Strengths-based Communication

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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 the 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, cushions the impact of confrontations, explores and resolves 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

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