# Crisis Response and Intervention Training (CRIT): Tips for Trainers

The Crisis Response and Intervention Training (CRIT) is designed to prepare law enforcement to respond effectively to individuals with behavioral health conditions (which include mental health conditions and substance use disorders) and/or intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who are experiencing a crisis or at risk of experiencing a crisis. The training is designed for sworn officers—but the participation of dispatchers, 911 call-takers, corrections/detention officers, probation/parole officers, fire and emergency medical services, and members of a mobile crisis team, is encouraged. CRIT is designed to be co-taught by law enforcement trainers and behavioral health or IDD subject matter experts. This document integrates adult learning theory[1] to provide trainers with practical tips for training law enforcement and includes specific examples from the CRIT curriculum.

## Law Enforcement as a Training Audience

A key component of being an effective trainer is understanding how the audience may learn best. Law enforcement officers have unique training needs. A typical day for law enforcement does not involve sitting in a classroom for long periods of time. They confront complex, high-stress situations and work within a distinctive operational culture. Experience has shown that a trainer's willingness to engage with their law enforcement audience, paired with their own first-hand experience, has fostered mutual respect and credibility, leading to community-based connections after the training. Understanding *how* to best communicate knowledge and experience to law enforcement is vital to creating an effective training environment.

## General CRIT Tips for Trainers[2,3]

- Acknowledge how important police officers' role is in the community, the unique position they are in to make a significant and positive impact on people's lives, and the real challenges officers face working with the public on a daily basis.
- If instructors have law enforcement family members, mention it as a way to build trust and credibility with officers in the training room.

1 Malcolm S. Knowles, 1970, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education; Andragogy versus Pedagogy,* New York, NY: The Association Press.

2 Stephen Lieb, Fall 1991, *Principles of Adult Learning,* Phoenix, AZ: Vision – South Mountain Community College, retrieved from https://petsalliance.org/sites/petsalliance.org/files/Lieb%201991%20Adult%20Learning%20Principles.pdf.

3 Cindy E. Hmelo-Silver, 2004, "Problem-Based Learning: What and How Do Students Learn?" *Educational Psychology Review,* 16(3): 235–266.

- Be familiar with any biases you may have about law enforcement and, as much as possible, leave them at the door before training.
- The modules in CRIT are designed to build upon each other, each adding to the knowledge base and skill set of officers. Instructors should review the entire curriculum in advance and identify opportunities to draw links between modules.

## Key Elements for Effective Training[4]

🔑 Connect information being taught to practical use for officers.

→ **Tip:** Articulate how the information being taught will benefit them.

→ **Tip:** Center learning around critical thinking and discussion of real-world challenges.

- Example: Highlight how learning effective de-escalation strategies for crisis response can improve safety for both officers and community members.

🔑 Provide consistent recognition to officers when they demonstrate effective learned skills and behaviors.

→ **Tip:** Give feedback that affirms desired training outcomes.

- Example: Acknowledge when they use person-first language.

→ **Tip:** Give constructive feedback that corrects undesired training outcomes.

- Example: Provide an example of person-first language to help officers modify their phrasing when they don't use person-first language (e.g., person living with schizophrenia versus schizophrenic person).

🔑 Emphasize why the information being taught is important and how officers can apply the information (e.g., describing a trauma response and when and how to apply that knowledge [e.g., what de-escalation tactic to employ]).

→ **Tip:** Ask officers to practice what they have learned throughout the modules, not just at the end.

- Example: Show the video "Officer Interaction with a Teen with Autism" in Module 7 and ask officers how they would approach the situation in the video based on what they've learned.

🔑 Apply the learned information to a new setting.

→ **Tip:** Connect new information and concepts to knowledge officers already have and view as beneficial to their work.

- Example: Leverage officers' pre-existing knowledge and skills (e.g., knowledge from mental health or Crisis Intervention Team training) to enhance what they learn during CRIT.

→ **Tip:** Confirm officers can implement learned skills/behaviors.

- Example: In Module 12, *Legal and Policy Topics*, engage officers in a discussion on how to use the knowledge learned from past modules to brainstorm disability accommodations they may implement going forward.

→ **Tip:** Affirm officers will avoid behaviors they are taught are ineffective.

- Example: In Module 16, *De-Escalation Communication Skills*, during training scenarios, emphasize that officers should use de-escalation skills that reduce sensory stimulation (e.g., turning off lights and sirens on their patrol vehicle before approaching the person in crisis).

4 Stephen Lieb, Fall 1991, *Principles of Adult Learning,* Phoenix, AZ: Vision – South Mountain Community College, retrieved from https://petsalliance.org/sites/petsalliance.org/files/Lieb%201991%20Adult%20Learning%20Principles.pdf.

## CRIT Activities Geared Towards Engagement and Interaction

- Role-playing scenarios and vignettes related to mental health conditions and intellectual and developmental disabilities (Modules 7, 16, 17, 18)
- Understanding Mental Health Conditions and Mental Illnesses, Hearing Voices drawing activity (Module 4)
- Understanding Mental Health Conditions and Mental Illnesses, Case Scenarios (Module 4)
- Module 4, Trainers Guide, group activity on mental illness symptoms
  - → Other examples: Brainstorming activities, facilitated discussions, problem-solving, case-based instruction, role-play, and mock scenarios
- **Tip:** Debrief from activities to aid self-reflection. Officers can discuss their experiences or what they learned with the group by sharing viewpoints and explaining their thoughts and decision-making processes.

## Key Takeaways

**Recommended**

- → Ensuring the learning environment is in a space where officers can ask questions and voice their opinions without fear of judgment.
- → Framing the training around the relevance to officers' jobs or day-to-day tasks and the situations they may encounter.
- → Using active and engaging learning activities, especially in content or lecture-heavy modules.
- → Providing examples of when incidents had a positive outcome.

**Not recommended**

- → Discounting officers' existing knowledge and life experience.
- → Focusing solely on information memorization.
- → Limiting the way officers engage in the classroom or not allowing time for meaningful engagement with responses to questions.
- → Focusing only on negative incidents.

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