

Communication Skills and Active Listening

Skills that Can be Learned

Types of Interactions: Advice and Support

- This is why we come to support groups
- How do we know that someone wants advice?
- Could it be that someone just wants us to listen and not offer advice and not try to fix our problems?
- See video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wUCyjiyXdg>

Just Listen and Don't fix the problem

- As a therapist I have heard this many times
- People who have been abused or traumatized generally are suspicious of and resentful of someone trying to fix them or their problems.
- It may seem like we don't care – that might not be our intention, but it can come across this way to another person.

Types of Interactions: Support/Empathy

- This can be different than seeking advice
- Someone is sharing something emotional or with a psychological component
- Trust is key
- Non-judgmental attitude
- Non-verbal and verbal listening skills
- Ask questions

Types of Interactions: Sharing Experiences

- This is how we start conversations
- This is how we meet people
- We find out if we have anything in common with a person
- Speaking and listening
- There is a difference between a therapeutic relationship and a relationship with a friend or acquaintance
 - Therapists don't talk about their issues or experiences as much
 - Friends/acquaintances expect to give and receive – sometimes we will talk about my issues and sometimes your issues

What is Free Information?

- A tool or technique for starting conversations
- It can work with existing friends, strangers, or any time you want to find something to say
- Examples:
 - The weather – e.g., the recent snowstorm
 - COVID and technology
 - Changes to relationships due to Zoom, COVID, mask wearing, vaccines
 - What a person is wearing – a shirt with certain writing on it – or the things in someone's environment, e.g., a picture on the wall, the colors in the background

Communicating With Empathy

- See video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tyFJTtzYtY>
- This is a skill that can be learned
- We use a variety of listening techniques
- We demonstrate that we care
- We understand the emotional aspects of what a person is communicating, and we demonstrate this understanding
- Can you think of times when you didn't feel like you were heard and understood?

Active Listening Techniques (Responding)

- **Paraphrase:** Explain what you believe has been said in your own words.
- **Clarify:** Ensure you understand what has been said through asking questions.
- **Summarize:** *Offer* a concise overview of what you believe the main points and intent of the message received are.

Communication/Listening tips

- Keep your attention on the message being presented
- Refrain from thinking about your own response to what is being presented.
- Refrain from offering judgement on *anything* the other person says.
- Observe non-verbal content. These are their own kind of communication which can be clarified by the active listener.
 - I often follow up with questions that seek to clarify what I think I am hearing non-verbally
 - I might say “it sounds like?” and pose it in the form of a question with my voice rising.

Personality: The Big Five Personality Model(OCEAN)

- O – Openness to Experience
- C – Conscientiousness
- E – Extroversion
- A – Agreeableness
- N – Neuroticism
- See Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLx8EASkSeQ>

Cognitive Distortions – All or Nothing Thinking

- All or Nothing Thinking – We don't get a job and tell ourself "no one will hire me. I am a failure. You get a one bad grade and tell yourself that you are a failure.
 - You have to be perfect.
 - You never measure up to your standards because you can never be good enough.
 - In reality no one is a perfect genius that never makes mistakes. We all face some failures in life. Nothing is ever perfect.
 - These reality statements are the way we challenge our thinking

Cognitive Distortion: Overgeneralization

- Overgeneralization leads to a fear of rejection.
- We ask someone to go out and they decline, and we tell ourselves “no girl would ever go out with me.”
- We don’t get a job offer after one or two interviews and say that “no one will ever hire me.”
- Reality: there are many reasons why someone else might have been chosen for the job. Not every woman or man has the same interests, tastes, preferences, likes and dislikes.
- The reality statements are examples of challenges to the automatic thought.

Cognitive Distortions: Mental Filter

- We pick a negative detail and dwell on it exclusively
- On a 100-item test we might focus on the 17 items we got wrong and not the 83 that we got right, even if it is the best grade in the class.
- You filter out anything positive from your view.
- Reality/Challenging statement: I got 83% right and that was the best in class.
- This is just one example.