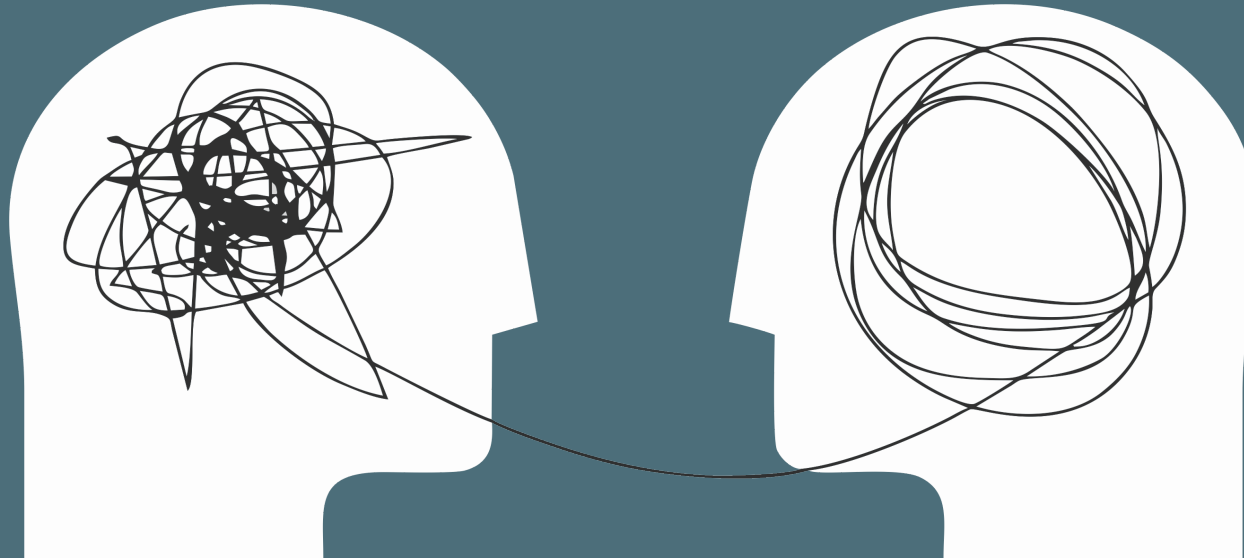


# PFA AND ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

ALEXANDER CHERYOMUKHIN, PHD, AND SOPHIKO GOGOCHASHVILI, MA, 2023

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## WHAT BEHAVIOR OF OTHER PEOPLE HELPED YOU IN STRESSFUL SITUATION?

- Remember a time when you were in stressful situation.
- What did you want/need the most?
- What did other people do that felt helpful and supportive to you?
- What did the other people do that was not helpful or increased your stress?

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID (WHO, 2011)

- PFA is provided to people immediately after crisis or stressful situation.
- PFA aims at reducing someone's experience of distress whilst also focusing on practical needs and linking people with assistance from others.
- PFA skills include knowing how to approach someone in distress and how to provide emotional support and practical help. Active listening is one of core skills.

# CORE BELIEFS

- It's not helpful to pathologize people's behavior. They do what they can from their perspective. People do the best they can within their beliefs, their abilities, and their interpretations of the situation. We should not label their reactions to stress as a pathology or a dysfunction – it is not helpful! Validate and de-pathologize!
- The problem is not a problem, the coping is the problem (Virginia Satir). It is not helpful to focus on whatever the identified problem is. It is helpful to focus on how people cope and what choices they have.
- People have multiple choices in terms of how they can respond. We can help people identify more choices and help them choose different / healthier options.

# KEY PRINCIPLES

- PFA is provided where people are, when people choose to share their stories and only in context of trust, safety and support.
- It is only helpful when people want to tell their stories.
- If people did not choose the time and place when they are ready to meet - it may not be to their benefit. Having a choice when, about what and how much people share - needs to be done in context of safety and support.
- PFA is not a long term therapy, it's not full therapeutic treatment, it is stopping the bleeding.
- The need for help is created by crisis events. It is not chosen by the client at the time chosen by you.
- You may see these people only once. You may not have privacy and comfort of private session.

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID INCLUDES:

- comforting someone in distress, providing emotional support and helping people feel safe and calm,
- helping them activate their strengths and coping resources;
- helping them to identify and address their immediate needs, such as food and water, rest, warmth, a blanket or a temporary place to stay; medical help, security and safety.
- People need to know how to access medical services, food, housing, emergency services, financial support, legal support, government support, and get additional information or access other services and social support they may need.

# IDENTIFY NEEDS AND AVAILABLE CHOICES

- Help people identify their needs.
- Sometimes people are paralyzed, confused and scared.
- We can help them go through their needs and ask: do you have a place to sleep, can you go into your home, are there relatives or friends where you can stay, do you know where community provides sleeping beds?
- We help them identify their choices.
- Then we ask if they want to share about their experiences: Who were you with, what coping tools and spiritual strengths can help you, what questions do you have? What do you need to do next.
- Validate their feelings. Reflect and reframe their feelings.

# PFA STEPS: LOOK, LISTEN AND LINK

## **1. Look: Identify those who needs immediate help:**

- People with safety and security risks
- People with physical injuries
- People with immediate basic and practical needs
- People with strong emotional reactions.

## **2. Listen:**

- Approach that person, make eye contact and introduce yourself;
- Offer to listen and accept their feelings and experiences;
- Focus on their safety and comfort, and their strengths, coping resources and immediate problem-solving;

## **3. Link with appropriate and necessary services or provide useful information.**



# IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVE LISTENING

- You may ask “How are things for you? Tell me how you feel. Is there something you need?”  
Give them space to talk about their own situations and how they deal with them.
- Holding hands may be very supportive. Ask permission to touch or to give a hug.
- Remind them of their strengths: offer them a meditation or relaxation, a wise quote, a breathing exercise, a prayer, help them explore how they can get some rest, focus on their strengths in their physical domain.
- We can help them connect with their social support: by asking about their family, friends, community, therapists.
- Or we can help them identify something positive they can do to help other people they don't know – which also reminds them about their strengths.

# EMPATHY

Empathy is loosely defined as an ability to understand and experience someone else's feelings and to adopt someone else's viewpoint (Colman, 2015).

- The ability to place yourself in someone else's shoes;
- understand other people's feelings, motivations, and behaviors;
- respond appropriately to someone else's feelings.

These skills are particularly beneficial during helping someone in crisis (Crisis Prevention Institute, 2016; Westland, 2015).



# PFA CORE SKILLS: EMPATHY AND ACTIVE LISTENING

- Sometimes simply being with a person in a state of high emotional upset can be enough, especially when we are unsure of what to say or how best to provide comfort. Sitting next to someone and handing them a bottle of water or a tissue can be helpful and profound.
- Listening and being nonjudgmental; Giving the other person our undivided attention.
- Sitting comfortably with silence and accepting bad feelings. When clients are either overwhelmed by their emotions or unable to put feelings into words, being present, open, and authentic can offer an environment where they can feel safe, calm down, and share how they feel (Westland, 2015).
- By making eye contact, mirroring their body position, holding hand, listening, and offering some help, You (the helper) convey this message to the client: “you are worth and you matter and you are not alone and you will be ok”. This way you help create feelings of trust and safety and human connection.

# ACTIVE LISTENING INCLUDES

- 1. Trying to understand what another person means, and paying attention to nonverbal communication, such as the speaker's tone of voice, timing, speed of talking, body language, and context.
- 2. Showing the other person that you understand them (Nelson-Jones, 2014).
- It helps both people to listen and understand each other.
- Telling their experiences to somebody else – can be healing for people in stressful situation. It also helps them better understand themselves, feel calm and supported.

# WHY IS ACTIVE LISTENING AS A SKILL IMPORTANT

- Being heard helps the person restore their sense of self-worth (self-esteem).
- It can help the person restore their rational / clear thinking.
- Validate / de-pathologize feelings. Help reduce feelings of shame, guilt, fear, self-blame and other negative feelings. Remind that their feelings and reactions are normal reactions to a difficult situation.
- We can help them understand that they have resilience and coping skills already. And we can help build and expand these skills.
- People want to be heard and accepted, not analyzed and treated, to feel free to talk about loss and crisis, when listeners do not fall apart. “Can we be together while I am not happy?”

# IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVE LISTENING

- People working in NGOs are often expected to fix other people's problems. But you can't get somebody out of their stress, grief or depression.
- Active listening can make a difference and it will help them, it can make their experience lighter.
- You offer them a relief from carrying that burden of their bad experience.
- To have somebody to talk to - it helps to reduce stress.
- Support teams at work can help you share your stressful day and be heard.
- Virginia Satir said that you give them a gift of being heard, but you are not their fixer.

# THREE COMPONENTS OF ACTIVE LISTENING (ROGERS & FARSON, 1987)

## **Listen for total meaning**

- When someone is conveying a message, there are two meanings to gather: the content and the feeling or attitude underlying the message. An active listener is not only tuned in to the information conveyed, but also how it is conveyed and any nonverbal cues present.

## **Respond to feelings**

- After listening, when a response is appropriate, the listener should respond to the feeling of what was said. In this way, the speaker feels understood and empathy is established.

## **Note nonverbal cues**

- Nonverbal cues include tone of voice, facial or body expressions, and speed of speech. All of these taken together can convey a much deeper meaning than merely the content of what was said.

# HOW TO USE ACTIVE LISTENING IN COMMUNICATION

- Adopt an attitude of respect and acceptance; don't try to control or judge;
- Remain present and available, willing to let your partner's experiences and emotions affect us;
- Develop an understanding of our partner's internal frame of reference, adopt the partner's perspective; learn to walk in their shoes;
- Provide small rewards and use open-ended questions: brief verbal and non-verbal expressions of interest that encourage people to continue speaking (Nelson-Jones, 2014). These reactions tell your partner: "I'm here with you. I am listening. Please continue."
- Open-ended questions encourage people to share more and go deeper. "Do you feel your relationship is failing?" can be replaced with "How do you feel about your relationship?"



# WALKING IN THEIR SHOES

- We want to develop an understanding of our partner's internal frame of reference, adopt the partner's perspective, learn to walk in their shoes.
- We want to show that we are listening to understand rather than reply (Engel, 2018).
- Unsolicited advice is careless and annoying and frustrating. For someone telling important truths about how they feel or sharing their experiences they are going through, nothing hurts more than not being heard.

# LANGUAGE NOT TO USE

Using the limiting language can stop people from actively communicating. Try to avoid statements such as the following (Horton, 2019):

- Providing unsolicited advice – “Why don’t you do this?” “You should try to ...”
- Telling stories – “That reminds me of when I ...”
- One-upping – “That’s nothing. You should have seen what happened when I ...”
- It is very easy to stop people from openly communicating by suggesting that their views – what they think and how they feel – are less important.



# EXAMPLES OF HELPFUL RESPONSES

- I am sorry that this happened to you.
- That would upset me too.
- I want to thank you for being so open and honest with me.
- This sort of challenge is never easy.
- What else would you like to share?
- It sounds like you had a very stressful time.
- It's no surprise you are upset.
- That sounds frightening.
- You are making complete sense.

# TECHNIQUES OF ACTIVE LISTENING

- Paraphrasing: Restate the information just received with your own words.
- Verbalizing emotions: Help the speaker to recognize their own feelings; Reflect the speaker's feelings and emotions in words.
- Asking open-ended questions: Encourage to tell more and go deeper.
- Summarizing: Review progress; Pull together important ideas; Restate major ideas expressed, including feelings; Check for accuracy.
- Clarifying: Help the speaker see other points of view; Ask questions for vague statements; Restate wrong interpretations to force further explanation.
- Encouraging: Encourage the speaker to keep talking; Use small rewards; Offer ideas and suggestions.
- Balancing: Help the speaker evaluate their own feelings and experiences and see them in perspective.
- "I" Statements. "I feel worried when you come late" instead of "You should come on time".



# USE SMALL VERBAL REWARDS TO SHOW INTEREST AND ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO SHARE MORE

- Uh-hmm
- Please continue
- Sure
- Tell me more
- Go on
- I hear you
- Yes
- Right
- So...
- Really?

# REFLECTING BACK

- Begin with reflections and try to capture the feeling of what was said. A reflection mirrors back what the person just said and tries to capture the meaning or the tone.
- For example, let's say a friend comes to you about a fight she had with her husband. She describes how the argument got heated. She is feeling worried about the state of their marriage.
- A reflection restates what she said:
- “Things got really heated last night – so bad you didn’t even want to be in the same room.”
- Or
- “You’re feeling really worried because this fight felt so intense.”
- The first example is a reflection of the content of what was shared. The second reflects the emotions. These types of reflections validate the speaker and help them feel heard and understood.

# REFLECTING BACK

- Summarizing and Paraphrasing **the content** of what the partner shared.
- Reflecting back **the emotions** that the partner shared.
- It's important to **check in** with your partner after you've reflected to be sure that it's accurate (**clarifying**).

# EXERCISE: LISTENING WITHOUT TRYING TO SOLVE: 3 STEPS (REFLECTING BACK)

- Listen without problem-solving. Participants in pairs practice these two scenarios:
- (1) sharing a problem while receiving advice and solutions.
- (2) sharing a problem while being listened to and reflecting back: Content, emotions, clarification for accuracy.
- Listen
- Reflect back
- Ask open-ended questions and clarify
- Can use Active Listening Reflection Worksheet



# KEY POINTS

- Active listening without judgement helps people feel understood and supported.
- Active listening can help a person in stressful situation to improve his/her sense of self-worth, express emotions and feel better, and improve his/her understanding of personal experience.
- Using active listening skills we can help a person to build trust, connect with their psychological resources, and discover a range of new choices and possible coping strategies.

# HOMEWORK

- Practice active listening skills using worksheets provided in handouts (Paraphrasing, Verbalizing emotions, Asking open-ended questions, Summarizing, Clarifying, Encouraging, Using “I” Statements.). Practice each skill at least 5 minutes a day several times per week.
- Listen without trying to solve: listen, reflect back, ask open-ended questions and clarify, encourage your partner to share more. Practice at least 5 minutes several times per week.
- Start preparing a flyer with list of organizations / services in your city that people can contact if they need help while dealing with stress. Collect information about providers of medical and emergency services, mental health services, psychological and social work support, organizations helping vulnerable groups (women, children), support groups, recreational groups and services, etc.