M1 Basic MAB®

BOOK TWO - SAFETY COMMUNICATION

2

Student Workbook
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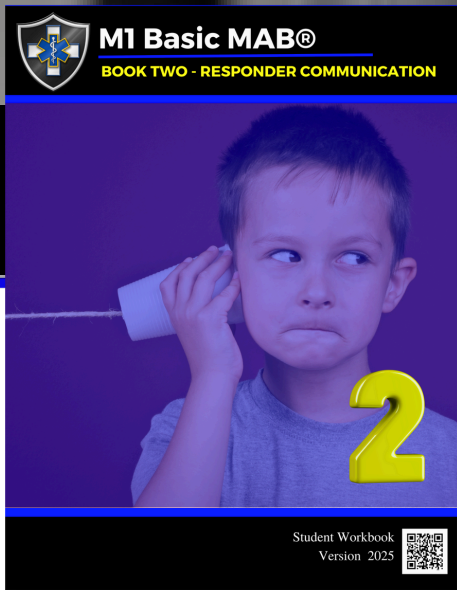
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Student Workbook
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Communication can be the deciding factor between escalation and resolution in a crisis. When emotions run high and uncertainty dominates, the way information is delivered—its tone, timing, and clarity—can either build trust or deepen chaos.

M1 Basic MAB®
BOOK TWO - RESPONDER COMMUNICATION

Student Workbook
Version 2025

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MAB Book Two...
Professional MAB Instruction & Development Tools

M1 Basic MAB:
MTAC Communication Fundamentals

This lesson is on the MAB Fundamentals of Tactically Advanced Communication (MTAC). Here we will learn the keys to effective communication to help us become effective in conflict resolution...

Communication involves more than just speaking and listening. It includes nonverbal cues, active listening, and clarity in expressing ideas. Mastering these basics can help you avoid misunderstandings and foster a positive work environment.

Some of the Benefits of Advanced Communication Skills Include the following...

- Increased General Safety
- Increased Levels of Responder Professionalism
- Decreased Customer complaints
- Reduction in liability
- An Increase in Individual and Team morale/ confidence
- Reduction in workplace stress levels
- Increased awareness and development of Professional Crisis Response Traits

What is the foundation of basic Communication?

- Communication is a **TWO-WAY** process.
- Communication is both the **SENDING** and **RECEIVING** of messages.
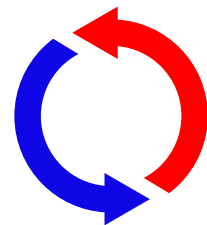
Let's take a look at the differing types of communication....

Auditory - Hearing, Speaking, or Auditory Language.

Visual - Seeing, visualizing, visual messages, or body language.

Kinesthetic - Physical Elements of communication

The Goal of the Professional is to encourage the development of **Voluntary** Cooperation, Collaboration, or Compliance.

Always mindful of the desire to avoid using force and to provide support in the least restrictive manner available.

Safety Assessment:

What are some key suggestions you have to help encourage voluntary cooperation?

The MTAC Responder Communication Principles...

When following the MTAC Response Principles, it is important to focus on how we deliver the messages we send...

1. **Respond, don't React**: Responders and the teams they lead need to seek alternatives to reacting to threats and start responding to the developing situation.

2. **Keep Communication Moving:** Often, the decision to use force is based on the verbal interactions we maintain with the person in crisis. These interactions help define the level of imminent danger to oneself and/or others. Keeping this communication exchange in motion increases our ability to de-escalate and to precisely respond to a dangerous crisis.

3. **Recognize the benefits of differences:** Differences—whether cultural, linguistic, psychological, or experiential—can actually be a powerful asset in crisis response.

The MTAC Response Principles (cont.)...

4. Acknowledge the effort and the intent of the messages being sent. Acknowledging effort means recognizing the time, energy, and intention someone puts into communication - even if the outcome isn't perfect. It's about saying, "I see you, and you matter."

5. Don't be afraid to explore different approaches. Trying different approaches to communication is one of the most effective ways to build stronger connections, resolve misunderstandings, and adapt to diverse people and situations.

6. Try to be more empathetic and less sympathetic, helps us understand others' emotions, leading to deeper, more meaningful approach. Empathy builds trust and reduces conflict in personal and professional settings.

7. Seek to find and use Positive Reinforcement. Positive reinforcement in crisis situations isn't just helpful—it can be transformative. When emotions run high and escalate, the strategic use of encouragement and affirmation can shift the entire dynamic.

Tips in utilizing Framing during Crisis Communication...

Framing isn't just about logistics—it's about language, tone, and intention. A well-framed response says: "You're not alone. You're not broken. You're supported."

Framing a behavioral crisis response effectively means creating a structured, compassionate, and person-centered approach that prioritizes safety, dignity, and recovery. Here's how professionals and organizations typically frame these responses:

- Do not hurry the client...

- Break a task into small parts...

- Use visual cues to communicate...

- Provide slow, brief, straightforward instructions...

- Use direct, consistent communication...

- Focus on the individual's needs, preferences, and strengths.

- Avoid punitive or coercive measures; instead, empower the person in crisis.

- Recognize that many behavioral crises stem from trauma.

- Try to foster responses that avoid re-traumatization and promote psychological safety.

- De-escalation First

- Use calming techniques, active listening, and non-threatening body language.

- Reinforce positive behaviors and offer choices to restore a sense of control.

- Where possible, use a team approach...

"If you want to see peace, you need to be peace...the individual in crisis is depending on you to mirror calm, speak confidence and hope, and that you are to help."

The Traits of a Professional Communicator...

As we develop our problem-solving skills, we recognize the traits of a well cultivated thinker. We seek to not just solve the immediacy of the situation, but to understand the depth and the cause and effect of the variables. Prevention of the next occurrence is often in the details of the current situation...it's good practice to...

- Raise vital questions and identify problems.

- Gather and assess relevant information and think open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought.

- As a professional communicator, we spend honest effort on ensuring we are sending messages appropriately...

- To understand another person, we must be willing to be influenced. When we are open, we allow people to release their fixed positions and consider alternatives...

- When we seek to understand, it allows us to act from a position of knowledge, and by trying to understand, we gain influence in the relationship.

- Use Positive Language. Try to avoid language that is negative in its connotation.

- Avoid using "But," "Can't," or "Don't." This negates the first part of the statement and brings confusion to communication.

- As we respond, can we correct mistakes with a supportive tone?

"Professional communicators are the ones who turn words into results."

The Perils of Reactionary Thinking...

Sometimes we can be caught off guard and slip into reactionary thinking. Problem-solving through reactionary thinking can be very difficult, as emotions can override logic.

Let's review some of the contributors towards reactive thinking:

- Reactive thinking is crisis-based thinking, coming up with solutions after problems develop.

- A reactive thinker often spends too much of his time fighting fires.

- Crisis-driven reactive thinking may be more prone to feeling stressed.

- Circumstances easily blindside a reactive thinker.

As we navigate conflicts away from reactionary thinking, we should seek ways to help foster critical thinking in the dialog. Critical thinking as a mindset is essential to the negotiation process. It helps to steer response away from reactive thinking and helps to mitigate the elements of escalation....

> **Reactive thinking can not see past limited options, has a tendency to focus on the threat versus the resolution, and has a difficult time creating a plan of approach.**

> **Critical thinking creates options, determines methods for effective communication, and can recognize and prioritize the developments of crisis variables.**

As we seek to foster critical thinking, we should also be mindful of potential obstacles to critical thinking...such as....

Here are a few ways to help foster critical thinking...

- Reliance on authority or someone else.

- Rigid thinking

- Cultural conditioning.

- Frame of reference.

- Hasty Moral Judgment.

- Resistance to change.

- Emotional Related Dysfunction...

- Use role modeling to demonstrate the correct behavioral response

- Develop well-received "Why" questions.

- Set a narrative for cause and effect.

- Thinking out loud

- Compare similar situations

- Verbalize Examples

- Listen and expect an answer to your message

Safety Assessment:

How do you respond when faced with the response choice of fight or flight? How can you improve your critical thinking skills?

We have learned that communication is both equal parts of send and receive. Our ability to practice active listening helps us keep the goals of communication in balance.

In this lesson we are going to review both good and bad listening habits...

To become an influencing part of any negotiation, you have to actively engage the needs and concerns of the individual in conflict.

When we practice Active Listening, we are fully concentrating on what is being said rather than just passively 'hearing' the speaker's message.

It is helpful, when active listening to show that you are listening by **providing feedback**. By doing so, conversations become more productive. It also helps build trust and understanding. Active listening requires effort and skill. It's more than just being quiet while someone speaks. It's about truly understanding their perspective.

When listening try to avoid these bad listening habits...

1. Showing a lack of interest in the subject,
2. Focusing on the person, not on the content.
3. Interrupting,
4. Focusing on the detail, missing the big picture,
5. Force-fitting their ideas into your mental models,
6. Daydreaming,
7. Letting emotions block the subject.

Active listening is a communication skill that involves entirely focusing, understanding, and responding thoughtfully to someone who is speaking. It's not just about hearing the words they are saying, but truly engaging with their message.

When listening, try to develop these good habits...

1. Pay Attention
2. Show you are listening
3. Provide Feedback
4. Defer Judgment
5. Respond Appropriately
6. Reflecting on what you heard
7. Exhibiting positive body language

It helps when we have an understanding of both Active listening and passive listening. Both are fundamentally different in terms of engagement and understanding.

Active Listening: Involves fully concentrating on the speaker, processing their message, and responding thoughtfully. It includes maintaining eye contact, nodding, paraphrasing, and asking relevant questions to show genuine interest and comprehension...

Passive Listening: In contrast, is a more disengaged approach. The listener hears the words but doesn't fully process or respond to them. They may appear indifferent, distracted, or simply not invested in the conversation...

Active listening strengthens relationships, enhances communication, and fosters mutual respect, whereas passive listening can lead to misunderstandings and missed opportunities for connection.

Effective verbal communication is essential for building strong relationships, resolving conflicts, and conveying ideas clearly. In this module we will be review some of the best strategies towards positive verbal communication...

Good communication starts with the practice of clarity & conciseness...

- Try and use simple, direct language.

- Take a moment to organize your thoughts before speaking.

- Try to not use filler words like "um" or "like."

- As you seek a calmer response, try to use a professional tone & delivery.

- Adjust your tone to match the message.

- Speak at a steady pace with confidence.

- Use pauses effectively to emphasize key points.

- Use courteous phrases like "please" and "thank you."

- Avoid overly emotional or aggressive language.

- Stay neutral and objective, especially in sensitive discussions.

The Core Elements of Effective Verbal Communication:

Clarity & Conciseness:
- What it means: Expressing your message in a straightforward, easy-to-understand way without unnecessary jargon or filler.
- Why it matters: People tune out when messages are vague or long-winded. Clear communication saves time and prevents misunderstandings.
- Example: Instead of saying, "We might want to consider possibly adjusting the timeline," say, "Let's move the deadline to Friday."

Nonverbal Cues:
- What it means: Body language, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and gestures that accompany your words.
- Why it matters: Nonverbal signals often speak louder than words and can reinforce—or contradict—your message.
- Example: Maintaining eye contact while speaking shows confidence and sincerity; crossed arms may signal defensiveness.

Tone & Delivery:
- What it means: The emotional quality of your voice—how you say something, not just what you say.
- Why it matters: Tone can convey confidence, empathy, urgency, or frustration. It shapes how your message is received.
- Example: A calm, reassuring tone during a crisis can de-escalate tension, while a firm tone in a meeting can assert leadership.
- Adjust your tone to match the message.
- Speak at a steady pace with confidence.
- Use pauses effectively to emphasize key points.
- Use courteous phrases like "please" and "thank you."
- Avoid overly emotional or aggressive language.
- Stay neutral and objective, especially in sensitive discussions.

Adaptability
- What it means: Adjusting your communication style based on your audience, setting, and situation.
- Why it matters: Different contexts require different approaches. Flexibility ensures your message resonates.
- Example: You might use formal language in a boardroom, but a more relaxed tone in a team huddle.

The 55/38/7 Rule of Communication...

Communication Component	Percentage of Impact	Description
Body Language	55%	Facial expressions, posture, gestures—nonverbal cues that shape perception.
Tone of Voice	38%	Vocal elements like pitch, volume, and emotion.
Words (Content)	7%	The actual spoken words.

"How you say what you say and when you say it defines the message!"

Care Professionals should always try to open the conversation with the usage of Professional Greetings and Closings...

- Personalize the care and try to use the patient's name in greetings

- Provide a close that positively summarizes the developed plan.

- Thank the patient for allowing you to help them

- Reassure them that the team is there to help

- Use Professional Greetings and Closings...
- Try to use the patient's name in greetings

- Close with a summary of the developed plan

- Thank the patient for allowing you to help them

- Reassure them the team is there to help

Trigger Words...

Now Let's turn our attention to trigger words as well as persuasive things we can say to help navigate negotiations...

Trigger words are specific words or phrases that evoke strong emotional or psychological responses in people. These can be positive or negative, depending on the context and the individual's personal experiences.

During personal interactions, words like "failure" or "rejection" might trigger self-doubt, whereas words like "achievement" or "success" can be motivating...

Trigger words tend to shut down communication and escalate conflict.

Minimizing trigger words is crucial for effective communication. It fosters understanding and builds stronger relationships. This is true in both personal and professional settings.

Persuasive language, conversely, aims to influence positively. It encourages agreement and action. It does so by appealing to logic and emotion.

Some Potentially Triggering Words ...

No	Forget it
Later	Never
seriously	Chaos
OMG	Failure
Stop it!	Negligence
Why?	Don't
Easy!	
Relax!	
Stupid	
Nope!	

Some Potentially Triggering Phrases...

|	
• Ignored warnings	• You need to...
• They caused this	• What is now?
• You should have…	• That's not my job
• Out of control	• Because I said so!
• You Always...	
• Calm Down!	

Persuasive language is like verbal alchemy—it transforms ordinary words into tools of influence, connection, and action. Whether you're leading a team, writing a speech, or calming a crisis, the way you phrase your message can dramatically shape how it's received.

Persuasive language is all about influencing thoughts, emotions, and actions in a way that encourages agreement or cooperation. Here are a few persuasive statements to use:

- How can we fix this?
- What do you suggest?
- Let's take a step back.
- I respect your feelings.
- We can figure this out.
- I hear you.
- I see why this matters to you.
- I appreciate your perspective.

- We understand this is difficult
- Your concerns are valid
- We're here to support you
- Let's take this one step at a time
- We're reviewing what happened
- We're focused on solutions
- Let's work together to move forward

True persuasion isn't about tricking people—it's about:

- Building credibility
- Fostering trust
- Offering value
- Respecting autonomy

Powers of Persuasion
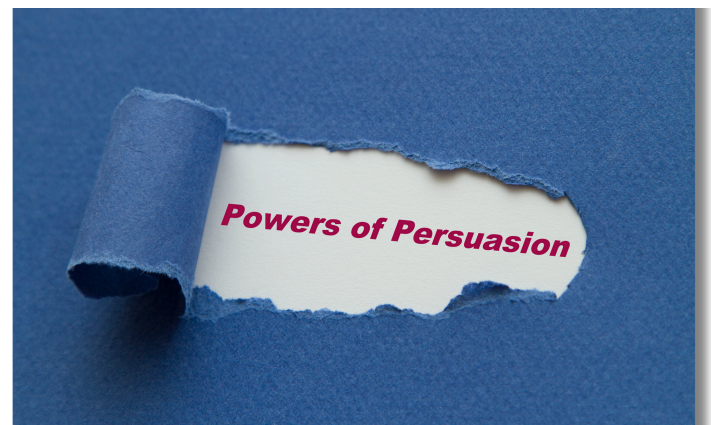
"It's the difference between 'convincing' and 'coercing.'"

Understanding our verbal avenues of approach helps us to enhance the framework for negotiation. Often, one of the first steps is utilizing persuasive language. Persuasive language is all about communicating that we want to help.

Here's how you can craft persuasive statements effectively and better influence negotiation efforts:

My Way
Your Way
Negotiate

Enhancing the Framework for Negotiation...

Persuasive language is all about communicating that we want to help. Here's how you can craft persuasive statements effectively and better influence negotiation efforts:

Appeal to Emotion (Pathos)

Using emotionally charged words can make your argument more compelling:

"Imagine how much better things could be if we worked together."

"I understand how frustrating this is, and I want to help find a solution."

Establish Credibility (Ethos)

Building trust makes your words more persuasive:

"Based on my experience, I believe this is the best course of action."

"Experts agree that this approach leads to better results."

"I've done thorough research, and here's what I found."

Use Logic and Reasoning (Logos)

Providing facts and logical arguments strengthens your position:

"Studies show that this method improves efficiency by 30%."

"If we take this step now, we can prevent bigger problems later."

"The numbers clearly indicate that this is the best choice."

Encourage Action...

Motivating others to take action is key in persuasion:

"Let's work together to make this happen."

"Now is the perfect time to take the next step."

"You have the power to make a difference—let's do it!"

Safety Assessment:

What are your favorite persuasive words or phrases to use?

Paralinguistics refers to the vocal elements of communication that go beyond words, influencing how a message is perceived. Here are some examples:

How we use our tone of voice, like a friendly tone that can feel inviting, or a harsh, sharp tone, may indicate frustration or urgency.

The level of pitch & volume, high pitch often conveys excitement or nervousness & a Low pitch can signal seriousness or authority.

Speaking loudly can show enthusiasm or dominance.

Our speech rate & pauses can also create confusion. A fast speech can suggest urgency or excitement, while a slow speech may indicate thoughtfulness or hesitation.
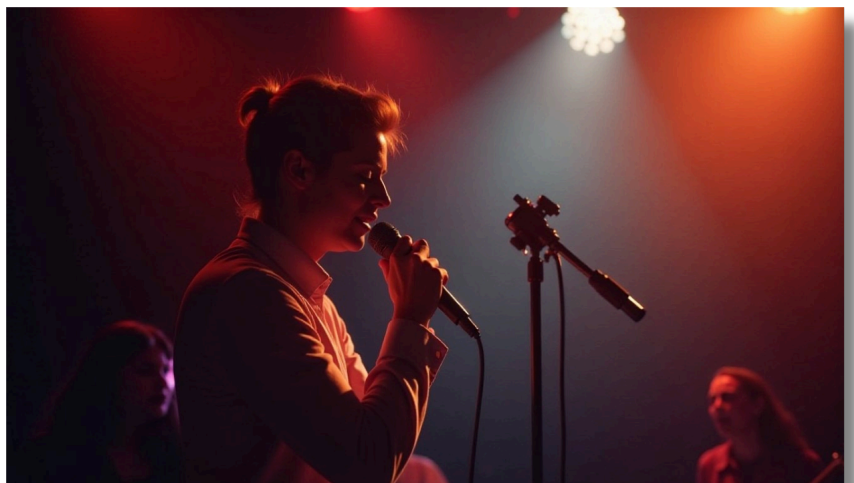
Pauses can add emphasis or allow time for reflection.

When we use vocal modulation, we define the importance of what we are saying.

Rising intonation at the end of a sentence can indicate a question or a sense of uncertainty.

Falling intonation can signal confidence or finality.

Non-Lexical Sounds: sighs express frustration or relief, and laughter can convey amusement or nerves.

People use visual communication in conversation to enhance understanding, reinforce messages, and express emotions. In this lesson we will review the many types of visual communication and learn how to use them positively in a negotiation...

There are many forms of non-verbal communication. Here are a few. We often use Facial Expressions...Facial expressions are responsible for a considerable proportion of nonverbal communication...

Nonverbal communication is the silent powerhouse behind how we express ourselves—often saying more than words ever could. Here are the key types, each with its own unique role in shaping perception and connection:

Facial Expressions	The most universal form—smiles, frowns, raised eyebrows, all convey emotion instantly.
Gestures	Movements like waving, pointing, or thumbs-up, that add emphasis or replace words.
Paralinguistics	Vocal elements such as tone, pitch, volume, and inflection that shape how words are received.
Body Language & Posture	How we sit, stand, and move communicates confidence, openness, or defensiveness.
Proxemics (Personal Space)	The physical distance we maintain—intimate, personal, social, or public zones.
Eye Contact (Oculesics)	Signals attention, trust, aggression, or avoidance depending on context and culture.
Haptics (Touch)	Touch conveys warmth, dominance, or comfort—think handshakes, hugs, or pats on the back.
Appearance	Clothing, grooming, and style choices send messages about identity, professionalism, and mood.

Facial expressions play a crucial role in communication, conveying emotions and intentions without words. Here are some common examples of Positive Expressions:

Smiles show happiness, friendliness, or agreement...

Raised Eyebrows can Indicate surprise or curiosity.

Nodding with a Soft Expression can signal understanding or encouragement.

Gestures are a powerful form of non-verbal communication that help convey emotions, reinforce spoken words, and enhance understanding. Here are some common types of gestures that are used in communication...

Hand chopping motion can be used to stress an important idea.

Pointing helps to direct attention to a specific object or person.

Raised index finger can signal the introduction of a key point.

Open palms help to show honesty and openness.

Clenched fists can indicate determination or frustration.

Hands on heart can express sincerity or deep emotion.

Body language and posture play a crucial role in communication, often conveying emotions and intentions without words.

Here are some common examples:

Creating an Open vs. Closed Posture

- Open posture – Standing or sitting with uncrossed arms and a relaxed stance signals approachability and willingness to engage.

- Closed posture – Crossed arms or legs may indicate defensiveness, discomfort, or disinterest.

Non-Verbal Communication can utilize the many elements of our physical presence to help deliver a message's intent...such as...

- Eye Gaze = People utilize eye gaze to determine if someone is being honest.

Non-verbal forms of Communication can be very effective; they can also derail the intent of the negotiation. Here are some tips on Non-Verbal Communication...

- Avoid slouching.

- Steer clear of smiles or laughter when messages are serious.

- Display some animation with your hands and facial expressions to project a dynamic presence.

- Don't bring your phone, a drink, or anything else that could distract you during an interview or meeting.

- A nod to demonstrate understanding.

- Rotate eye contact with various speakers in group settings or networking situations.

- Stay calm even when you're nervous.

- Steer clear of monotone delivery.

- Wait until the person is done talking to respond.

Understanding the forms of kinesthetic communication—such as body movements, gestures, and touch—is vital during crisis situations because these nonverbal cues often become the primary language when verbal communication breaks down.

In high-stress environments, individuals may be overwhelmed, nonverbal, or reactive, making it essential for responders to read and respond to physical signals with precision and empathy.

For example, a clenched fist, sudden retreat, or rigid posture may indicate fear, resistance, or escalation, while open palms, slow movements, and relaxed shoulders can signal cooperation or de-escalation.

Recognizing these cues allows crisis responders to adjust their own body language to project calm, safety, and control—helping to defuse tension and guide others toward stability. Moreover, intentional use of kinesthetic communication—such as maintaining a non-threatening stance or using gentle, culturally appropriate touch—can reinforce verbal messages and foster trust. In trauma-informed practice, this awareness becomes even more critical, as certain gestures or proximity may trigger distress.

By mastering kinesthetic forms, professionals can navigate volatile situations with greater sensitivity, clarity, and effectiveness.

"Students are advised to know your agencies policies on the use of kinesthetic communication; some agencies choose a no physical contact policy when it comes to communication."

Physical Kinesthetic Communication encompasses the following categories:

Gestures – Hand movements, nodding, and pointing help emphasize speech and clarify meaning.

Facial Expressions – Smiling, frowning, or raising eyebrows convey emotions without words.

Posture & Body Movements – Standing tall shows confidence, while slouching may indicate discomfort or disinterest.

Eye Contact – Maintaining eye contact signals attentiveness and trust, while avoiding it may suggest nervousness or dishonesty.

Touch (Haptics) – A handshake, pat on the back, or hug can express warmth, support, or authority.

Movement & Space (Proxemics) – How people position themselves in relation to others can indicate comfort, dominance, or engagement.

"Students are advised to know your agencies policies on kinesthetic communication; some agencies choose a no physical contact policy when it comes to communication."

Social Emotional Touch...

Handshake – Used for greetings, agreements, and establishing rapport.

Pat on the back – Shows encouragement or support.

Holding hands – Signifies connection and intimacy.

Arm around the shoulder – Provides reassurance or camaraderie.

Professional & Functional Touch...

Firm handshake in business meetings – Establishes professionalism and confidence.

Guiding touch – Lightly directing someone by placing a hand on their back.

Tap on the shoulder – Gains attention in a polite manner.

"Students are advised to know your agencies policies on the use of kinesthetic communication; some agencies choose a no physical contact policy when it comes to staff and client communication."

Cultural & Ritualistic Touch...

Cheek kisses – Common in greetings in many cultures.

Bowing with a handshake – A respectful greeting in some traditions.

High-five – Celebrates success or agreement.

Fist bump – A casual greeting or sign of solidarity.

Hand on heart – Expresses sincerity or deep emotion.

"Students are advised to know your agencies policies on on the use of kinesthetic communication; some agencies choose a no physical contact policy when it comes to communication."

Guidance on Kinesthetic Communcation without physical contact...

- Using kinesthetic communication without physical touch is not only possible—it's often the most appropriate and effective approach in trauma-informed, culturally sensitive crisis response.

- Kinesthetic communication refers to the use of body movements, gestures, posture, and facial expressions to convey meaning. When touch is off-limits or inadvisable, these non-contact cues become essential tools for expressing empathy, authority, and calm.

Non-Touch Kinesthetic Communication Techniques...

- Open, non-threatening posture Stand with relaxed shoulders, uncrossed arms, and feet planted firmly but gently. This signals approachability and emotional safety.

- Intentional gestures Use slow, deliberate hand movements to reinforce verbal instructions or offer reassurance. For example, a palm facing upward can signal openness or invitation, while a gentle downward motion can encourage calm.

- Facial expressions Maintain a soft, attentive expression. A slight nod or raised eyebrows can show understanding and engagement, while a neutral mouth and relaxed jaw help de-escalate tension.

- Eye contact Use steady but non-invasive eye contact to convey presence and attentiveness. Avoid staring, which can feel confrontational—especially in high-stress situations.

- Controlled proximity Respect personal space while positioning yourself within a visible and accessible range. Your physical orientation—such as standing at a slight angle rather than head-on—can reduce perceived threat.

- Movement pacing Slow, predictable movements help regulate the environment. Sudden gestures or abrupt shifts can trigger anxiety or defensive reactions.

- Mirroring and alignment Subtly aligning your posture or gestures with the other person's can build rapport and signal empathy. This technique is especially useful in group facilitation or peer support settings.
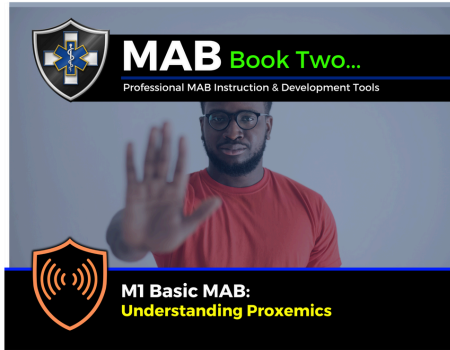
Welcome to today's lesson on Proxemics. The MAB definition of proxemics is how we influence space by how we occupy space.

This crucial skill set helps provide the distance needed to help see and read crisis variables when responding to workplace violence.
Now, lets begin...

Proxemics in crisis response refers to how space is used—intentionally and intuitively—to influence safety, perception, and emotional regulation during high-stakes interactions. According to MAB (Managing Aggressive Behavior) principles, proxemics is defined as how we influence space by how we occupy space

This crucial skill set helps provide the distance needed to help see and read crisis variables when responding to workplace violence.

This concept becomes especially critical when responding to workplace violence, behavioral escalations, or emotionally charged situations.

In practice, proxemics involves maintaining appropriate physical distance, choosing strategic positioning, and adjusting body orientation to reduce perceived threat and enhance situational awareness. For example, standing at a slight angle rather than directly in front of someone can feel less confrontational, while keeping a safe buffer zone allows responders to observe body language cues and react swiftly if needed. Proxemics also helps establish boundaries—both physical and psychological—so that individuals in crisis feel less crowded or overwhelmed.

Effective use of proxemics supports trauma-informed care by respecting personal space and minimizing triggers. It also reinforces nonverbal communication strategies like open posture, controlled movement, and calm pacing, which can de-escalate tension and foster trust. In essence, proxemics is not just about where you stand—it's about how your presence shapes the emotional and physical dynamics of the moment.

There are four basic levels of measured proxemic influence.

Intimate Space:

The first influential measurement starts with **intimate space,** usually representing 0 to 2 feet away from the patient, the zone reserved for close relationships.

For those who work in the healthcare field, this is the space we enter when providing direct patient care, like administering a vaccine. It's vital to be aware of this boundary and respect it to build trust.


**Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)**
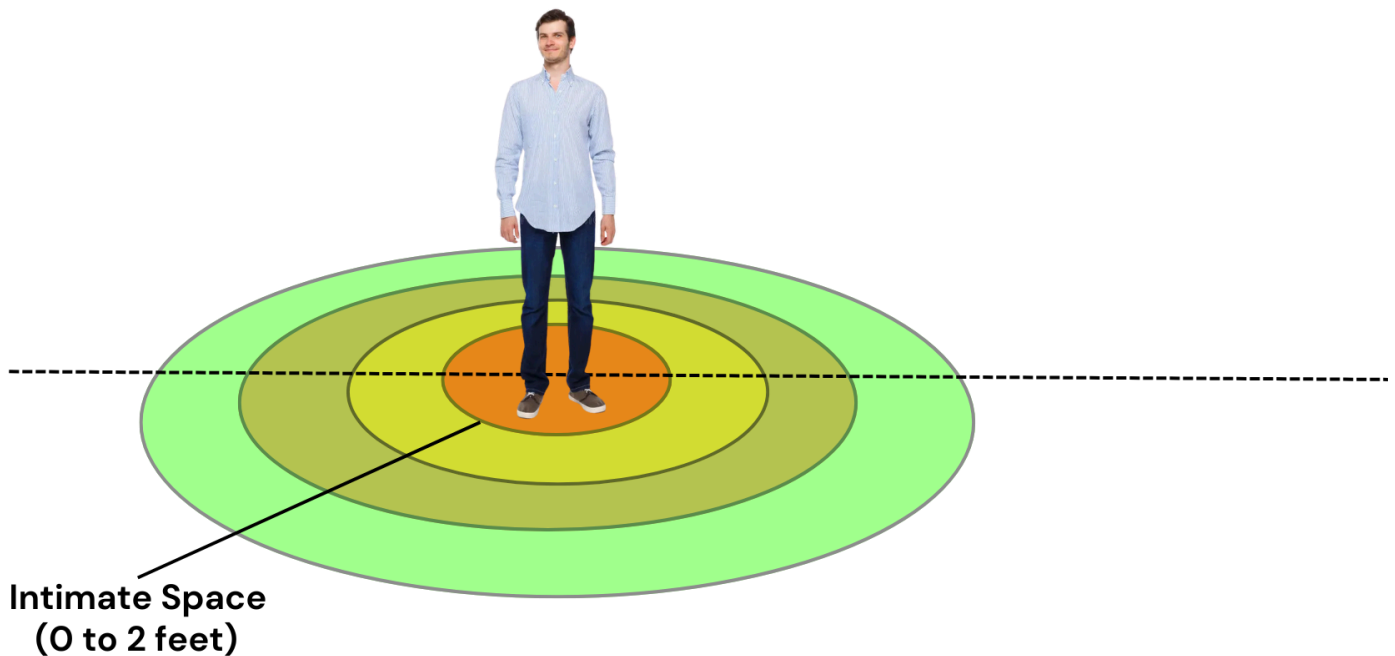
Personal Space:

Next is **personal space**, measured 2 to 4 feet from the individual, the comfortable distance for interactions with friends and family. In a healthcare setting, this might be the distance you maintain when discussing a individual care plan with their loved ones. Maintaining this space helps foster open communication.

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)
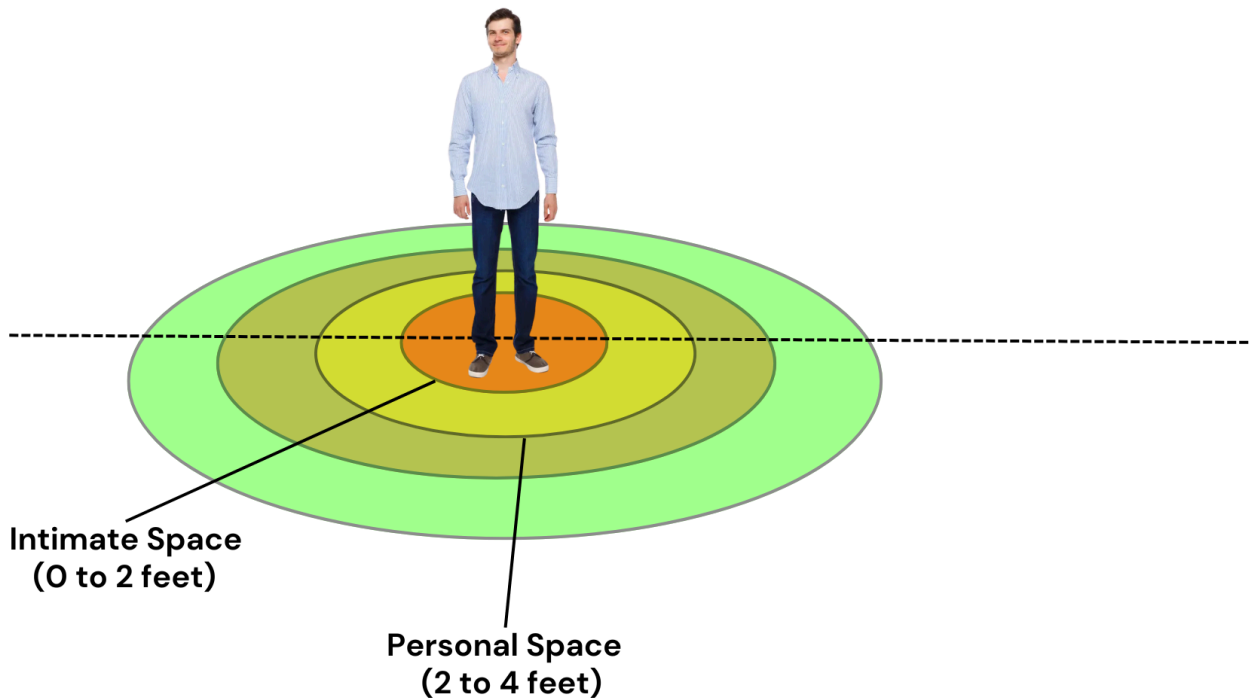
Safety Assessment:

What job duties require you to be in the personal space of the individuals you serve?

Social Space:
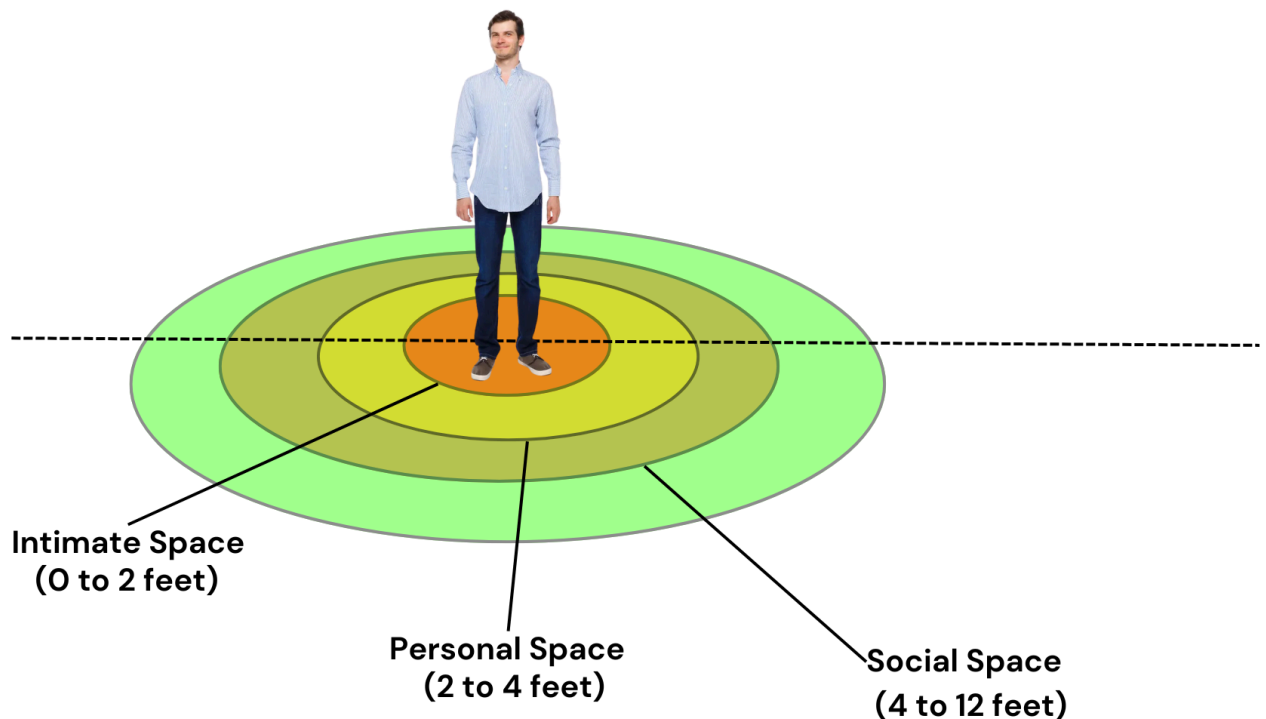
Now, let's consider **social space**, measured 4 to 12 feet from the individual, the distance we keep with acquaintances.

Think of interactions in a shared workspace or during a team meeting. Being mindful of this distance to promote a professional and comfortable environment.

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Social Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Safety Assessment:

What job duties require you to be in the Social space of the individuals you serve?

Public Space:

Finally, we have public space, measured 12 feet or more away from the individual, used for public speaking or addressing a large group. This is the distance we maintain when giving presentations or addressing a crowd. Understanding this distance helps project confidence and maintain control.

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Social Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Public Space
(12 or more feet)
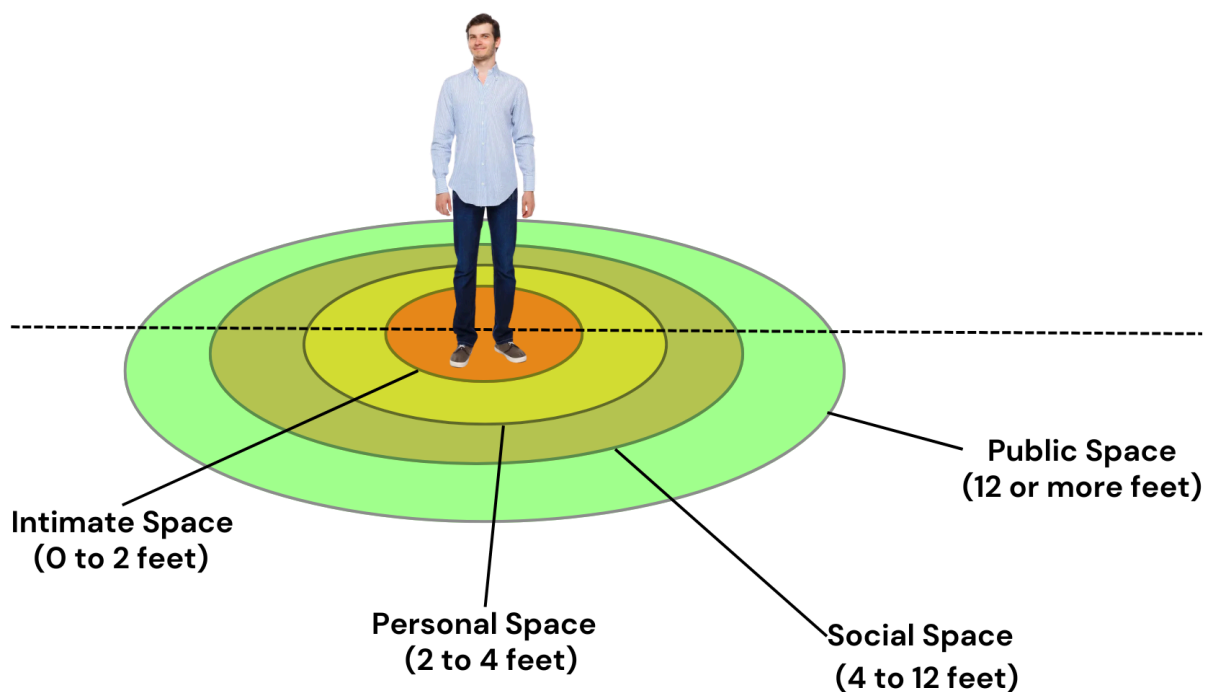
Safety Assessment:

What types pf observable elements in the environment should you maintain awareness of while in the public space?

Why does Proxemics Matter in Crisis Response?

- Proxemics is a concept that becomes critical when responding to workplace violence, behavioral escalations, or emotionally charged interactions. The physical distance between individuals, the angle of approach, and the responder's body orientation can either escalate or de-escalate a situation.

- For instance, standing too close or directly in front of someone in distress may feel threatening, while maintaining a respectful buffer zone and positioning oneself at a slight angle can reduce perceived aggression and foster psychological safety.

Proxemics and Situational Awareness...

- Proxemics also enhances situational awareness. By keeping appropriate distance, professionals, social workers, and emergency responders can better observe nonverbal cues—such as clenched fists, shifting posture, or signs of withdrawal—that signal potential escalation. This spatial awareness allows for quicker, more informed decisions and helps responders maintain control without resorting to force.

- In trauma-informed care, proxemics is especially vital because it respects personal boundaries and minimizes triggers. Ultimately, mastering proxemics allows crisis responders to communicate calm, authority, and empathy—without saying a word.

If you're working in crisis intervention or just want to improve your non-verbal communication, mastering proxemics can be a game-changer.

How to Better Utilize Proxemics...

- To better use proxemics in crisis response, you need to treat space as a strategic tool—one that shapes perception, regulates emotion, and enhances safety.

- Proxemics isn't just about distance; it's about how your presence influences the environment and the people within it.

Here's how to refine your use of proxemics for maximum impact:

- **Maintain a safe buffer zone** Keep enough distance to observe body language and react if needed, but not so far that you appear disengaged. This balance helps you stay alert while signaling respect for personal space.

- **Use angled positioning** Standing at a slight angle rather than head-on reduces perceived threat and creates a more collaborative dynamic. It also allows for smoother movement and clearer exits if needed.

- **Control your pacing and movement** Move slowly and predictably. Sudden gestures or abrupt shifts can trigger anxiety or defensive reactions. Your movement should feel intentional and calming.

- **Respect cultural and trauma-informed boundaries** Different individuals and communities have varying comfort levels with proximity. Always stay on the side of caution and adjust based on cues like flinching, withdrawal, or eye aversion.

- **Use space to de-escalate** Step back if someone becomes agitated. Giving space can reduce pressure and allow the person to regulate themselves. Conversely, stepping forward too quickly can escalate tension.

- **Orient yourself for visibility and accessibility** Position yourself where you can be seen and heard clearly, without crowding. This is especially important in group settings or when guiding someone through a stressful environment.

- **Pair proxemics with other nonverbal cues** Combine spatial awareness with open posture, soft facial expressions, and calm gestures. Together, these elements reinforce your message and build trust.

- **Proxemics is a dynamic skill**—one that evolves with context, culture, and individual needs.

Developing Rapport through Proxemics:

Developing rapport through proxemics means using space intentionally to foster trust, emotional safety, and connection—especially in crisis response settings where verbal communication may be strained or ineffective.

Proxemics is defined as how we influence space by how we occupy space, and when used skillfully, it becomes a silent but powerful tool for building relational bridges.

To build rapport, professionals can begin by maintaining a respectful buffer zone that honors personal boundaries while still signaling presence and support. Standing at a slight angle rather than directly in front of someone reduces perceived threat and creates a more collaborative dynamic.

MAB Book Two...
Professional MAB Instruction & Development Tools

GIVE RESPECT   EARN RESPECT

M1 Basic MAB:
Supporting Safe Boundaries
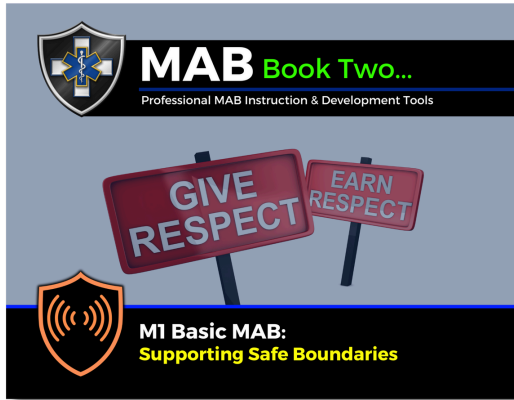
Now that we understand how proxemic influence is measured we need to also understand the application of safe boundaries.
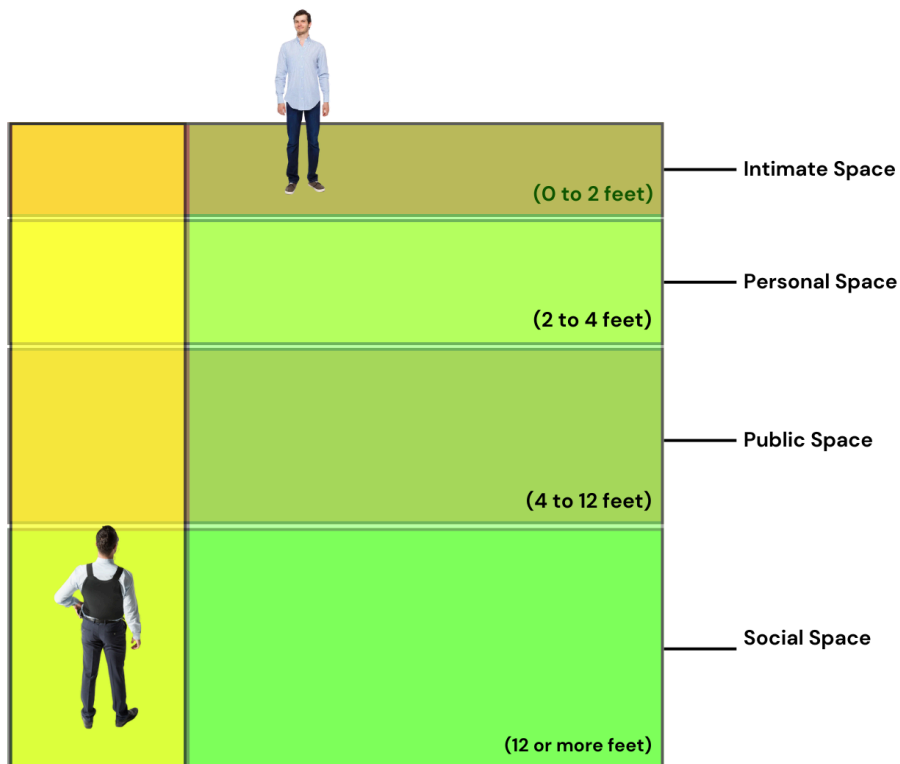
While Proxemic influence is understood and intuitively measured by most, safe boundaries are learned and reinforced by individual life experiences.

A safe boundary can be set at any of the Proxemic Intervals, or it can encompass all of them. It is the level the patient feels most comfortable that determines the safe boundary.

Take a look at the following images and take note of how widely variant safe boundaries can be set by individuals...

Let's move forward and review safe boundaries...

Sometimes where we stand influences the intuitive space where people can feel less encumbered by our presence...
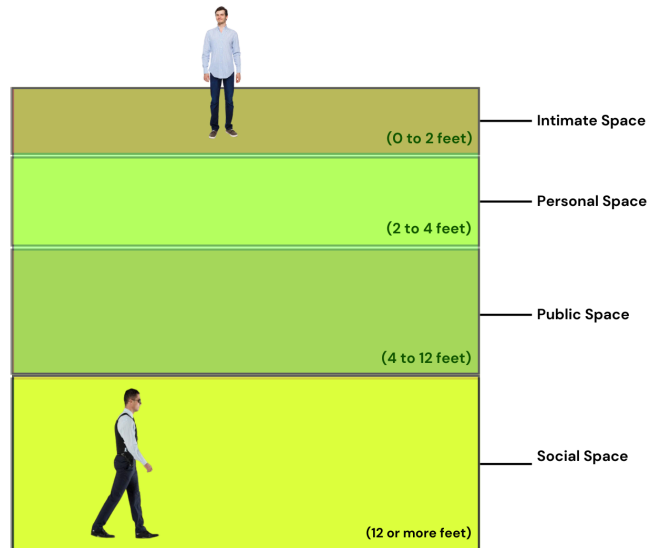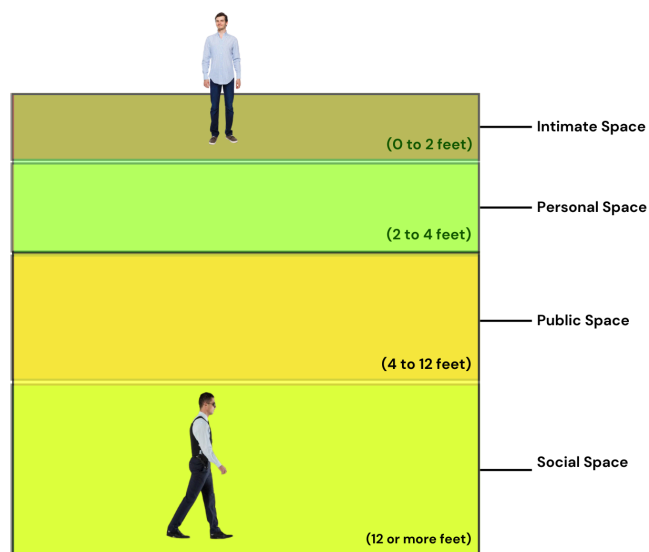

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Public Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Social Space
(12 or more feet)

Responder/professional team movements that are not understood can lead to worry about the potential for threat...

Intimate Space (0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space (2 to 4 feet)

Public Space (4 to 12 feet)

Social Space (12 or more feet)

Responders/professionals that divide an area in half and occupy the middle can hold influence over the total room...

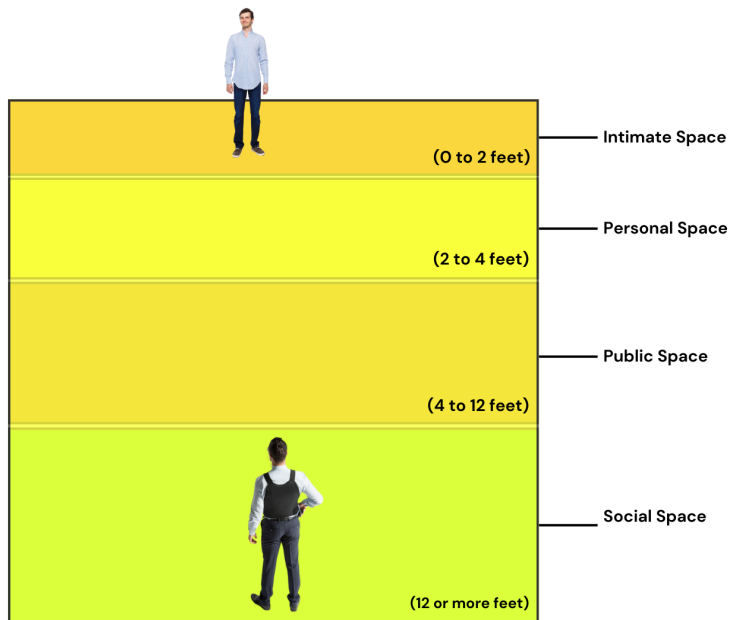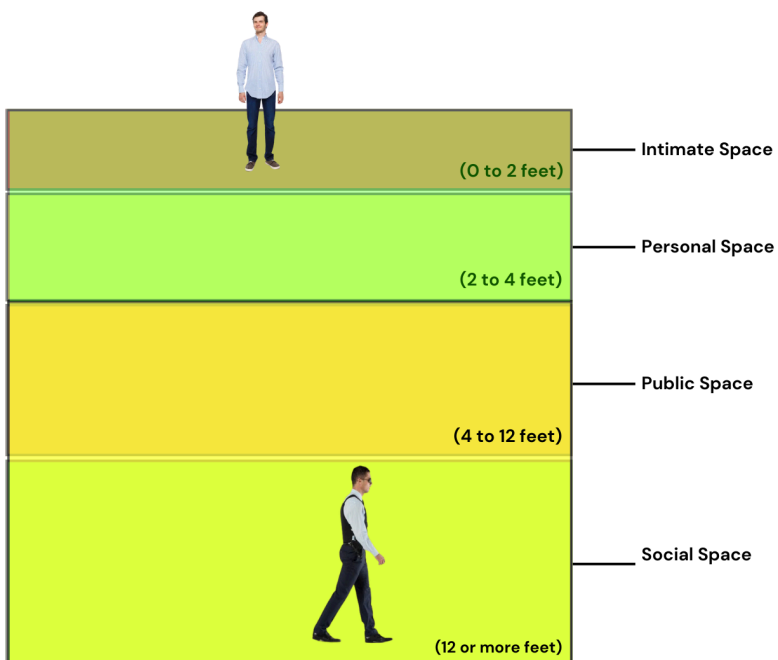Intimate Space (0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space (2 to 4 feet)

Public Space (4 to 12 feet)

Social Space (12 or more feet)

Some people react to left and right alignments as a risk or threat...

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Public Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Social Space
(12 or more feet)

Sometimes you can provide a little anxiety relief by increasing a little distance between you and an upset patient...

Intimate Space
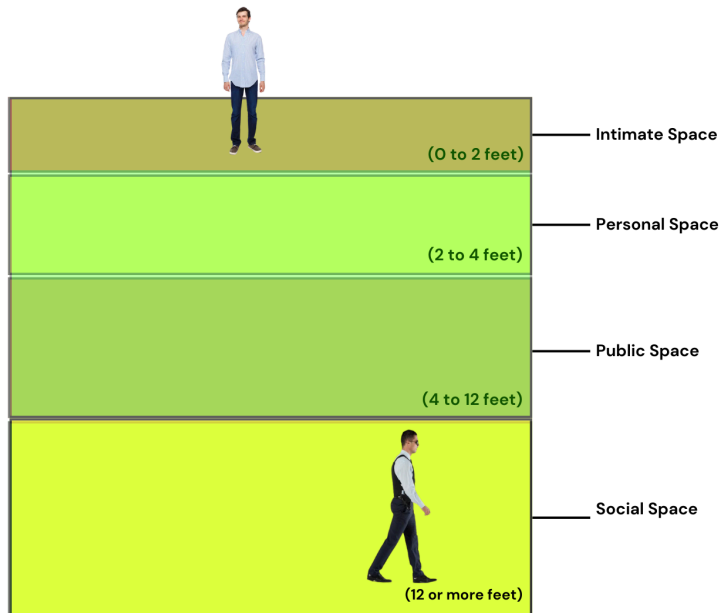(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Public Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Social Space
(12 or more feet)

There are no perfect methods for instantly knowing the Safe Boundaries of another, we do our best to move in a measured way to communicate intent and receive permission to approach...

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Public Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Social Space
(12 or more feet)

Confirming the individuals permission to advance closer is the one thing that ties all of the proxemic intervals together and supports the development of Safe Boundaries.

Your ability to read the variables and process the levels and types of communication will help you trust but verify the approach is safe and is seen as help.

The Influence of Proxemics in Situations:

1. **Full Influence** - Divide the area in half and occupy the center

   ◦ By aligning in the center of the room, the Responder influences the entire room. Perceptually, the patient can feel trapped, unable to leave without dealing directly with staff.

2. **Directing Influence** - Leaving intuitive distance open to encourage targeted movement in a specific direction.

   ◦ By aligning in a manner, the patient can only really see one true independent route out that has the least Number of staff direct influence.
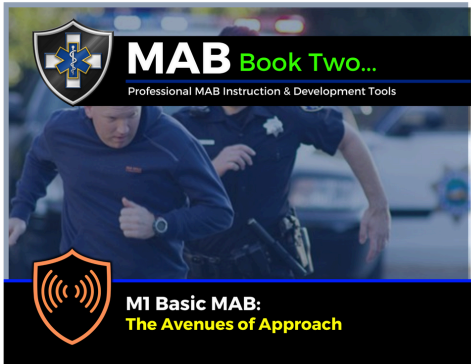
3. **Independent Influence** - Occupying the least restrictive position in the room to convey open options.

   ◦ By aligning in a manner where the patient feels as if they have options.

M1 Basic MAB:
The Avenues of Approach

When we are called to respond to crisis situations it's important for our team members to mindful of their Avenues of Approach.

Our efforts to hurry and help those in crisis sometimes can turn an accidental blind eye towards the acuity that we can bring to the situation as we approach it...

This next topic will walk us through some of the positives and negatives of response team approaches....

The term avenues of approach refers to the method and manner that a responder team presents when they approach an individual in crisis.

- How much does the acuity increase when a team rushes in to assess and respond to a crisis?

- Consider how your approach and occupation of the environment can impact the situation.

- Adjusting the level of acuity your response brings into the location is key.

Try to be aware of the following:

Where they stand about relative to the crisis, accidently crowding or surrounding an escalated individual.

Are Responders blocking the only exit or doorway?

How many staff talk simultaneously? When multiple responders are involved, designate one person as the primary communicator. Having too many people speak at once can confuse or overwhelm the individual, escalating tensions.
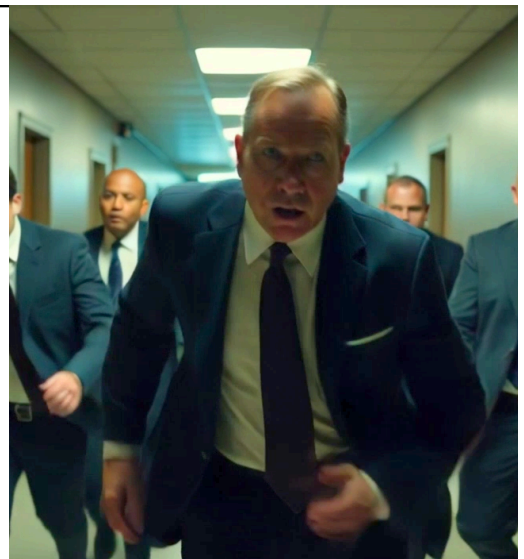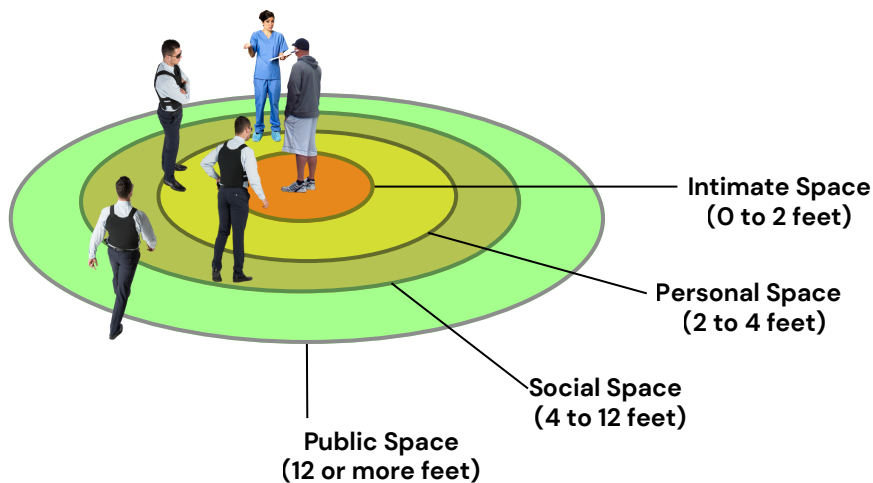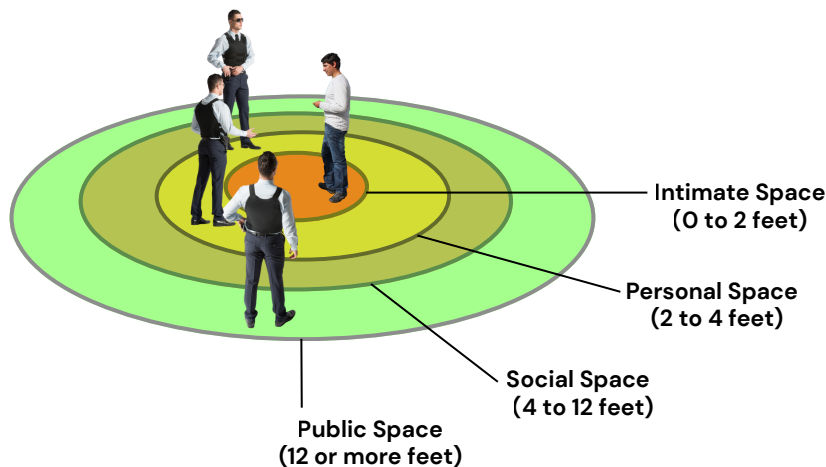
Unspoken Communication Through Team Alignment:

1. **Team Crowding** - The CRT Team or solo responders instinctively closing on the space in front of the individual or client. Be mindful to not crowd the individual if the variables do not require it.

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Social Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Public Space
(12 or more feet)

2. **Team Intent-** The CRT Team, or solo responder, approaches in a manner that leads the individual to question the intent of the team

- Try to not let the team frustration enter into team alignment.

- Be mindful of your facial expressions

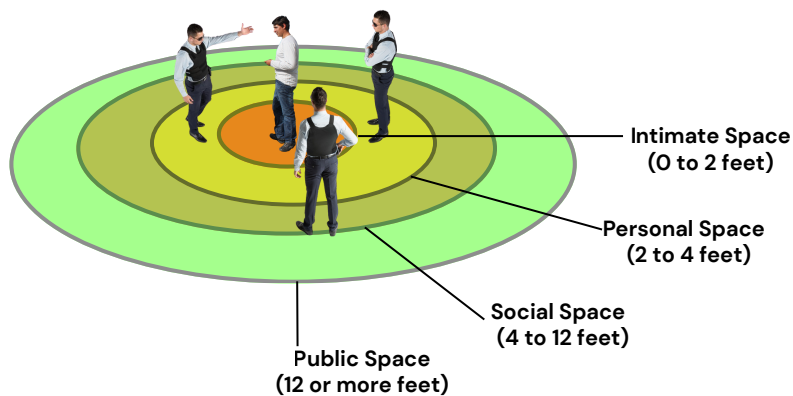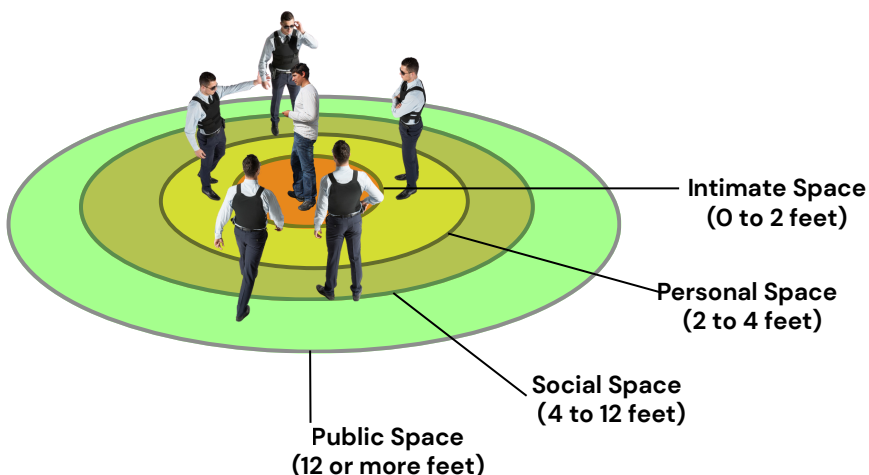- Avoid rushing up toward the client

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Social Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Public Space
(12 or more feet)

- **3. Team Stacking -** The CRT Team approach closes in on the individual from 2-3 sides. This Sometimes occurs when team members arrive at the crisis situation from different locations team stacking occurs.

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Social Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Public Space
(12 or more feet)

4. Team Trapping - The CRT Team approach surrounds the individual from all sides
  - Threat levels climb when an individual feels trapped or surrounded.

Intimate Space
(0 to 2 feet)

Personal Space
(2 to 4 feet)

Social Space
(4 to 12 feet)

Public Space
(12 or more feet)

Monitoring the Avenues of Approach...

Monitoring the method and manner of avenues of approach in crisis response is essential because how a responder enters a space—physically and psychologically—can either escalate or de-escalate the situation. The "avenue of approach" refers to the path a responder takes toward an individual in crisis, and the method and manner describe how that approach is executed: posture, pacing, angle, proximity, and presence. These elements are deeply tied to proxemics and nonverbal communication, and they shape the emotional tone of the interaction before a single word is spoken.

A direct, fast, or head-on approach may feel threatening or confrontational, especially to someone in a heightened emotional state or with a trauma history. In contrast, a slow, angled, and respectful approach signals calm, control, and empathy. Monitoring these factors allows responders to adjust in real time—reading cues like flinching, withdrawal, or defensive posture—and respond with sensitivity. It also supports situational awareness, giving the responder time and space to assess risk, observe body language, and maintain safe boundaries.

In trauma-informed crisis response, the goal is not just to reach the individual, but to do so in a way that preserves dignity, minimizes triggers, and fosters psychological safety. By consciously managing the method and manner of approach, responders communicate respect, reduce perceived threat, and lay the groundwork for trust and cooperation. This is especially critical in MAB training, where spatial dynamics and emotional regulation are central to effective intervention...

Los Angeles County Employee Assistance Program (EAP),

Phone: (213) 433-7202,
email: EAP@hr.lacounty.gov.

Policy 0400-503.50 Field Safety in Child Welfare: Preventing and Managing Client Violence

Issue Date: 6/2/2025

Consultation with supervisor/management prior to the Therapeutic Rapport

Developing a Plan of Action to prevent future crises and to ensure Safety with your supervisor/ management team.

Contact Health and Safety for County Protocol and Procedures,

Phone: (213) 351-5727,
email: HealthandSafety@dcfs.lacounty.gov

Thorough review of County Policies and Procedures

Acts/Threats of Violence Against Employee in the Workplace, Management Directive 95-06
FYI CWS/CMS 6.3 Code Drop

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