

RLS
Associates, Inc.

Moving Public Transportation
Into the Future

Integrated Mobility Division
N.C. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

**NCDOT-IMD Strategic Training
Conflict-De-Escalation**

www.rlsandassoc.com

RLS

Disclaimer

The materials provided with this course are intended for educational and informational purposes only. This includes all material in the PowerPoint presentation, handouts, videos, PDF attachments, and quizzes. Regulations and other guidance are subject to change. RLS has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of materials at the time they are presented, however, the participant is responsible for review of the material for compliance with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations and their own needs.

Unauthorized use or publication of materials for commercial purposes is prohibited.

2024, RLS & Associates, Inc. ®

www.rlsandassoc.com

RLS

Webinar Etiquette


Unmute

Raise Hand to Alert Moderator

Select Audio Source


Type in a Question

www.rlsandassoc.com




Course Content

- ◆ Definitions of Conflict and De-escalation
- ◆ Identify Situations That Cause Passenger Frustrations
- ◆ Review Strategies for De-escalation



www.rlsandassoc.com



Training Goals

- ◆ Gain a Better Understanding Of...
 - Your community
 - Your riders
 - Your role as a transit operator
 - The impacts of your words, posture and actions
- ◆ Effective Use of Customer Service Skills
- ◆ Learn Techniques To Mitigate Conflicts With Passengers, Community Members and Co-workers

This Class Does Not Teach Self-Defense Skills

www.rlsandassoc.com



The Public Transit Operator's Reality

- ◆ Operator Conflicts or Assaults Are Ever-Increasing
- ◆ Safety of Transit Operators Is a Top Priority



www.rlsandassoc.com



Types of Conflict

- ◆ Passenger Against Driver
- ◆ Passenger Against Supervisor
- ◆ Passenger Against Passenger



www.rlsandassoc.com



Three Influencers of Communication

- ◆ Words
 - What we say
- ◆ Tone
 - How we say it
- ◆ Body Language
 - How our body says it



- These 3 Join Together To Express the Overall Message

www.rlsandassoc.com



Working Definition of Conflict

- ◆ Conflict
 - A disagreement in which the people involved see a threat to their needs, interests or concerns
- ◆ Key Thought
 - Work through issues with riders BEFORE verbal/physical violence ensues



www.rlsandassoc.com



Definition of De-Escalation

- ◆ De-escalation
 - The effective use of verbal and non-verbal (body language) communication skills to calm an angry or out of control passenger
- ◆ Escalation Phase
 - When interaction turns into conflict
 - It is vital to initiate de-escalation strategies during this phase

www.rlsandassoc.com



Why De-escalation Is Important

- ◆ Increases the Confidence of Operators in Difficult Situations
- ◆ Demonstrates the System's Desire To Meet Passenger Needs
- ◆ Diffusing Tense Situations
 - Reduces stress
 - Helps provide greater safety for everyone on the vehicle

www.rlsandassoc.com




Passenger Types

- ◆ Families
- ◆ Students
- ◆ Elderly
- ◆ Transient/Homeless
- ◆ Adults
- ◆ Commuters



www.rlsandassoc.com



Passenger Expectations

- ◆ Treat Others the Way You Want To Be Treated
- ◆ Provide a Service to the Entire Community
- ◆ Be Professional and Polite While Dealing With a Variety of People and Personalities
- ◆ Ensure All Customers Feel Welcomed, Valued and Appreciated

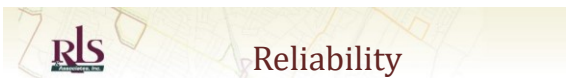
www.rlsandassoc.com



Six Basic Service Desires

- ◆ Reliability
- ◆ Safety and Security
- ◆ Convenience and Accessibility
- ◆ Cleanliness and Comfort
- ◆ Simplicity
- ◆ Affordability

www.rlsandassoc.com



Reliability

- ◆ Reliability
 - Consistency with pickups and drop offs
 - Times
 - Location
 - Routing
 - Wait time
 - Assistance
 - Minimal service interruptions due to...
 - Mechanical issues
 - Improper directions
 - On-board incidents

www.rlsandassoc.com

RLS **Safety and Security**

- ◆ Safety and Security
 - Providing freedom from harm or disruptive behavior
 - Minimal distractions of operator
 - Constant dispatch communication
 - Interaction with technology
 - Constant adjustments to operator area
 - On-going discussions with passengers
 - Exhibits patience while driving
 - Enforcement of policies
 - Ensuring passengers feel secure while onboard
 - Properly marked safety equipment and evacuation exits



www.rlsandassoc.com

RLS **Convenience and Accessibility**

- ◆ Convenience and Accessibility
 - Providing service that is user-friendly and meets needs
 - Amenities
 - Seating
 - Lighting
 - Trash receptacles
 - Easy to read and understand schedules and ride guides
 - Simple reservation process

These communicate appreciation of passengers


www.rlsandassoc.com

RLS **Cleanliness and Comfort**

- ◆ Cleanliness and Comfort
 - Vehicles free of garbage and odors
 - Clean, well maintained vehicles and equipment
 - Neutral climate control
 - Securement system properly stowed
 - Operator looking professional

Show pride in the service

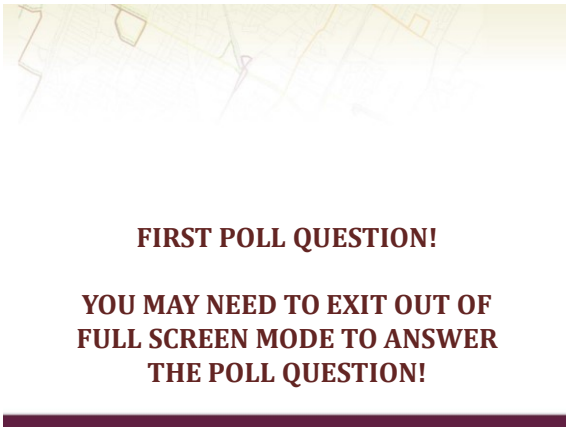
www.rlsandassoc.com



rls **Simplicity and Affordability**

- ◆ Easy To Use and Affordable
 - Help riders understand system's services
 - Reasonable fare structure
 - Adjustable for "ability to pay" levels – low income, disabled, seniors or students
 - Use of vouchers, passes or smartcards
 - Reservation process has minimal hold time or phone tree options with one number to call

www.rtsandassoc.com



FIRST POLL QUESTION!

YOU MAY NEED TO EXIT OUT OF FULL SCREEN MODE TO ANSWER THE POLL QUESTION!

www.rtsandassoc.com



rls **Triggers**

- ◆ What Is a Trigger?
 - An incident perceived as a threat by an individual
- ◆ Types of Triggering Events
 - Fear-based
 - A person feels threatened and believes they are about to lose something they value
 - Frustration
 - A person feels their needs are not being met

www.rtsandassoc.com



Why Does Transit Conflict Occur?

- ◆ Unmet Expectations
 - Promptness
 - Affordability
 - Friendly and personable
 - Ease of use
 - Accessibility for disabled
 - Ease of scheduling
 - Availability
 - Cleanliness



www.rlsandassoc.com



Root Causes for Rider Conflict

- ◆ Transit Service Dissatisfaction
- ◆ High Stress Level
- ◆ Resentment of Authority
- ◆ Mental Health Issues
- ◆ Under the Influence of Alcohol/Drugs



www.rlsandassoc.com



Transit Conflict Instigators

- ◆ Unwanted Advances or Harassment
- ◆ Use of Profanity
- ◆ Delays in Services
- ◆ Bullying
- ◆ Language or Cultural Differences
- ◆ Fare Disputes
- ◆ Vandalism of Vehicle

www.rlsandassoc.com



Recognizing Signs of Conflict

- ◆ Clinched Fists or Jaw
- ◆ Sweating, Restlessness or Pacing
- ◆ Change in Voice Tone, Eye Contact, Stance
- ◆ Blame, Anger, Frustration
- ◆ Spatial Distancing Reduced

www.rlsandassoc.com



Recognizing Signs of Conflict (Cont'd)

- ◆ Disruptive Behaviors
 - Yelling, bullying, refusing to comply with rules
- ◆ Lowering of Body Posture
- ◆ Heavy Breathing
- ◆ Raised/Hidden Hands
 - Holding hands in air out of frustration
 - Hiding hands behind back or in pockets

www.rlsandassoc.com



Types of Assaults

- ◆ Verbal Assault
- ◆ Spitting (Becoming More Common)
- ◆ Assault With an Object
- ◆ Physical Assault
- ◆ Assault With a Weapon



www.rlsandassoc.com



Strategies To Reduce Transit Conflict

- ◆ Install Protective Barriers
- ◆ Video Surveillance
- ◆ Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL System)
- ◆ Operator De-Escalation Training
- ◆ Consistent Reporting of Assaults
- ◆ Periodic Route or Driver Evaluations

www.rlsandassoc.com



Control Strategies (Cont'd)

- ◆ Meet With Passengers and/or Caregivers To Discuss Strategies To Mitigate Transit Conflict
- ◆ Involve Operators in Safety Committees
- ◆ Enforce Passenger Codes of Conduct
- ◆ Suspend Service for Violations
- ◆ Provide Adequate Escape Routes and Opportunities To Escape

www.rlsandassoc.com



De-Escalation Training Is a Must!

- ◆ Training Plays a Critical Role in Reducing Assaults
 - Provides employees with knowledge about agency expectations to address a variety of common situations related to conflict that could lead to assault
 - Agency must identify latest trends that may increase potential for conflict (i.e. politics, sports event, latest Tiktok video, rise in gang activity, recent local industry layoffs)

www.rlsandassoc.com



Training Benefits Everyone

- ◆ Employees Respond to High-risk Scenarios in One of Three Ways
 - Taking actions that de-escalate the situation
 - Retreating into “hostile withdrawal”
 - Responding aggressively in a way that promotes conflict

www.rlsandassoc.com



Early Observations

- ◆ An Operator Should Not Make Assumptions About a Passenger’s State of Mind...
 - But, an operator should make a mental note of strange behavior exhibited while boarding or during the trip

www.rlsandassoc.com



Early Observations (Cont’d)

- ◆ Proactive Actions
 - Be attentive to passenger conduct and actions
 - Check (passenger) rear-view mirror similar to side view mirrors
 - Listen for any disruption or increased volume or negative tone
 - Think about next steps if disruptions elevate
 - Know safe stops on the route of travel
 - Calculate trigger(s) for intervention

www.rlsandassoc.com



Early Observations (Cont'd)

- ◆ Proactive Actions (Cont'd)
 - Do not overly focus on potential disruption at the cost of defensive driving
 - Pull over if distraction is too much
 - Review training and policy while thinking through possible next steps
 - Use professional judgement versus personal judgement

Better to be prepared than blind-sided

www.rlsandassoc.com



Conflict De-Escalation Strategies

- ◆ The Best Fight Is the One You Don't Have To Have



www.rlsandassoc.com



Assessing Conflict Escalation

- ◆ VIDEO
- ◆ What Could Have Been Done Differently?
- ◆ Viewer Discretion Is Advised
 - Violence

www.rlsandassoc.com

rls Assessing Conflict Escalation



www.rlsandassoc.com

rls De-Escalate Yourself

- ◆ Act Calm/Remember To Breathe
- ◆ Maintain Non-Threatening Eye Contact
- ◆ Neutral Facial Expressions
- ◆ Relaxed Body
- ◆ Keep Gestures to a Minimum

www.rlsandassoc.com

rls Act vs React

- ◆ When We Act
 - We remain in control
- ◆ When We React
 - We can “respond impulsively”
 - Responding impulsively leads to mistakes and regretful decisions

www.rlsandassoc.com



Practice The Pause

- ◆ Gives You a Chance To Stop and Think!
- ◆ As You Pause
 - Observe
 - Aim to listen
 - Thoughtfully respond

www.rlsandassoc.com



Use Connecting Questions

- ◆ Don't Tell Passengers To Calm Down
- ◆ Instead
 - Validate their feelings
 - Ask "What do you need?"
 - Ask "How is it going?"
- ◆ Let Them Vent

www.rlsandassoc.com



Protect Your Reactionary Gap

- ◆ Avoid the Danger Zone
 - Within 1 arm's length
- ◆ Maintain Safety Zone
 - Outside of person's reach
- ◆ Create a Zone of Influence
 - Within safety zone but close enough for effective communication

www.rlsandassoc.com



Make a Personal Connection

- ◆ Use the Passenger's Name
- ◆ Ask What the Issue Is
- ◆ Acknowledge Their Emotion
 - Upset, frustrated, angry, etc.
- ◆ Empathize With Their Feelings
- ◆ Offer Help

www.rlsandassoc.com

SECOND POLL QUESTION!

**YOU MAY NEED TO EXIT OUT OF
FULL SCREEN MODE TO ANSWER
THE POLL QUESTION!**




Actively Listen

- ◆ Ask What the Issue Is
- ◆ Acknowledge Their Concern or Complaint Before Offering a Response
- ◆ Summarize the Issue
- ◆ Seek "Common Ground" of Agreement




www.rlsandassoc.com



Non-Verbal De-Escalation Skills

- ◆ Maintain Neutral Facial Expression
 - Initiate an attentive expression
 - Helps reduce hostility & expresses that you care
- ◆ Mirror Behavior You're Seeking
- ◆ Avoid Aggressive Body Stances and Posture
- ◆ Minimize Excessive Gesturing, Pacing, Fidgeting, or Weight Shifting


www.rlsandassoc.com



Flip the Roles Approach

- ◆ Mentally Try Arguing Their Point of View
- ◆ Practice Perspective Taking
 - Ask them why they feel the way they do
 - Don't just assume how they feel

www.rlsandassoc.com



C.A.I.R.O

- ◆ Method of Conflict Management
 - Calm
 - Assertive
 - Informing behavior
 - Reflect/Redirect
 - Opening behavior


www.rlsandassoc.com



Calm

- ◆ Don't Challenge Your Passenger
- ◆ Don't Raise Voice
 - Resist "natural" reaction
 - Use neutral, consistent voice tone
- ◆ Calm Helps To
 - Diffuse the situation
 - Decide if there are other threats
 - Discern possible escape routes

www.rlsandassoc.com



Assertive

- ◆ When Our Voice Tone and Body Language Betray Us, We Often Come Across As Controlling, Parental, Insecure and Aggressive
- ◆ Have Confidence in Your Ability
- ◆ Have an Empowered Pitch
- ◆ Take the Middle of the Road Approach

www.rlsandassoc.com



Informing Behavior

- ◆ Communicate What's Going On in Neutral Terms Without Using "You Messages"
- ◆ Use "WE" Phrasing With the Irrate Rider
 - WE are moving on now
 - WE can talk now
 - WE all want to remain safe
 - WE do not want to disrespect each other
- ◆ Do Not Order or Command Them To Do Something

www.rlsandassoc.com



Reflect/Redirect

- ◆ Actively Listen
- ◆ Let Them Vent / Don't Interrupt Them
- ◆ Let the Passenger Know You Heard Them
- ◆ If the Rider Is Frustrated Take the Time To Affirm Their Frustrations
- ◆ Appear Sympathetic to What They Are Feeling
- ◆ Use a Reflective Statement With an Informing Statement To Calm a Passenger

www.rlsandassoc.com



Opening Behavior

- ◆ Try To Make a Personal Connection
- ◆ Ask Questions That Help the Person Feel Acknowledged and Visible
 - Can I help you?
 - Do you need something?
 - How are you doing today?
 - What do you think about what I am saying?
- ◆ Allow Them To Open Up and Express Themselves To Address Their Feelings

www.rlsandassoc.com

THIRD POLL QUESTION!

**YOU MAY NEED TO EXIT OUT OF
FULL SCREEN MODE TO ANSWER
THE POLL QUESTION!**



Strategy for Mitigating Escalation

REMEMBER: *Aggression breeds aggression, potentially escalating a bad situation into an emergency*

- ◆ Handle the Situation From the Driver’s Seat When Possible
- ◆ Avoid Invading the Offender’s Personal Space
- ◆ Your Calmness Is Paramount To Enhance De-escalation
- ◆ Project Sense of Control Without Conveying Aggressiveness

www.rlsandassoc.com



Strategy for Mitigating Escalation (Cont’d)

- ◆ Listen To Concerns Without Passing Judgement
- ◆ Your Body Posture Should Be As Non-Threatening As Possible
- ◆ Use a Non-Excitable Tone of Voice Presentation
- ◆ Try To Connect in a Personable Way

www.rlsandassoc.com



Strategy for Mitigating Escalation (Cont’d)

- ◆ Strive To Get Them To Say “Yes” in Your Dialogue
 - If the offender is agreeing with you, it is difficult for them to stay angry at you
- ◆ Treat Every Passenger With Respect
 - Don't embarrass, humiliate or intimidate passenger
- ◆ Share a Verbal Confirmation of Onboard Cameras, if Equipped
 - If problem person knows they’re being recorded it could help to diffuse the scenario

www.rlsandassoc.com



Strategy for Mitigating Escalation (Cont'd)

- ◆ Avoid These Statements
 - Calm Down
 - Could be perceived as commanding them
 - Why
 - May be perceived as an accusation
 - Promotes defensiveness
 - You Should Or You Shouldn't
 - These statements may incite inadequacy, shame or frustration within passenger

www.rlsandassoc.com



Strategy for Mitigating Escalation (Cont'd)

- ◆ De-Escalation Skills Are Not Foolproof
- ◆ Although Effective in Most Settings, There Are a Few Passengers Who Will Refuse to De-Escalate
 - Recognize this serious red flag and protect
 - Maintain a safe distance
 - Allow the passenger to exit
 - Follow system policy

www.rlsandassoc.com



Role of Management

- ◆ Though the Operator Is on the Front-Line, There Are Steps Management Can Take To Help Mitigate Conflict



www.rlsandassoc.com



Role of Management

- ◆ Preventive Steps
 - Conduct service/operator evaluations more than once a year
 - Depending on state laws, spot check surveillance footage randomly or when known trouble areas exist (post signage on vehicle of surveillance system)
 - Maintain training standards and timeline for refresher training

www.rlsandassoc.com



Role of Management (Cont'd)

- ◆ Preventive Steps (Cont'd)
 - Seek feedback from operators or dispatchers on elevated passenger behavior
 - Be aware of trends in community through police, peers, community agencies, local news or passenger tips (be wary of false insinuations)

www.rlsandassoc.com



Conclusion

- ◆ The Safety of Employees and Passengers Is a Tenet of Every Transit System
- ◆ By Understanding How To Recognize and Respond to Conflicts Effectively, Employees Can Reduce the Risk of Violence to Them and Passengers

www.rlsandassoc.com



RLS & ASSOCIATES, INC.
3131 S. DIXIE HIGHWAY, SUITE 545
DAYTON, OH 45439
WWW.RLSANDASSOC.COM

www.rlsandassoc.com
