

Strengths-based Communication

Myka Piatt, Temple University Harrisburg



Learning Objectives

- Participants will:
 - Learn strategies for communicating with empathy
 - Practice communicating with empathy
 - Receive and reflect on feedback about their communication skills
 - Practice powerful questions



Reflecting Empathy

- Reflecting empathy is the ability of the worker to accurately reflect what the family member is saying with the aim of understanding and respecting the family member's feelings
- Accurate empathy clarifies or strengthens the family's own experiencing and meaning without imposing worker's own material/biases



Empathy

- Empathy sends the message that the family worker accepts the family's position
- Acceptance
 - Respect
 - Nonjudgmental
 - Understanding that the family/individual has unique situation, needs and goals
- Acceptance aids change
- Acceptance is not approval



Tips

- Maintain a [non-judgmental stance](#)
- Requires use of active listening and empathic and reflective responding skills
- Feels unnatural
- Build an "Emotional Bank Account" before giving advice



Empathy is NOT:

"I know exactly how you feel."

"Let me tell you about a time I had a similar experience"



Levels of Empathic Responding

- Supportive sounds
- Mirroring
- Reflecting feeling (does not further family's self understanding or facilitate deeper levels of self exploration)
- Additive empathy-skill of reflecting meaning beneath the surface of family's awareness
 - Expands family self awareness, cushion the impact of confrontations, explore and resolve relational reactions
 - Use once the relationship is solid

Empathic Failure

Reflect wrong

- Feeling
- Content
- Meaning
- Intensity



Powerful Questioning

- Stimulates reflective conversation
- Is thought-provoking
- Reveals underlying assumptions
- Invites creativity and new possibilities
- Generates energy and forward movement
- Evokes more questions



Powerful Questions: Empowering

- Create opportunities
- Make the assumption that something can happen
- Imply that people are capable and have the skills to succeed
- Motivational
- Open a dialogue
- Find out what people really think and feel
- Set a positive tone for the interaction
- Demonstrate "shared power"

Examples of Powerful Questions

- "What needs to change?"
- "How does the other person see this situation?"
- "What am I missing or overlooking?"
- "What barriers did you face?"
- "What was under your control and what was not?"
- "What would you do differently?"
- "What is holding us back?"
- "What evidence do you have to support your view?"
- "What is the next step?"
- "What contributed to our success?"
- "What did you do well?"
- "What skills did you use?"

Wrapping Up

For more information contact:
Myka Piatt
717-232-6400
myka.piatt@temple.edu

