
Critical Thinking Exercise – Nursing #1

You are a nursing student living with five other students in a large house. Each has their own room, and share bathroom and kitchen facilities. While five of you are having dinner together, someone asks if anyone has seen the sixth student. It becomes apparent that none of the students have seen him for a couple of days, but his bicycle is locked at the rear of the house. You go to his room and knock on the door, but there is no verbal response, although you do hear movement in the room.

The group decides to locate the extra key and investigate. They find their housemate sitting on the floor in the corner of his room. The odor of urine is strong and the room is a mess. The young man is quiet, but has a look of terror on his face. As you approach, he tells you to leave him alone or you will regret it.

Directions: Write your responses to the following questions and prepare to discuss in class.

1. List the questions that come to mind in reviewing the above situation.
2. Determine the relevance of the questions to the situation facing you at this point in time.
3. Is there any other information that you must have before acting in this situation?
4. List the possible causes for his behavior.
5. List the possible options to consider in dealing with this situation.
6. Prioritize the options in dealing with this situation.

Discussion Topics:

1. What assumptions were used in determining your conclusions about an action plan in this situation? Were these assumptions a hindrance or an effective tool in reaching preliminary conclusions?
2. Were any biases apparent in discussing this situation? How are unknown biases detrimental to resolving such a situation?
3. What attitudes are apparent in discussing this situation? How do attitudes impact our understanding, assessment and resolution of situations involving mental health issues?

Instructor Guide-Critical Thinking Exercise – Nursing #1

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The group decides to locate the extra key and investigate. They find their housemate sitting on the floor in the corner of his room. The odor of urine is strong and the room is a mess. The young man is quiet, but has a look of terror on his face. As you approach, he tells you to leave him alone or you will regret it.

Directions: Write your responses to the following questions and prepare to discuss in class.

1. List the questions that come to mind in reviewing the above situation.
Some of the questions that may arise in the review of the situation are:
 - *Am I safe?*
 - *Is he under the influence of drugs?*
 - *Is he mentally ill?*
 - *How can I help?*
2. Determine the relevance of the questions to the situation facing you at this point in time.
 - *The highest priority at this point in time is personal safety.*
 - *All of the questions are relevant in the context of the above priority.*
 - *The other questions are important in determining the next action.*
3. Is there any other information that you must have before acting in this situation?
 - *Does he have a weapon?*
 - *Has this happened before?*
4. List the possible causes for his behavior.
 - *Drug or alcohol intoxication*
 - *Mental illness with paranoid hallucinations*
 - *Metabolic abnormality – diabetes mellitus/ketoacidosis*
5. List the possible options to consider in dealing with this situation.
 - *Try to talk him down, making certain to position self between him and the door.*
 - *Call his next of kin to get more information.*
 - *Call a trusted friend to help in the situation.*
 - *Call 911 as this may be a psychiatric emergency.*
6. Prioritize the options in dealing with this situation.
There are several options to consider and the priorities will change depending on the responses to each action. Reinforce that personal safety comes first. One person can be assigned to talk with him from the door, while another can call a friend or next of kin for further information and to help in the situation if it does not escalate. Be ready to call 911 for this medical emergency at any time.

Discussion Topics:

1. What assumptions were used in determining your conclusions about an action plan in this situation? Were these assumptions a hindrance or an effective tool in reaching preliminary conclusions?

Novice students will frequently determine action plans based on assumptions driven by experience in their personal lives. These assumptions may prevent them from assessing the situation completely and determining an appropriate action plan. Today's students in the health occupations however, come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and will respond from their perspective. The initial response from most students will probably be that this case involves drug intoxication and that the person either needs to be talked down or controlled. Discussion can include the other causes for the behavior, so that students can consider all options. Facilitator must focus on the personal safety issues first!

2. Were any biases apparent in discussing this situation? How are unknown biases detrimental to resolving such a situation?

It is wise for the facilitator to tread gently in communicating in this subject area. Most people become threatened and defensive if their unknown biases are confronted. Unknown biases can cause one to approach a situation with "tunnel vision" and prevent an objective and impartial approach in assessing the situation, determining a plan and following through with it. Again, stress personal safety and compassion in dealing with the situation.

3. What attitudes are apparent in discussing this situation? How do attitudes impact our understanding, assessment and resolution of situations involving mental health issues?

Attitudes towards situations are as varied as the people in the group. Some group members will experience fear or disgust at the situation and will respond by either avoiding the situation or becoming judgmental, escalating the situation. Others may experience compassion and be overly "helpful" in the situation, approaching the patient closely and putting themselves and others at risk. Key points for the facilitator to stress in the resolution of the situation include:

- *Remain sensitive to the behaviors of the patient.*
- *Note signs of escalation of the agitation or calming in response to the communication.*
- *Call for additional resources early.*
- *Putting self and others at risk also puts patient at a higher risk.*