

Healing Communication for Ourselves and Our Clients

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Why Communication is Important

“There seems to be no agent more effective than another person in bringing a world for oneself alive, or, by a glance, a gesture, or a remark, shriveling up the reality in which one is lodged.”

Erving Goffman, **Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction**

Definition and Key Aspects of Communication

-Communication is passing or conveying meaning between two or more people. All behavior in the presence of another person conveys meanings.

-Communication always includes “How I see you” and “How I want you to see me or act toward me” messages, usually implied rather than stated.

-Communication includes multiple messages from the sender simultaneously. If these complement each other, there is clarity. If they contradict each other, there is often confusion by the receiver, especially if the contradiction is denied by the sender.

Healing communication :

- Intention – it all starts here
- Presence - patient, compassionate attention to here-and-now events within myself and between myself and the other
- Trust in the other's basic goodness (connection)
- Accurate empathy and understanding of another's needs through feedback
- Practice

How to Communicate with Someone in Distress

If someone is in distress

- *We ask what's going on for them - not what's wrong with them or if they have been given a diagnosis. . .*
- *We meet (them) with calm curiosity. . .*
- *We've found that what helps people move through (distressed) feelings is being able to talk openly about them. . .*
- *We believe that the most important tasks are building a life that's worth living, making meaningful connections, and finding communities to join.*

Sera Davidow, Recovery Learning Center
in interview "An Open Mind"

Some Beneficial Health Effects of Healing Communication –

- Improved psychological health
- Improved social well-being
- Improved physical health

A Mindfulness Break

Peer Sharing Circle

- Time: divide the time equally among participants. Decide how to keep the time.
- Speakers: Although there may be a focus question such as "What's going on" or "How are you doing or feeling," participants can share what's most important from their own experience during their time.
- Listeners: Set an intention to listen with an open mind/heart. No comments are made.
- Confidentiality: What's said in the circle, stays in the circle, unless speaker gives permission to share.

Three elements of healthy listening to a speaker

- Patient, curious attentiveness to self and other (Peer Sharing Circle)
- Further communication practice in pairs:
 - Empathic questioning and feedback to understand the other's needs
 - Selectively sharing one's own experience through I messages or meta-communication

Instructions for Peer Sharing Circle:

- Join with 2 others at your table to form a group of 3 (or max of 4).
- Decide who will keep time.
- Agree who will start.
- Each person gets up to 2 minutes to share what's going on, what matters right now, how s/he is feeling. Share from your own experience. It's ok to pass or not use all the time.
- When your time is up, finish your sentence and stop. Allow a breath between each person.
- Listen for the call to return after 7 minutes.

Empathic Reflection

- Person A: One person in the peer circle agrees to check out an empathic observation with another person in the circle (Person B) about what s/he said.
- Person A: You may share a feeling you sensed when s/he spoke, a clarifying question, or a restatement of something spoken.
- Person B: Respond to Person A with an affirmation of what was shared (Yes, I was feeling . . .) or further clarification (What I meant was . . .)

Blocks to healing communication by the listener:

- Advising or Fixing
- Over-interpreting
- Judging
- Ordering
- Personal issues that are distracting or triggering

And in the end . . .

"One can, I think, listen someone into existence, [and] encourage a stronger self to emerge..." Mary Rose O'Reilly

"The ethical implications of our fundamental connectedness are profound. Because of our intrinsic oneness, health can never be merely personal, and neither can illness, poverty, or hunger. The unity we share requires a recalibration of the Golden Rule from, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,' to 'Be kind to others because in some sense they are you.' On this realization, our future on Earth may depend." – Larry Dossey, MD

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