



# MANAGING INTENSE EMOTIONS: TIPS FOR DISASTER SERVICE WORKERS DURING AN EMERGENCY OR DISASTER

An emergency or disaster may be especially stressful for people who lack access to important resources. They may be fearing for their safety while being separated from their support systems. These tips can help you support those in crisis effectively, compassionately, and confidently.



## Communicate Calmly and Respectfully

Speak slowly at a normal or slightly quiet volume. Use please and thank you and other strength-based, positive language. Practice active listening.



## Be Mindful of Body Language

Make sure you are facing the person with an open stance and making appropriate eye contact.



## Use Concrete Questions

Ask specific, close-ended questions and explain why you are asking that question. Keep language simple and use brief phrases. Ask what might be helpful and let them be in control of their behavior. Don't force a solution.

*Sometimes when people are feeling anxious or frightened they may shut down or feel frustrated or irritated. **If the person becomes agitated...***

### THEY MAY:

### YOU CAN RESPOND BY:

Challenge or Question Your Guidance

Repeating your question and explaining why you are asking it. Allow time for the person to think before answering. Answer their questions calmly.

Refuse to Follow Your Suggestions

Giving the person time to think about your request or regain control—do not assert control. If needed, restructure your request in another way while remaining professional.

Lose Control and Become Verbally Agitated

Providing the person space and letting them know that you may need assistance from a colleague or supervisor to help them.

Become Threatening or Intimidating

Stepping back to give yourself some physical distance from the person. Seek assistance from a colleague or supervisor and **call 911** if in immediate danger.

For more information, visit [pmhp.ucla.edu/guides](https://pmhp.ucla.edu/guides)