to all members of the community and recognizes that persons in crisis may benefit from intervention. The Department will collaborate, where feasible, with mental health professionals to develop an overall intervention strategy to guide its members' interactions with those experiencing a mental health crisis. This is to ensure equitable and safe treatment of all involved.

## B. ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

All employees are expected to fully comply with the guidelines and timelines set forth in this policy. Responsibility rests with the supervisor to ensure that any violations of policy are investigated and appropriate training, counseling and/or disciplinary action is initiated. This directive is for internal use only and does not enlarge an employee's civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

## C. DEFINITIONS

**Person in crisis** - A person whose level of distress or mental health symptoms have exceeded the person's internal ability to manage his/her behavior or emotions. A crisis can be precipitated by any number of things, including an increase in the symptoms of mental illness despite treatment compliance; noncompliance with treatment, including a failure to take prescribed medications appropriately; or any other circumstance or event that causes the person to engage in erratic, disruptive or dangerous behavior that may be accompanied by impaired judgment.

## **D. SIGNS**

Employees should be alert to any of the following possible signs of mental health issues or crises:

- a. A known history of mental illness
- b. Threats of or attempted suicide
- c. Loss of memory
- d. Incoherence, disorientation, or slow response
- e. Delusions, hallucinations, perceptions unrelated to reality or grandiose ideas
- f. Depression, pronounced feelings of hopelessness or uselessness, extreme sadness or guilt
- g. Social withdrawal
- h. Manic or impulsive behavior, extreme agitation or lack of control
- i. Lack of fear
- j. Anxiety, aggression, rigidity, inflexibility or paranoia

Employees should be aware that this list is not exhaustive. The presence or absence of any of these signs should not be treated as proof of the presence or absence of a mental health issue or crisis.

## **E. MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND CRISIS INTERVENTION STAKEHOLDERS**

The Chief of Police should designate an appropriate Commander to collaborate with mental health professionals to develop an education and response protocol. It should include a list of community resources to guide department interaction with those who may be suffering from mental illness or who appear to be in a mental health crisis ([VA Code § 9.1-187](#)).

## **F. RESPONDING OFFICERS**

Safety is a priority for first responders. It is important to recognize that individuals under the influence of alcohol, drugs or both may exhibit symptoms that are similar to those of a person in a mental health crisis. These individuals may still present a serious threat to officers; such a threat should be addressed with reasonable tactics. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to limit an officer's authority to use reasonable force when interacting with a person in crisis.

Officers using discretion are reminded that mental health issues, mental health crises and unusual behavior are not criminal offenses. Individuals may benefit from treatment as opposed to incarceration.

An officer responding to a call involving a person in crisis should:

- a. Promptly assess the situation independent of reported information and make a preliminary determination regarding whether a mental health crisis may be a factor.
- b. Attempt to determine if weapons are present or available.
- c. Request available backup officers and specialized resources as deemed necessary (such as an available MICT officer) and, if it is reasonably believed that the person is in a crisis situation, use conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques to stabilize the incident as appropriate.

- d. If feasible, and without compromising safety, turn off flashing lights, bright lights or sirens.
- e. Take into account the person's mental and emotional state and potential inability to understand commands or to appreciate the consequences of his/her action or inaction, as perceived by the officer.
- f. Secure the scene and clear the immediate area as necessary.
- g. Employ tactics to preserve the safety of all participants.
- h. Determine the nature of any crime.
- i. Request a supervisor, as warranted.
- j. Evaluate any available information that might assist in determining cause or motivation for the person's actions or stated intentions.
- k. If circumstances reasonably permit, consider and employ alternatives to force.

## **G. DE-ESCALATION**

Officers should consider that taking no action or passively monitoring the situation may be the most reasonable response to a mental health crisis.

Once it is determined that a situation is a mental health crisis and immediate safety concerns have been addressed, responding members should be aware of the following considerations and should generally:

- Evaluate safety conditions.
- Introduce themselves and attempt to obtain the person's name.
- Be patient, polite, calm and courteous and avoid overreacting.
- Speak and move slowly and in a non-threatening manner.
- Moderate the level of direct eye contact.
- Remove distractions or disruptive people from the area.
- Demonstrate active listening skills (i.e., summarize the person's verbal communication).
- Provide for sufficient avenues of retreat or escape should the situation become volatile.

Responding officers generally should not:

- Use stances or tactics that can be interpreted as aggressive.
- Allow others to interrupt or engage the person.
- Corner a person who is not believed to be armed, violent or suicidal.
- Argue, speak with a raised voice or use threats to obtain compliance.

## **H. CALL FOR SERVICE DETAILS**

When responding to an incident that may involve mental illness or a mental health crisis, the officer should request that the communicator provide critical information as it becomes available. This includes:

- a. Whether the person relies on drugs or medication or may have failed to take his/her medication.
- b. Whether there have been prior incidents or suicide threats/attempts, and whether there has been previous police response.
- c. Contact information for a treating physician or mental health professional.

Additional resources and a supervisor should be requested as warranted.

## **I. SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

A supervisor should respond to the scene involving any significant interaction with a person in crisis (suicide attempt, threats of violence, weapons, etc.) or when requested by the responding officer(s). The responding supervisor should:

- a. Attempt to secure appropriate and sufficient resources.
- b. Closely monitor any use of force, including the use of restraints, and ensure that those subjected to the use of force are provided with timely access to medical care (see the Handcuffing and Restraints Policy).
- c. Absent an imminent threat to the public, consider strategic disengagement. This may include removing or reducing law enforcement resources or engaging in passive monitoring.
- d. Ensure that all reports are completed and that incident documentation includes appropriate terminology and language.
- e. Evaluate whether a critical incident stress management debriefing for involved members is warranted.

## **J. CIVILIAN INTERACTION WITH PEOPLE IN CRISIS**

Civilian or clerical employees may be required to interact with persons in crisis in an administrative capacity, such as dispatching, records request and animal control issues.

- a. Employees should treat all individuals equally and with dignity and respect.
- b. If an employee believes that he/she is interacting with a person in crisis, he/she should proceed patiently and in a calm manner.
- c. Employees should be aware and understand that the person may make unusual or bizarre claims or requests.

If a person's behavior makes the employee feel unsafe, if the person is or becomes disruptive or violent, or if the person acts in such a manner as to cause the employee to believe that the person may be harmful to him/herself or others, an officer should be promptly summoned to provide assistance.

## **K. EVALUATION**

The Commander designated to coordinate the crisis intervention strategy for this department should ensure that a thorough review and analysis of the department response to these incidents is conducted annually. The report will not include identifying information pertaining to any involved individuals, officers or incidents and will be submitted to the Chief of Police through the chain of command.

## **L. TRAINING**

In coordination with the mental health community and appropriate stakeholders, the Department will develop and provide comprehensive education and training to all department employees to enable them

to effectively interact with persons in crisis. Officers specifically assigned to a crisis intervention team shall successfully complete training as required by the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) ([VA Code § 9.1-188](#)).

All Harrisonburg Police Department officers will attend Crisis Intervention Training (CIT)