

## Psychological First Aid Skills: Some Foundational Points

### *Active Listening Skills: BESTT EARS*

**Non-Verbal: BESTT** (always think about cultural factors)

Body language – showing attention, support

- Make it clear you are listening...
- Match physical position
  - Standing? Then you stand. Sitting? Then you sit.
- Show focus by body position (not slouching)
  - Arms, Facial expression, Physical tension

Eye contact

- to show respect and attention

Space

- distance
  - How far away are you?
- position
- orientation
  - how is your body turned relative to their body?

Touch-*Caution!* -- Most powerful form of communication (for better or worse)

- Pat on the arm, back
- Hug?
  - Ask before doing it, Side hug?

Time-Being there

- Making the time to listen
- Focused and present during listening

**Verbal: EARS**

Encourage

- Support with words/voice
- Encouraging verbal prompts
  - uh-huh, mm-hmm & head movements (nodding)
- Tone of voice
  - Not too loud

Ask questions to make sure you understand

- Clarify the meaning of communications
- Don't interrupt until story is ended
- Ask about feelings and thoughts
  - Open questions are best:
    - how? what? could? would?
  - Closed questions are not ideal:
    - is? are? do? did?

Re-state/Paraphrase

- Re-state a part of the story in your own words to make sure you understand
- Reflect factual content: "So, if I understand, what happened was..."
- Reflect feeling content: "So it sounds like you're feeling (new word for their feeling)"

## Summarize

- Tell the person's story in your own words
- Convey a sense of what happened
  - "Let me see if I've got this. First (blank) happened, then (blank)? And you felt (their feeling word)?"
  - "Okay, this is what I've heard so far..."

- Tips:**
- 1. Avoid "Why?" and "Why not?"**
  - 2. Avoid "I know how you feel."**
  - 3. Don't judge the person's experience or reactions in or since the event**

## Emotional Aspects of listening

- Be true to who you are
- People can often tell if you're being fake

## Cognitive Aspects of listening

- Focus- on the speaker
- Thought Stopping- watch for your own thoughts getting in the way (daydreaming)
- Refocusing- If you begin to drift away deliberately focus on listening to the speaker

## *When & How to Make Referrals*

Its time to make a referral when:

- Unpleasant symptoms last more than 4-6 weeks
- It's difficult for the individual to function at home, school, or on the job
- An individual feels concerned about his/her behaviors or emotions
- Evidence of potential for harm to self or others, or psychotic processes
- If you feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed in dealing with the situation

Alarm Bells:

- Person threatens harm to self
  - "...end it all," "...go to sleep and never wake up"
- Risky behaviors (including excessive use of substances)
- Any suicidal talk is something to take seriously
  - DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK IF THEY'RE THINKING ABOUT HURTING THEMSELVES
- Threaten harm to others
- Having/feeling a loss of control
- Person is withdrawing from others (if that's a change for them) or any significant change in behaviors
- Person is not in touch with reality

**When in doubt, get help from someone else!**

- Another adult, school counselor, mental health professional, spiritual leader, law enforcement officer