



C.D.P

STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR CSO'S TRAINING COURSE

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Empathy Bingo

Worksheet

Empathy Bingo can be played in group therapy contexts, or by an individual on their own. Designed to help players differentiate between empathy and other responses, this handout has two parts:

- **Part A** is a bingo grid that lists different types of responses that are common during interactions. Cross out each square as you recognize a certain type of response from Part B. If you are working in a group setting, you may want to copy the sheet so that each group member has their own bingo grid.
- **Part B** is a set of snippets from different example dialogues – therapists can read these out to a group, or individuals can cover the left-hand column and read through them without seeing the answers. Each snippet corresponds to a different square on the grid – that is, a dialogue may exemplify “Correcting”, “Educating”, and so forth.

This exercise can help you or a group learn about the different ways we can respond to a friend in need of empathy, and why empathy is usually the best choice.

Part A:

Interrogating	One-Upping	Advising	Correcting
Consoling	Shutting Down	Educating	Sympathizing
Explaining	Fixing It	Empathizing	Storytelling

Part B:

Fixing It	A: I'm anxious about getting to the airport on time. B: I'll drive you.
One-Upping	A: Check out this bruise from my fall down the stairs. B: That's tiny, look at what I got when I was hit by a bike.
Storytelling	A: I couldn't get a taxi for hours last night and had to walk home at 5 am. B: That sounds like the time when...
Consoling	A: I feel terrible that my student failed his exam. B: You're not to blame, you're a brilliant tutor.
Sympathizing	A: The dentist told me I need to have very painful root canal surgery. B: Oh man, that's terrible.
Interrogating	A: I can't get my mom to listen to my point of view. B: What's the problem, exactly?
Shutting Down	A: My boss has cut my pay. B: Buck up, let's play some pool.
Educating	A: I don't know anybody at my new college. B: See it as a chance to develop your social skills.
Explaining	A: I'm annoyed because you left the kids waiting an hour after school. B: That's only because the traffic was terrible...
Advising	A: I can't understand where all my money goes after I get paid. B: I reckon you should create a budget.
Correcting	A: I think your essay about the greenhouse could be improved. B: It was about a glasshouse, not a greenhouse.
Empathizing	A: My whole house is flooded and everything in it is soaked. B: Do you feel stressed out and in need of some support?

Active Listening Reflection Worksheet

Active listening is a valuable technique for understanding, absorbing, and responding to what is being said.

Review the following key skills for active listening (modified from Kabir, 2017) and use the form below to consider how well they were used in a specific situation:

- Use of **encouragers** – use short words and signals to signal listening and engagements e.g., nodding the head, words like 'yes' 'no' 'Uh-huh.'
- **Open body language** – to communicate openness, that the client is safe, and readiness to listen, sit with arms unfolded facing the client in an open posture.
- **Repeat back** – repeating some of the keywords back to the client to prompt for more.
- **Summarizing** – sum up, using your own words, the main ideas behind what has been spoken about.
- **Paraphrasing** – repeating back the last thought or few thoughts back to the speaker using your own words.
- **Mirror the speaker** – to a sensible degree, and to make them feel at ease, adopt the speaker's body language, language, and voice tone.
- **Reflection** – pay attention to the speaker's mood or feelings, and feed your interpretation back to them.
- **Balance silence with questioning skills** – allow time for the client to think about what they are going to say, use appropriate questions if needed to help the client open up.

The following four golden rules are needed for any form of communication to take place (Kabir, 2017):

1. *Seek to understand before seeking to be understood*
2. *Be non-judgmental*
3. *Give the speaker your undivided attention*
4. *Use silence effectively*

Reflection Exercise

Did I use each of the following? If not, why?

- Encouragers
- Open body language
- Repeating back
- Summarizing
- Paraphrasing
- Mirror the speaker
- Reflection
- Balance silence and questioning

Which of the above techniques worked well?

Which of the above techniques did not work well?

How can I implement the un-used techniques?

Did I meet each of the following objectives:

1. *Seek to understand before seeking to be understood*
2. *Be non-judgmental*
3. *Give the speaker your undivided attention*
4. *Use silence effectively*

If not, then why?

References

- Kabir, S. M. (2017). *Essentials of counseling*. Dhaka: Abosar Prokashana Sangstha.

Dr. Jeremy Sutton

Active Listening in Session

We listen most effectively and form greater understanding when we *actively* listen to what is being said.

Use the below questions to reflect on a recent session with a client and the vital factors of active listening.

When was the session, and with who?

Did you use **open-ended questions**? If so, give examples:

Were you **attentive**? If so, give examples:

Did you seek **clarification**? If so, give examples:

Did you **summarize** what was being said? If so, give examples:

Did you **observe non-verbal** as well as verbal communication? If so, give examples:

Did you use **reflection** (repeating back what you understood for confirmation)? If so, give examples:

Reflect on the answers you gave to each question and consider where you could improve or add additional focus in the future.

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Listening Accurately Worksheet

#1: Step In Their Shoes

Select someone that you would like to work on your relationship with. When you talk, try your best to take their point of view. For instance, try picturing that you are them, going about their day. Does your capacity to feel empathy change by taking their perspective?



#2: Fact-Check Your Interpretations

Reflect on the dialogues you and that person have had. Make a conscious effort to fact-check your interpretations and assumptions regarding what they said.



#3: Give Your Full Attention

During a conversation, start by giving your full attention to the other person. Before you move on to other things, consider what might occur if you asked: "I would like to clarify that I've understood you correctly. May I?" Almost every time, you'll get a positive response.



#4: Clarify What They've Said

Make an effort to clarify what you think you have heard – identify and reflect their emotions. If you are unsure whether you've understood correctly, just ask.



#5: Clarify What You've Said

During conversations, you might try asking the speaker if they could share what they've heard from you. How would you clear up any misunderstandings if they arose?



Effective Communication Reflection Worksheet

Effective communication does not have to be complicated. Indeed, the following list contains basic guidance regarding verbal and non-verbal communication that we can use in any situation.

Ask members of the group to review each tip/technique, and then complete the form below to understand how effectively they can be implemented:

- **Maintain eye contact** – the speaker needs to know that the listener is attending to what is said. At the same time, the listener wants to see that the speaker is engaged in what they are saying to their audience.
- **Maintain appropriate body language** – take into account whether non-verbal techniques could confuse or negate the message. For example, head shaking, nodding, smiling, leaning forward, leaning back, and how you are sitting or standing while you talk may change the tone and even the content of the message.
- **Use people names** – where a group is small enough, using someone's name can begin and maintain rapport while reinforcing a sense of belonging.
- **One person speaking at a time** – this can be supported by using a 'talking stick' (only the person in possession can talk) or reaching an agreement in advance to not interrupt or talk over one another.
- **Use of personal pronouns** – when feelings or beliefs are being discussed, try and use "I" and "we" to make them personal to the speaker.
- **Address group issues early** – where a problem has arisen that may affect communication, address as early as possible.
- **First, seek to understand and then to be understood** – listen to what is being said and ask questions to remove uncertainty. Only then put forward your views or answers.
- **Ask open-ended questions** – use questions that allow the other person to open up and explain what they are trying to communicate.
- **Be honest** – we are highly developed at detecting when someone is less than truthful, be open and honest in what you say, and be more likely to reciprocate.
- **Use appropriate language** – speak in a way that the listener can understand. Using technical jargon to someone with a different background will lead to confusion and detachment.

Reflection Exercise

Which of the above techniques is most challenging to implement, and why?

What does your group currently do well to ensure effective communication?

What do you think your group could do better to promote effective communication?

In terms of your interaction with the group, what verbal/non-verbal techniques do you feel you should work on?

How might a group agreement be reached on effective communication? And how might it encourage group members?

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Using Small Rewards

Richard Nelson-Jones defines *small rewards* as “brief verbal and non-verbal expressions of interest designed to encourage clients to continue speaking” (Nelson-Jones, 2005, p. 99).

They may seem subtle, yet they are powerful tools to encourage clients (and friends, colleagues, and family members) to share their thoughts and feelings and, equally importantly, communicate their internal frame of reference.

Try out the following steps to learn what small reward phrases look like and consider whether you are using them in sessions.

Examples include (modified from Nelson-Jones, 2005):

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

- Repeating the last word can also be effective.
[Client] *I am feeling sad.* [Therapist] *Sad?*

1. **Review a five-minute section of a session** (this works best when replaying a recording but can be practiced with a partner).

2. **Ask yourself:**

- *Were you using small rewards enough?*
- *Could you use them more?*
- *What effect did they have when you used them?*
- *When did you not use them?*

3. **Create a list** – reflect how and when small rewards could be used to keep clients talking, helping them feel respected and understood.

Produce a list of when using small rewards would be helpful and which ones work for you (using the above list and new ones).

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

References

- Nelson-Jones, R. (2005). *Practical counselling and helping skills*. Sage.

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"I" Statements

When a person feels that they are being blamed—whether rightly or wrongly—it's common that they respond with defensiveness. **"I" statements** are a simple way of speaking that will help you avoid this trap by reducing feelings of blame. A good "I" statement takes responsibility for one's own feelings, while tactfully describing a problem.

"I feel emotion word when explanation."

- ✓ "I feel..." must be followed with an emotion word, such as "angry", "hurt", or "worried".
- ✓ Careful wording won't help if your voice still sounds blaming. Use a soft and even tone.
- ✓ In your explanation, gently describe how the other person's actions affect you.

Examples

Blaming	"You can't keep coming home so late! It's so inconsiderate."
"I" Statement	"I feel worried when you come home late. I can't even sleep."

Blaming	"You never call me. I guess we just won't talk anymore."
"I" Statement	"I feel hurt when you go so long without calling. I'm afraid you don't care."

Practice

Scenario	A friend always cancels plans at the last minute. Recently, you were waiting for them at a restaurant, when they called to say they couldn't make it.
"I" Statement	

Scenario	You are working on a group project, and one member is not completing their portion. You have repeatedly had to finish their work.
"I" Statement	

Scenario	Your boss keeps dumping new work on you, with little instruction, and not enough time. Despite working overtime, you're weeks behind.
"I" Statement	

Using “I” Statements

Practicing open, honest communication is sometimes trickier than it seems. This can be especially true when we are dealing with conflict, and feeling blamed or guilty.

In these instances, we may say hurtful things or things that we don’t mean while attempting to express our needs or emotions.

Using “I” Statements can be a straightforward way to communicate how you feel, while simultaneously owning your feelings and outlining the details of the problem as you perceive it.

Worksheet

This worksheet contains a simple formula for using “I” Statements, as well as some helpful examples to get you started.

Fill in the blanks to practice crafting your own “I” Statements.

“I” feel _____ [emotion] _____ when _____
[situation/context/challenge] _____ ”

For example:

Situation	<i>“You always make me late because you never tell me our plans in advance”</i>
“I” Statement	<i>“I feel stressed out when you don’t update me about our plans.”</i>
Situation	<i>“You always talk about your amazing weekend when you know I have no days off.”</i>
“I” Statement	<i>“I feel left out when I can’t join in your weekend plans.”</i>

Fill In The Blanks

Situation	<i>A relative asks to borrow money for the third time this week. You’re saving for bills and tight on cash.</i>
“I” Statement	
Situation	<i>Your neighbor parks across your driveway every day. You have to park in the street and carry heavy groceries up a long driveway.</i>
“I” Statement	
Situation	<i>A friend cannot make it to your upcoming performance. You’ve been practicing a special song for them for weeks.</i>
“I” Statement	

Trading Places Worksheet

Seeing things from multiple perspectives can be especially useful when you disagree with someone and cannot move forward. While helpful in developing empathy, it may also provide an insight into the actions needed to resolve an issue and move on (Shapiro, 2020).

The Trading Places worksheet includes ten steps that can be used with individuals or groups to see things from another perspective:

1. Sit quietly, and breathe easily.
2. Ground yourself in the present moment by focusing on your breath.
3. Bring to mind a difficult or uncomfortable situation you are having with someone.
4. Write down *your* thoughts and feelings for a few minutes.
5. Afterward, return to the present moment:
 - Focus on your breathing.
 - Notice how you feel.
6. Write down the thoughts and feeling you think *the other person* may have for a few minutes.
 - What do they think?
 - Notice how you feel.
7. Afterward, return to the present moment:
 - Focus on your breathing.
 - Notice how you feel.
8. Imagine a person with great wisdom (real or imagined) and feel their support, compassion, and consider their guidance.
9. Write down the thoughts and feelings you think the *wise person* may have about the situation from their perspective for a few minutes.
 - Focus on your breathing.
 - Notice how you feel.
10. Recognize the wisdom and the insight it offers to the situation.

The ability to shift perspective is always available to you and can offer valuable input into the feelings you have been unable to resolve.

References

- Shapiro, S. L. (2020). *Rewire your mind: Discover the science + practice of mindfulness*. London: Aster.

Back-to-Back Drawing

Communication Exercise



Instructions

- 1 Pair off group members, and instruct them to sit back-to-back.
- 2 Give one member (the “listener”) a blank piece of paper and a pencil, and the other member (the “speaker”) a geometrical image from pages 2 – 4.
- 3 Ask the speaker to describe the geometrical image in detail. The drawer will attempt to recreate the image on their blank piece of paper, based upon the instructions. Neither member can see the others’ paper, and the listener may not communicate with the speaker. Allow 5 – 10 minutes for this portion of the exercise.

? Discussion Questions

Speaker

What steps did you take to make sure your instructions would be clear? How can these steps be translated to real-life conversations?

What was it like not having feedback from the listener during the exercise?

What we mean to say, and how it’s interpreted, are often not the same. What can you do while speaking to reduce the risk of miscommunication in real-life conversations?

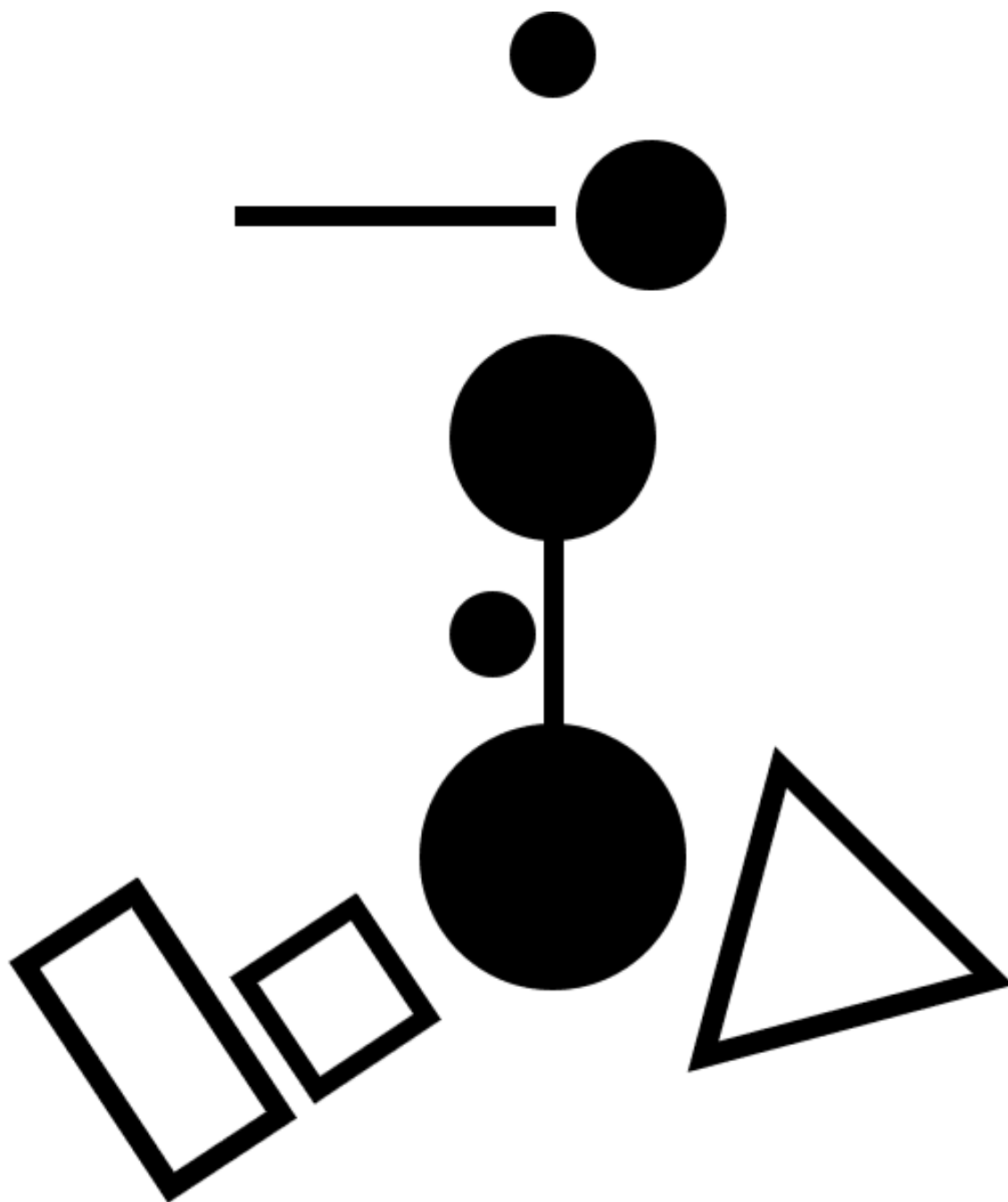
Listener

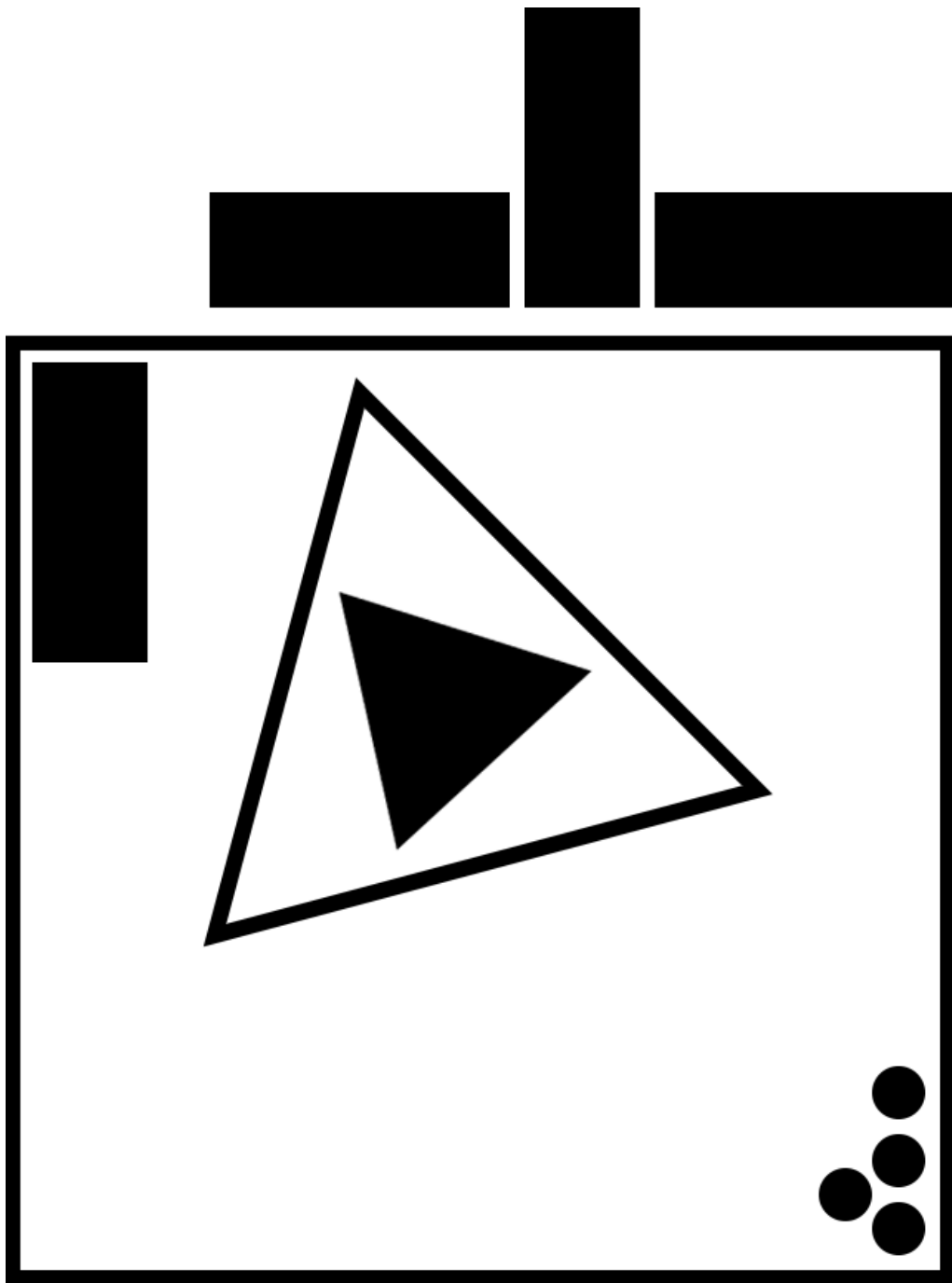
What did you like about the speaker’s instructions?

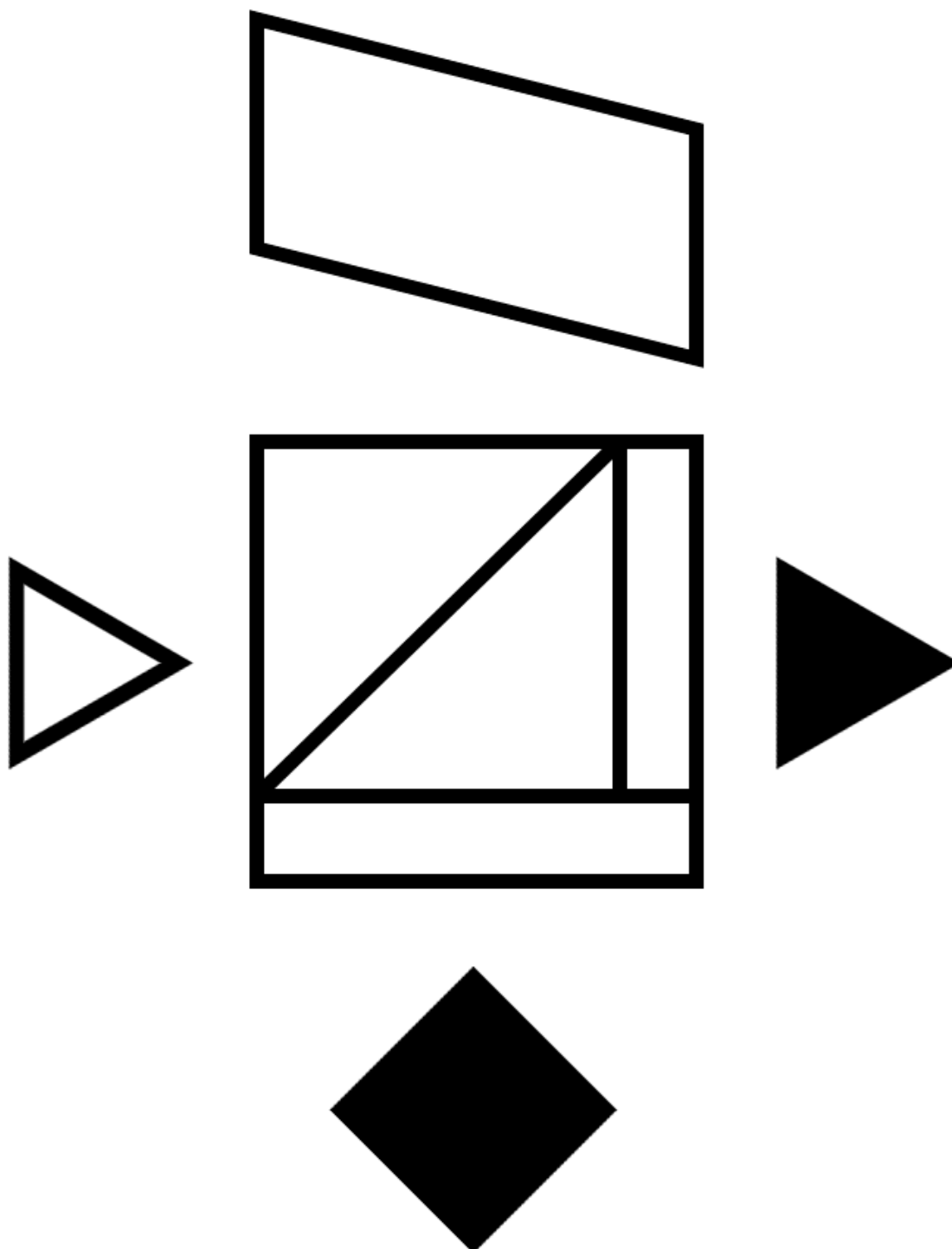
Did you find that any of the speaker’s instructions were ambiguous, or difficult to follow?

How do you think your results would’ve been different if you had been able to communicate with the speaker?

Communication is as much about being a good listener as being a good speaker. What steps can you take while listening to reduce misunderstandings in real-life situations?







Key Principles and Steps of the Psychological First Aid

(Source: The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2023, and National Institute of Mental Health, 2022)

Psychological First Aid (PFA) and Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) are promising practices for disaster behavioral health response and recovery. Both PFA and SPR were developed by the National Center for PTSD and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, as well as other individuals involved in coordinating and participating in disaster response and recovery.

PFA and SPR intervention strategies are intended for use with children, adolescents, parents and caretakers, families, and adults who are survivors or witnesses exposed to disaster or terrorism. PFA and SPR can also be provided to first responders and other disaster relief workers.

While grounded in the same foundations of disaster response and recovery, there are several differences between PFA and SPR. PFA is a supportive intervention for use in the immediate aftermath of disasters and terrorism. SPR is used in the weeks and months following disaster and trauma, after the period where PFA has been utilized or when more intensive intervention is needed. The delivery of PFA is defined in terms of days or weeks after a disaster (timing will depend on the circumstances of the post-disaster setting). SPR is intended to assist disaster survivors after safety, security, and other vital and immediate needs have been met and when the community is rebuilding. In some cases, SPR may be delivered one week after a disaster, as a follow up to the initial PFA response, and in other cases it may be appropriate to provide this assistance weeks, months, or even years after a major event. The timing will be partially dependent on how devastating the disaster was to community resources and infrastructure.

SPR places greater emphasis on teaching specific skills to meet survivor needs, as well as on follow-up to reinforce the use of these skills. PFA, in contrast, is often delivered in temporary settings where follow-up may not be possible.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed modular approach to help children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of disaster and terrorism. Individuals affected by a disaster or traumatic incident, whether survivors, witnesses, or responders to such events, may struggle with or face new challenges following the event. PFA was developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the National Center for PTSD, with contributions from individuals involved in disaster research and response.

PFA is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping. PFA does not assume that all survivors will develop severe mental health problems or long-term difficulties in recovery. Instead, it is based on an understanding that disaster survivors and others affected by such events will experience a broad range of early reactions (e.g., physical, psychological, behavioral, spiritual). Some of these

reactions will cause enough distress to interfere with adaptive coping, and recovery may be helped by support from compassionate and caring disaster responders.

PFA core actions constitute the basic objectives of providing early assistance within days or weeks following an event. Providers should be flexible, and base the amount of time they spend on each core action on the survivors' specific needs and concerns. The core skills are designed to be helpful in addressing the survivors' and responders' needs and concerns. PFA is designed for delivery in diverse settings. Mental health and other disaster response workers may be called upon to provide Psychological First Aid in general population shelters, special needs shelters, field hospitals and medical triage areas, acute care facilities (e.g., Emergency Departments), staging areas or respite centers for first responders or other relief workers, emergency operations centers, crisis hotlines or phone banks, feeding locations, disaster assistance service centers, family reception and assistance centers, homes, businesses, and other community settings.

The eight PFA Core Actions include:

- **Contact and Engagement:** To respond to contacts initiated by survivors, or to initiate contacts in a non-intrusive, compassionate, and helpful manner.
- **Safety and Comfort:** To enhance immediate and ongoing safety, and provide physical and emotional comfort.
- **Stabilization (if needed):** To calm and orient emotionally overwhelmed or disoriented survivors.
- **Information Gathering on Current Needs and Concerns:** To identify immediate needs and concerns, gather additional information, and tailor Psychological First Aid interventions.
- **Practical Assistance:** To offer practical help to survivors in addressing immediate needs and concerns.
- **Connection with Social Supports:** To help establish brief or ongoing contacts with primary support persons and other sources of support, including family members, friends, and community helping resources.
- **Information on Coping:** To provide information about stress reactions and coping to reduce distress and promote adaptive functioning.
- **Linkage with Collaborative Services:** To link survivors with available services needed at the time or in the future.

In addition to translating PFA into several languages, NCTSN members and partners have worked to develop PFA adaptations for school personnel (for use in the aftermath of a school crisis, disaster, or terrorism event), as well as community religious professionals, Medical

Reserve Corps members, and staff at facilities serving families and youth who are experiencing homelessness.

5 Action Steps for Helping Someone in Emotional Pain (National Institute of Mental Health):

1. **ASK:** “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” It’s not an easy question but studies show that asking at-risk individuals if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or suicidal thoughts.
2. **KEEP THEM SAFE:** Reducing a suicidal person’s access to highly lethal items or places is an important part of suicide prevention. While this is not always easy, asking if the at-risk person has a plan and removing or disabling the lethal means can make a difference.
3. **BE THERE:** Listen carefully and learn what the individual is thinking and feeling. Research suggests acknowledging and talking about suicide may in fact reduce rather than increase suicidal thoughts.
4. **HELP THEM CONNECT:** Call emergency number or Crisis Line, save these numbers in your phone so they’re there if you need them. You can also help make a connection with a trusted individual like a family member, friend, spiritual advisor, or mental health professional.
5. **STAY CONNECTED:** Staying in touch after a crisis or after being discharged from care can make a difference. Studies have shown the number of suicide deaths goes down when someone follows up with the at-risk person.

Additional information about Psychological First Aid:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/5-action-steps-for-helping-someone-in-emotional-pain>

<https://www.nctsn.org/treatments-and-practices/psychological-first-aid-and-skills-for-psychological-recovery>

What Is Active Listening?

Richard Nelson-Jones (2014) says we should recognize the difference between hearing and listening. While hearing involves receiving sounds and interpreting their meaning, listening involves accurately understanding their meaning. Listening goes beyond hearing and committing words to memory by becoming aware and sensitive to nonverbal communication, such as the speaker's tone of voice, timing, speed of talking, body language, and context.

Active listening can be summed up as entailing “not only accurately understanding speaker's communication but also showing that understanding” and therefore embodies the skills of both the sender and the receiver (Nelson-Jones, 2014).

What Is Empathetic Listening?

While both active and empathetic listening involve giving our full attention, the latter places particular attention on understanding the other person's emotional experience.

Accurate empathy is a helpful tool for facilitating self-exploration and, when used for communication within therapy or the workplace, can be game changing (Miller & Rollnick, 2013; Engel, 2018).

Empathy results from a four-step process:

- Step 1: Noticing/observing someone's emotional state
- Step 2: Correctly interpreting that emotional state
- Step 3: ‘Feeling’ the same emotion
- Step 4: Responding to the emotion

Empathy is not achieved if any of these four steps fail. Without empathy, we would struggle to:

- understand other people's feelings, motivations, and behaviors;
- respond appropriately to someone else's feelings; and
- understand social interactions that rely on subtle behaviors, cues, and social norms, such as jokes, faux pas, and sarcasm.

The ability to respond appropriately to someone else's emotions is extremely important for forming bonds. Empathy underlines the bond that forms between parent and child (Decety & Cowell, 2014).

Simply put, empathic listening involves reflecting back the emotions we hear; for example, “You sound angry and upset.” It shows understanding, encouraging the speaker to share more by validating them without judgment.

Ultimately, it requires us to suspend our biases and ego, showing that we are listening to understand rather than reply (Engel, 2018). For someone telling important truths about how they feel or sharing the experiences they are going through, nothing hurts more than not being heard.

Communicating empathically requires vulnerability for both the speaker and listener. Honest, open communication means the speaker leaves themselves open to challenge or ridicule. It is not all one-sided; the listener may also feel some of their hurt and pain.

Examples of empathetic statements and responses that can show that you understand your partner’s feelings:

- 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.
- It is clear that this has impacted you deeply.
- What else would you like to share?
- It sounds like you had a very stressful time.
- Yes, what has happened makes no sense at all.
- I am on your side.
- It’s no surprise you are upset.
- That sounds frightening.
- You are making complete sense.

Why Is Active Listening as a Skill Important?

“Behind the discipline of good listening is a trust that it is useful for clients to explore their own experience and perceptions” (Miller & Rollnick, 2013, p. 49). Ultimately, it keeps people going, motivating them to enter uncomfortable areas of conversation and work through difficult material.

Active listening skills help:

- counselor or helper listen to their client.
- client listen to the counselor or helper.
- counselor/helper listen to themselves.
- client listen to themselves.

If someone is listening poorly or focusing too much on themselves, they will miss out on much of what is being communicated. On the other hand, listening well, actively, to the other person can equally enhance their inner listening (Nelson-Jones, 2014).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, active listening is recognized as the central skill in forming and maintaining relationships within therapy and counseling.

How to Use Active Listening in Communication

It is possible to increase our understanding of what it takes to listen well, share and receive information, and form more robust emotional bonds (Abrahams & Groysberg, 2021; Westland, 2015).

Typically, it involves the counselor learning to practice the following.

Adopt an attitude of respect and acceptance

“An accepting attitude involves respecting clients as separate human beings with rights to their own thoughts and feelings” (Nelson-Jones, 2014, p. 82). As counselors, we must suspend any judgment of clients’ goodness or badness and recognize (as with our own) their capacity to fail based on the life skills they possess or are lacking.

We must also allow others to develop and grow at their own pace without trying to control or judge them. We must remain present and available, willing to let the clients’ experiences and emotions affect us.

Develop an understanding of our clients’ internal frame of reference

Active listening requires that we adopt the client’s perspective, understanding their internal frame of reference. Therefore, we must recognize and understand the separateness of “me” and “you” by breaking out of our internal frame of reference and learning to walk in their shoes.

Provide small rewards and use open-ended questions

“Small rewards are brief verbal and non-verbal expressions of interest designed to encourage clients to continue speaking” (Nelson-Jones, 2014, p. 96). When used well, they can motivate, support, and encourage the client, saying, “I’m here with you. Please continue.” They tell the client we are actively listening and would like to dig deeper.

Examples of small rewards:

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

Open-ended questions are powerful and a valuable way to promote active listening. “Do you feel your relationship is failing?” can be replaced with “How do you feel about your relationship?”

Closed questions can seem negative and potentially controlling, blocking clients’ access to their internal frame of reference.

Reflecting feelings

Reflecting feelings shows we are in tune with the other person. While similar to paraphrasing, it isn’t the same; we are “responding to clients’ music and not just their words” (Nelson-Jones, 2014, p. 102). It is difficult, requiring the listener to emphasize and experience the client’s emotional flow and then communicate it back.

Clients typically use a variety of feeling words, but they often cluster around central themes, such as a lack of self-confidence, difficulty coming to terms with loss, or fear of failing.

Once the counselor hears and understands these feelings, they can reflect them back, often using a variation of “You feel X because Y.”

“You’re angry and hurt because that person lied to you, and you can’t tell them anymore.”

Manage initial resistances

Resistance may present itself at any point during counseling. Perhaps the client is ambivalent, reluctant, or challenges the process based on what they think they need (Nelson-Jones, 2014).

Active listening skills can help with all forms of resistance. For example, a counselor encountering aggression, rather than challenging it or becoming sucked in, can reflect it back, showing, loud and clear, that the client's feelings have been heard and registered.

Take the following example:

Client: "This is a waste of time. My parents are idiots; they just don't get me."

Counselor: "You are angry coming here because you feel your parents are the ones with the problems."

Feedback can open up further discussion regarding the client's feelings toward their parents and inform a greater understanding that can build the counseling relationship.

Active empathic listening

Active empathic listening involves going beyond the person's words and fully grasping their emotions. While valuable in any situation, it is particularly beneficial during therapy and in times of crisis (Crisis Prevention Institute, 2016; Westland, 2015).

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. Showing compassion and being willing to share our time can offer great support, mainly when we are doing the following (Crisis Prevention Institute, 2016):

- Being nonjudgmental
- Giving the other person our undivided attention
- Listening carefully to feelings and facts
- Sitting comfortably with silence
- Using nonverbal messages to show we are listening and understanding

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 find a safe place to calm down to share how they feel (Westland, 2015).

Avoiding limiting language

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

Providing 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 all too easy to stop people from openly communicating by suggesting that their views – what they think and how they feel – are less important.

3 Principles of Active Listening

Often, while we are listening, we are thinking of how we will respond. We might get distracted and miss some of what was said. We may not be paying much attention to the nonverbal communication cues of the speaker.

Active listening requires the listener to pay close attention to what is being communicated verbally and nonverbally. The listener is encouraged to interpret not only the content of what is being said, but also the emotions present and the body language.

In order to achieve this, the listener must be willing to devote energy to the task. They will need to have an excellent attention span and honed empathic abilities. Active listening has even been referred to as the “measurable dimension of empathy” (Olson & Iwasiw, 1987, p. 104).

There are three main components of successful active listening (Rogers & Farson, 1987):

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. Note all 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.

7 Techniques to Train Your Active Listening Skills

Each technique is listed with an example and an explanation of the use.

Technique	Purpose	To achieve it	Example
Paraphrasing	Convey interest. Encourage the speaker to keep talking.	Restate the information just received with your own words.	“So you were worried because your friend did not call you”.
Verbalizing emotions	Show that you understand. Help the speaker to evaluate their own feelings.	Reflect the speaker’s basic feelings and emotions in words.	“And this made you really angry.”
Asking open-ended questions	Get more information.	Ask open-ended questions.	“And what happened after that?”
Summarizing	Review progress. Pull together important ideas Establish the basis for further discussion.	Restate major ideas expressed, including feelings.	“This seems to be the major event that disturbed you.” “These seem to be the key ideas that you’ve expressed so far...”
Clarifying	Clarify what was said. Help the speaker see other points of view.	Ask questions for vague statements. Restate wrong interpretations to force further explanation.	“You said that you reacted immediately. Was this still on the same day?”
Encouraging	Convey interest. Encourage the speaker to keep talking.	Disagree or Challenge. Use varying intonations. Offer ideas and suggestions.	“Then your manager approached you. How did they react?” “Tell me more.” “And nobody ever helped you?”

Balancing	Get more information. Help the speaker evaluate their own feelings.	Ask questions.	“Did you perceive the inconvenience to be worse than how you feel in other situations?”
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Useful tips to practice active listening:

1. Face the speaker and have eye contact

Eye contact is an important part of face to face conversation. Too much eye contact can be intimidating, though, so adapt this to the situation you're in. Try breaking eye contact every five seconds or so, or to show you're listening attentively, look at one eye for five seconds, then another eye for five seconds, then switch to looking at their mouth. When you look away, looking to the side or up is better than looking down, which can seem like you want to close the conversation.

Check your posture and make sure it's open – avoid crossed arms or crossed legs, which can make you look 'closed' or defensive. Leaning slightly forward or sideways whilst sitting can show that you're listening – as can a slight tilt of your head or resting your head on your hand.

2. “Listen” to non-verbal cues too

Pay attention to what the other person is saying with their body language

Facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures can tell you just as much as what is being said in words. Pay attention to what the other person is saying with their body language - are they smiling, for example, or are their arms crossed defensively, or are they rubbing their eyes as if they're tired or upset. Even on the phone, you can learn a lot from the other person's voice, which might sound subdued or upbeat.

3. Don't interrupt

Being interrupted is frustrating for the other person – it gives the impression that you think you're more important, or that you don't have time for what they have to say. If you are naturally a quicker thinker or speaker, force yourself to slow down so that the other person can express themselves. Remember, a pause or a few seconds of silence doesn't mean that you have to jump in. Letting the other person speak will make it easier for you to understand their message, too.

Even interruptions that respond to something that they've said can be distracting if it means the conversation gets sidetracked from what they were trying to tell you about. If this does happen, steer the conversation back to "So, you were telling me about...".

4. Listen without judging, or jumping to conclusions

If you start reacting emotionally to what's being said, then it can get in the way of listening to what is said next. Try to focus on listening. Equally, don't assume that you know what's going to be said next.

5. Don't start planning what to say next

You can't listen and prepare at the same time.

6. Show that you're listening

Nod your head, smile and make small noises like "yes" and "uh huh", to show that you're listening and encourage the speaker to continue. Don't look at your watch, fidget or play with your hair or fingernails.

7. Don't impose your opinions or solutions

It's not always easy, but lending a listening, supportive ear can be much more rewarding than telling someone what they should do. When a loved one has health problems is a time when they probably want to tell you how they're feeling, and get things off their chest, rather than have lots of advice about what they should be doing.

In other areas of life too, most people prefer to come to their own solutions. If you really must share your brilliant solution, ask first if they want to hear it – say something like "Would you like to hear my suggestions?"

8. Stay focused

If you're finding it difficult to focus on what someone is saying, try repeating their words in your head as they say them – this will reinforce what they're saying and help you to concentrate. Try to shut out distractions like other conversations going on in the room. And definitely don't look at your phone.

9. Ask questions

Asking relevant questions can show that you've been listening and help clarify what has been said.

If you're not sure if you've understood correctly, wait until the speaker pauses and then say something like "Did you mean that x..." Or "I'm not sure if I understood what you were saying about..."

You should also use open questions where you can, like "How did that make you feel?" "What did you do next?"

10. Paraphrase and summarize

Repeating what has been said really shows you've been paying attention, and allows the speaker to correct you if you haven't understood

Sometimes called reflecting, this is repeating what has been said to show that you understand it. This may seem awkward at first, but really shows you've been paying attention, and allows the speaker to correct you if you haven't understood correctly.

If you're not sure how to do this, try starting a sentence with: "Sounds like you are saying..."

11. And remember....practice makes perfect

Old habits are hard to break, so you'll need to make a conscious effort to become an active listener. Try spending a week in which you summarize the main points or outcomes at the end of each conversation or meeting. This will help you get into the habit.

Useful Links:

<https://positivepsychology.com/active-listening/>

<https://positivepsychology.com/active-listening-techniques/>