Foundations of Call Handling

Foundations of Call Handling prepares telecommunicators to respond effectively to calls for service by developing essential information-gathering, protocol, communication, decision-making, safety, and stress-management skills. The course emphasizes the telecommunicator's responsibility to collect critical information, determine appropriate resources, support caller and responder safety, provide Pre-Arrival Instructions, and communicate changing scene conditions. Learners also explore how structured call-handling tools such as Total Response support consistency, safety, evidence preservation, risk mitigation, and timely response.

Learning Objectives

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

1. Apply the Journalistic Investigative Approach to gather essential information on calls for service.
2. Explain how Total Response and protocol-driven call handling can support a consistent response to calls for service.
3. Demonstrate effective communication skills when interacting with callers, victims, and responders.
4. Apply call-handling techniques that support safety, effective decision-making, and reduced individual and agency liability.
5. Recognize situational stress and apply appropriate strategies for responding to workplace stress.

Module 1: Information Gathering

Effective information gathering is central to every call for service. This module introduces the Journalistic Investigative Approach and teaches learners to gather enough information to understand the emergency, support an appropriate dispatch, protect callers and responders, and provide appropriate Pre-Arrival Instructions. Learners also examine situational-awareness techniques that help them look beyond the caller's immediate perspective.

Module Objectives

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

1. Apply the Journalistic Investigative Approach to gather essential call information.
2. Use the 5Ws + H + W + H + I formula to identify location, incident details, involved parties, timing, circumstances, weapons, hazards, and injuries.
3. Obtain detailed location information using techniques such as Where Within the Where and inverted visualization.
4. Apply situational-awareness techniques to identify victims, multiple people or events, red flags, and broader scene conditions.
5. Explain how effective information gathering supports caller, responder, and public safety.

Content/Activities

- Journalistic Investigative Approach and 5Ws + H + W + H + I
- Where and Where Within the Where
- Caller-party classifications
- Weapons, hazards, and injuries
- Situational Awareness and victim focus
- Thinking in Multiples and Red Flags
- Balcony Approach and Inverted Visualization
- Knowledge checks
- JIA drag-and-drop activity

Module 2: Introduction to Protocols

Protocols provide telecommunicators with a structured approach for gathering information, making dispatch recommendations, and delivering consistent instructions. This module introduces protocol-driven call handling and explores how structured tools can guide the telecommunicator while supporting professional judgment and agency procedures.

Module Objectives

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

1. Explain the purpose of protocols in emergency call handling.
2. Describe how protocol-driven call handling promotes consistency and supports decision-making.
3. Use protocol information to support appropriate dispatch recommendations and Pre-Arrival Instructions.
4. Explain the relationship between structured protocols, agency procedures, and professional judgment.
5. Identify benefits of protocol-driven call handling for callers, responders, telecommunicators, and agencies.

Content/Activities

- Purpose and structure of call-handling protocols
- Protocol-driven decision-making
- Dispatch recommendations
- Pre-Arrival Instructions
- Call consistency and responder safety
- Evidence preservation and risk mitigation
- Knowledge checks and application activities

Module 3: Effective Communication

Successful call handling depends not only on what information is gathered but also on how the telecommunicator communicates. This module focuses on techniques for establishing control, listening effectively, communicating clearly, and interacting professionally with callers who may be emotional, confused, frightened, or difficult to understand.

Module Objectives

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

1. Demonstrate clear, professional communication during calls for service.
2. Apply active listening techniques to identify relevant information and caller needs.
3. Use effective questioning techniques to obtain accurate and complete information.
4. Adapt communication strategies to callers experiencing stress, fear, confusion, or emotional distress.
5. Maintain professionalism and call control while demonstrating appropriate concern for the caller.

Content/Activities

- Active listening
- Effective questioning
- Caller rapport and call control
- Clear and concise communication
- Communicating with distressed or challenging callers
- Professionalism and customer service
- Scenario-based knowledge checks

Module 4: Expanding Your Call Handling Toolkit

Telecommunicators regularly encounter calls that require flexibility beyond basic questioning and protocol navigation. This module expands the learner's collection of call-handling techniques so they can recognize unusual circumstances, improve situational awareness, manage difficult interactions, and adapt appropriately as conditions change.

Module Objectives

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

1. Apply additional call-handling techniques to complex or unusual calls for service.
2. Select communication and information-gathering strategies appropriate to changing call conditions.
3. Recognize cues that indicate additional questioning or clarification is required.
4. Maintain situational awareness while balancing caller needs, responder safety, and dispatch priorities.
5. Integrate foundation techniques with protocol guidance and professional judgment.

Content/Activities

- Advanced information-gathering techniques
- Situational-awareness strategies
- Clarification and follow-up questioning
- Call-control techniques
- Adapting to changing conditions
- Professional judgment and guided flexibility
- Applied scenarios and knowledge checks

Module 5: Reducing Liability Risk

Effective call handling protects not only callers and responders but also the telecommunicator and agency. This module examines how adherence to established standards, accurate information gathering, appropriate documentation, professional communication, and consistent use of approved procedures can reduce preventable risk.

Module Objectives

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

1. Explain how call-handling decisions can affect individual and agency liability.
2. Apply established protocols, policies, and procedures consistently during calls for service.
3. Recognize call-handling practices that may create unnecessary risk.
4. Explain the importance of accurate documentation, information gathering, and communication.
5. Apply professional practices that support the agency's standard of care.

Content/Activities

- Standard of care
- Policy, procedure, and protocol compliance
- Accurate information gathering and documentation
- Caller and responder safety
- Evidence preservation
- Risk mitigation
- Call assessment and quality improvement
- Knowledge checks

Module 6: Responding to Workplace Stress

Emergency communications can expose telecommunicators to demanding workloads, emotionally difficult calls, and repeated high-stress situations. This module helps learners recognize workplace stress and understand the importance of responding to stress in ways that support personal well-being and continued professional performance.

Module Objectives

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

1. Recognize common sources and signs of stress associated with emergency telecommunications.
2. Explain how stress can affect communication, decision-making, and job performance.
3. Identify healthy strategies for managing routine and situational workplace stress.
4. Recognize when additional support or organizational resources may be appropriate.
5. Apply stress-management practices that support resilience and effective call handling.

Content/Activities

- Sources and signs of workplace stress
- Effects of stress on call handling and decision-making
- Situational and cumulative stress
- Healthy coping and stress-management strategies
- Personal and organizational support resources
- Resilience and professional well-being
- Knowledge checks and course review

Course Completion Criteria

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

- CE hours awarded: 3
- Certificate duration: 12 Months

Technical Requirements

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