


How to Have a Supportive Conversation: Building on Your Natural Helping Abilities

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK TEAM



The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages , and cultures of First Nation Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

WHAT WE DO...



Build Resiliency: Assist community members to see the capabilities they possess and facilitate members to be resources to one another.



Build Community: Create opportunities for people to come together, make connections and dialogue with each other.

Build Capacity: Help community members realize and share their assets & increase skills & knowledge



Build Voice: Ensuring that community members' voices are involved in deciding what needs to be done, then designing and delivering a solution.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING: Understand what it looks like when people are doing well
- WARNING SIGNS: Understand what it looks like when people are not doing well
- HELPING SKILLS: Build skills in how to help others
- CONNECTIONS: Increase knowledge in on/off campus resources
- SELF CARE AND BOUNDARIES: Recognizing your capacity as a Helper



WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?



Resilience

The ability to bounce back from stressful or difficult life experiences



Resilience

Bounce back,

Adapt,

Move forward



Community Resilience

The capacity of a social system to come together to work toward a communal objective

(Fikret & Ross, 2013)



U OF A: DID YOU KNOW?



66.8%

OF STUDENTS
REPORT FEELING
VERY LONELY

(That equals 25,270 students!!)

KNOWING WHEN PEOPLE NEED HELP

How do we know when someone is having a bad day?



INDICATORS OF DISTRESS

Academic

- Repeated absences
- Disruptive in class
- Decline in quality of work or grades
- Questionable content in assignments

Safety Risk:

- Assignments dominated by themes of extreme emotions

Physical/Behavioural

- Marked changes in appearance
- Isolating or withdrawal from social situations
- Increase in substance use
- Behaviour out of proportion for the situation

Safety Risk:

- Illegal or reckless behaviour
- Violent behaviour

Emotional/Psychological

- Disproportionate emotional responses
- Irritability or unusual apathy
- Verbally abusive (taunting, badgering)
- Self-disclosures of sadness, loneliness or distress

Safety Risk:

- Unprovoked anger
- Depression

Situational

- Academic probation
- Loss of a significant relationship
- Financial stress
- Chronic illness

Safety Risk:

- Putting affairs in order, saying goodbye, giving away possessions

QUALITIES OF A HELPER

- Think of the people you go to for help
- What is it about those people that make you feel comfortable sharing with them?



EMPATHY

One must listen carefully to the individual, **enter their world** and **see their world as *the individual sees and experiences it***. Each individual's uniqueness is valued.



THE HELPING SKILLS

Steps to facilitate
supportive
conversations

- 1) State your concern
- 2) Identify the problem
- 3) Explore alternatives and consider outcomes
- 4) Find out what the person is going to do and express support



STATE YOUR CONCERN

“I noticed” “You sound” “I heard”

- Agree on a set time and place in a private space
- Express care and concern
- Honour the person and their situation





IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

“What’s been happening?”

“How have you been feeling?”

- Use open-ended questions and listen from a place of non-judgment
- Paraphrasing sentences
- Listen for the main theme and summarize what is being presented



WHY IS ACTIVE LISTENING IMPORTANT?



We use listening skills every day; however, active listening is a very difficult skill to do well every time.

ACTIVE LISTENING TIPS



LISTENING FOR FEELINGS

Listening for feeling formula:

“It sounds like you’re feeling emotion because of
incident/subject/issue”

Don’t worry if you identify an emotion incorrectly, the speaker will let you know and even clarify the conversation even more!



OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

*Avoid using “Yes” or
“No” questions,
or questions that allow
for one word answers.*



ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS?

Open Ended Start With...

Who
What
Where
When
How
Describe, Give
Explain

Use these to questions to engage participation

Closed Ended Start With...

Is
Do
Are
Could
Does
Would
Can

Use these questions when you are trying to give information.



EXPLORE ALTERNATIVES AND CONSIDER OUTCOMES

“What ideas do you have?”

*“What would happen if you
did that?”*

- “Play the tape to the end”
- Instill a sense of hope



THE 'RIGHTING REFLEX'

The desire to make better, fix, or prevent harm before the person has specifically asked for such assistance or given permission to provide it

- intention is positive
- we want to help
- offering unasked for solutions or advice
- we do it without thinking
- it's an automatic response we're often unaware of arguing for change

the result = shutdown/withdraw or escalation



FIND OUT WHAT THE PERSON IS GOING TO DO AND EXPRESS SUPPORT

“What would you like to do?”

“How can I help you move forward with this?”

“Let me know if you need me”

- Instill the sense that a positive change is possible
- Believe what they are telling you
- Don't promise anything you won't be able to deliver





BeThere.org

PRACTICE EXERCISES:

Scenario 1:

- Sam is a 3rd year student who has come into your office for the first time
- Sam explains that they haven't needed financial aid before but that now their circumstances have changed and they can no longer pay for school
- As you discuss possible options Sam grows visibly upset and discloses that they were financially dependant on an abusive partner who they decided to leave.
- How do you respond?

Scenario 2:

- Casey comes into your office upset that their current application for funding was declined because they were overawarded last year.
- Casey explains that they had to withdraw from some of their classes last year because they were "going through something and were just going fail anyway."
- As you proceed to assist Casey, they grow very quiet and withdrawn and keep insisting that they can't have another year like last.
- How do you respond?

BOUNDARIES

- Guidelines or limits we set in relationships that allow us to protect ourselves and others.
- Flexible and can change depending on the situation
- Creates equality in relationships



BOUNDARY QUESTIONS

- Do you ever say “yes” when you really want to say “no”? Do you ever say “no” and then feel incredibly guilty?
- Do you allow yourself to be interrupted to attend to the needs of others?
- Do you want to be useful, and so you end up giving way too much?
- Have you ever put someone else’s needs ahead of your own?

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES



What is in my scope?

What is realistic for me?

What are my needs?

Have I communicated all of this?



EXPRESSING OUR LIMITS

I WANT TO HELP.

HERE'S WHY I CAN'T:

HERE'S WHAT I CAN DO:



Treat
Yo Self



Thanks for your participation!

Questions?

Contact the Community Social Work
Team

Thoughts?

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Comments?

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