Information Gathering from Child and Senior Callers

Information gathering can present unique challenges when emergency callers are at either end of the age spectrum. Children may have difficulty understanding questions, describing what they see, recalling information, or recognizing the seriousness of an emergency. Senior callers may experience hearing or vision loss, mobility limitations, or communication challenges that affect how information is exchanged. This course examines these age-related considerations and provides practical techniques telecommunicators can use to communicate effectively, gather critical information, maintain situational awareness, and adapt their approach to the individual caller.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, learners will be able to:

1. Explain how cognitive development affects communication and information gathering with child callers.
2. Apply age-appropriate questioning and communication techniques when handling emergency calls from children.
3. Recognize common characteristics and communication challenges associated with senior callers.
4. Adapt questions and emergency instructions to accommodate hearing, vision, mobility, and other caller limitations.
5. Apply patience, situational awareness, and effective communication strategies when gathering information from child and senior callers..

Module 1: Understanding Child Callers

Children do not process information in the same way as adults, and their ability to communicate during an emergency is influenced by their level of cognitive development. This module introduces developmental concepts that can help telecommunicators better understand how young callers think, remember information, interpret questions, and respond to unfamiliar situations. Particular attention is given to the preoperational and concrete operational stages of development and how the characteristics of each stage can affect emergency communication and information gathering.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Explain how cognitive development influences a child's communication abilities.
2. Identify the stages of cognitive development relevant to child callers.
3. Describe characteristics of children in the preoperational stage.
4. Describe characteristics of children in the concrete operational stage.
5. Relate developmental characteristics to information gathering during emergency calls.

Content/Activities

- Child cognitive development
- Piaget's developmental stages
- Preoperational and concrete operational characteristics
- Knowledge check

Module 2: Communicating With Child Callers

A child's developmental level can affect vocabulary, memory, attention, emotional reactions, and the ability to understand what is happening during an emergency. Telecommunicators must adjust their communication techniques accordingly. This module explores strategies for speaking with children in language they understand, maintaining their attention, interpreting their descriptions, and recognizing important clues within the call. Learners also examine how calm communication, reassurance, and simple instructions can help children remain engaged and provide useful information.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Use simple and familiar language when questioning child callers.
2. Apply techniques for maintaining a child caller's attention and cooperation.
3. Recognize descriptions and background information that may indicate important emergency conditions.
4. Use reassurance and calm communication to support frightened or distressed children.
5. Provide clear, developmentally appropriate instructions to child callers.

Content/Activities

- Child caller communication techniques
- Preoperational caller strategies
- Concrete operational caller strategies
- Recorded calls and call analyses

Module 3: Common and Special Situations With Child Callers

Children may contact emergency services for medical emergencies, domestic violence, or other situations they recognize as unusual without fully understanding what is happening. These calls require telecommunicators to listen carefully, identify potential safety concerns, and obtain useful information from the child's descriptions. Additional challenges can occur when a child does not know an address or must communicate across a language barrier. This module examines strategies for handling these situations while maintaining caller safety and gathering the information responders need.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Identify common emergencies reported by child callers.
2. Recognize safety concerns during calls involving domestic violence.
3. Gather useful information when a child cannot fully describe an emergency.
4. Apply appropriate strategies when language barriers affect communication.
5. Use alternative methods to determine a child caller's location when an address is unknown.

Content/Activities

- Medical and domestic violence calls
- Language barriers
- Unknown-address techniques
- Recorded calls and call analyses
- Child caller knowledge check

Module 4: Understanding Senior Callers

Senior callers can present a different set of information-gathering challenges. Some may hesitate to contact emergency services, minimize their symptoms or circumstances, apologize for requesting assistance, or provide important information later in the conversation. These behaviors can make it more difficult to determine the urgency of a situation. This module examines characteristics commonly encountered when communicating with senior callers and emphasizes the importance of listening carefully while continuing to gather critical information in a timely and respectful manner.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Identify common characteristics and behaviors of senior callers.
2. Recognize when a senior caller may minimize the seriousness of an emergency.
3. Explain why senior callers may hesitate to request emergency assistance.
4. Recognize how delayed or incomplete information can affect call handling.
5. Balance respectful communication with the need to obtain critical information efficiently.

Content/Activities

- Senior caller characteristics
- Hesitancy and delayed information
- Information-gathering considerations
- Call examples

Module 5: Specialized Challenges With Senior Callers

Physical and sensory changes associated with aging can affect a caller's ability to communicate, describe an emergency, or carry out instructions. Hearing loss may make questions difficult to understand, while vision loss may limit a caller's ability to provide visual descriptions or move safely through an environment. Mobility limitations may also prevent a caller from completing standard evacuation or safety instructions. This module examines these specialized challenges and focuses on adapting communication and instructions to the caller's actual abilities and circumstances.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Recognize how hearing loss can affect emergency communication.
2. Adapt speech and questioning techniques for callers with hearing difficulties.
3. Identify how limited mobility may affect a caller's ability to follow emergency instructions.
4. Adjust information gathering and instructions for callers with vision loss.
5. Use situational awareness to identify alternatives when standard instructions cannot be followed.

Content/Activities

- Hearing loss
- Mobility limitations
- Vision loss
- Recorded calls and call analyses

Module 6: Effective Information Gathering With Senior Callers

Successful communication with senior callers requires telecommunicators to recognize individual limitations without making assumptions based solely on age. A caller may need additional time to process a question, may have difficulty hearing certain words, or may be physically unable to carry out an instruction. This module brings together communication strategies for senior callers and emphasizes patience, clear questioning, appropriate pacing, situational awareness, and flexibility when standard communication or emergency instructions do not meet the caller's needs.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Select communication techniques appropriate to a senior caller's individual abilities.
2. Modify questions to improve caller understanding and response.
3. Provide clear instructions that account for sensory or physical limitations.
4. Recognize verbal and environmental clues that may affect caller safety.
5. Apply patience and situational awareness throughout the information-gathering process.

Content/Activities

- Senior caller communication techniques
- Adapted questioning and instructions
- Situational awareness
- Senior caller knowledge check
- Course review

Course Completion Criteria

To successfully complete this course and earn a certificate and continuing education hours, learners must achieve a minimum score of 75%. The quiz must be completed within 30 minutes.

- CE hours awarded: 1
- Certificate duration: 12 Months

Technical Requirements

- Desktop, laptop, or mobile device
- Speakers or headphones
- High-speed Internet access
- A current web browser