

# Communication Challenges & Building Relationships

Insights from How Therapists Communicate and the Challenges Mental  
Health Professionals face

# My Role In the Group

- I bring my experiences as a therapist who has provided individual, group, family and couples counseling
- In this support group my role is slightly different – I am here for support myself
- When I lead therapy groups on the job, I NEVER focused on my own issues
- I am here for support along with everyone else.
- I will share my email if anyone wants to contact me about the group:  
[brucewhealton@outlook.com](mailto:brucewhealton@outlook.com)

# Host, Facilitator, Leader etc.

- These words might have similar meanings in support or therapy groups.
- I have gotten feedback that some people would like me to be like a leader, facilitator, or host.
- I hope this won't create any confusion with me also being a member that wants support just like everyone else.
- I welcome and invite other co-hosts, co-facilitators, co-leaders in the future. I know someone in AA that said that is how they run meetings; they ask different members to host the meeting at different times

# Confidentiality or Anonymity & Friendship Building

- What is said in the group doesn't leave the group
- We don't want to talk behind anyone's back
- This is similar to the concept of privacy
- Even in friendships we imagine that certain things that we share will be kept private.
- We can also decide to share our phone numbers or email addresses if we would like to do so – we might find that we have something in common with another member...
- One of the goals: to make and build friendships

# Example of Challenging Encounter – Insights Offered

- I meet James (not his actual name) for the first time to support him
- James is a member of a different race than me
- James explains that he has a third grade reading level
- James is hard to understand when he talks, as sometimes he seems to be mumbling
- James wants help passing his driving test and he wants to go to a community college to study engineering but he didn't graduate from high school
- James has a mental illness – Bipolar (Manic-depression) and he said he has schizophrenia

# Things to consider about example

- I need to demonstrate respect
- I can't assume that he is illiterate but later he reveals that is having a hard time understanding the material for the written part of his driving test
- Observation: Our friends are people with whom we have a great deal in common but if we can effectively communicate in challenging situations, we might be better friends and better listeners overall.

# Good and Bad Communication examples

- Example of Bad communication: See video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcOKFiupRKc>
- Compare/contrast that with this next video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-VeSMPgy-l>
- How would you feel differently depending on how the other person acts when you are trying to speak to them?
- How would you feel differently about your friend or the potential for the friendship depending on how the other person is acting?

# Tips of Active Listening

- Put down everything else that you are doing when someone is talking to you.
- Make eye contact
- Use verbal cues to indicate that you are listening while the other person is talking
- Don't think about your response but instead just listen when the other person is speaking
- There is a time for everything – time for you to listen and a time for you to share



# 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.

# Mental Illness Stigma

- Someone like my ex-wife would feel shame that would prevent someone from her culture from attending a “support group” or if they did, they would need encouragement.
- Many group members have discussed that they might be dealing with other mental illnesses – from personality disorders, to PTSD
- Does anyone feel uncomfortable when you find out that someone in the group has disclosed that they have a mental illness?
- Do we all feel safe enough to share this information if it applies to us?

# Cultural Competence and Differences

- Culture generally refers to “shared values, norms, traditions, customs, art history, folklore and institutions of a group of people
- We are all very diverse and belong to many cultural groups
- It isn't practical, desirable, or necessary to only associate with and make friends with those people who have the same exact cultural background.
- Is that previous statement a belief that we share among ourselves?

# Examples of cultural differences

- Gender/sex
- Race
- Groups that we join
- Where we live – part of the country, urban, suburban, rural areas
- Where we were raised or grew up
- Our jobs and careers
- Our educational background
- Our age or generation
- Can we think of other examples?

# Generalizations – Potential Problems

- Ask questions – never just assume
- We are all diverse and again we are members of different cultural groups
- Overgeneralization is a Cognitive Distortion as described in the book “Feeling Good” by David Burns which I recommended.
- Remember that the fact that we are affected by cognitive distortions doesn’t mean that we are irrational, delusional or can’t think logically – the fact that we do fall prey to cognitive distortions doesn’t mean that we are “crazy”

# 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 – 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 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.



# 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>