



TCI – Module Seven Crisis Communication



Crisis Communication and Active Listening

Caring and Responsive relationships

To be effective in a crisis we need to have a caring and therapeutic developmental relationship with the child and/or young person. Caring relationships are built on **trust, empathy, validation and respect**. To build these relationships we need to ensure that we are supporting the child or young person repeatedly and consistently in order to reduce their stress and help them feel safe.

As a **trusted** adult we can help children and young people through difficult times by providing co-regulation and support. **Empathy** means seeing the world through the child or young person's eyes and communicating that understanding to them. Children need to know we understand what they are experiencing. **Validating** a young person requires listening and sending the message that we understand their perspective. To show **respect** we need to listen and take the child or young person's view into consideration.

To achieve this we need to have good non-verbal and verbal communication skills.

Active Listening: Listening, Understanding and Responding

Sometimes, instead of trying to understand young people's feelings, we tend to try and cheer them up, minimise their feelings, or solve their problems for them. This can discourage a young person from further communication. Using non-verbal and verbal communication techniques in active listening help build relationships and help adults to answer the question "What does this young person feel, need, expect or want?"

Young people and children who are angry, upset, frightened, or disappointed want to have someone understand their feelings and viewpoint. Often they do not know what their feelings are and need help from a trusted adult to help sort out what happening to them emotionally so that they can manage their emotions. By being respectful and validating the young person/child's experience, children are more likely to see the adult as helpful, interested and a secure base.

Non – verbal Techniques

Non-verbal skills include carefully attending to and attuning to the child or young person through the use of:

- **Silence:** There are times when adults can communicate more by remaining silent than by speaking. Sometimes people feel uncomfortable with the silence and feel compelled to fill the void. It may be good to give the young person the opportunity to express their feelings and calm down by remaining silent.
- **Nods:** Can be used to convey understanding when using silence



- **Physical closeness:** If we have a good relationship with the child we can use our presence as a way to calm the child down.
- **Facial expression:** The face can be very expressive, sometimes it's not what we say but how it is expressed that conveys the most information.
- **Eye contact:** Awareness of what is communicated and received through eye contact is crucial. Establishing eye contact at the beginning of an interaction conveys interest and undivided attention. Prolonging eye contact may make the other person apprehensive or defensive.
- **Body language:** We need to ensure that we keep a check on the body language we are conveying to the child during a crisis. We need to ensure that we are engaged with the child.
- **Tone of voice:** Has meaning above and over words so we need to ensure that our tone of voice is not trying to match the child's during an escalation.
- **Gestures:** If we have a good relationship with the child we may make caring gestures to the child to help calm them down. This could be a slight touch on the shoulder.

Verbal Techniques

Verbal techniques that encourage a young person to talk can help the young person to calm down by expressing their feelings and concerns with words. This helps us to experience what the child/young person is feeling, thinking and perceiving. Verbal Techniques includes:

- **Minimal Encouragements:** Minimal encouragements are brief statements that urge young people to continue speaking eg. Uh-huh, go on or I see.
- **Door Openers:** Are invitations to young people to speak eg. I'd like to hear more, tell me about that or what's up.
- **Closed Questions:** Are for specific short answer responses and are useful when trying to clarify a detail.
- **Open Questions:** Encourage young people to explain further, to provide more information. Open questions generally begin with "how" and "what".
- **Why Questions:** It is best to avoid asking why as they may elicit a defensive response, they can be seen as a challenge or a prelude to an attack.
- **Tone of Voice:** Is important to keep in mind in any verbal interaction.

Understanding Responses

As we listen to what the child/young person is feeling we need to ensure:

- We communicate to the child/young person that they have been understood
- Help the child/young person make sense of it

Reflective and empathic responses help children and young people feel heard and sort out what is happening to them.

- **Reflective Responses:** Acknowledges what the young person is feeling and presents it back to them in a way that helps the child or young person to better understand, manage and cope with their emotions.



- Empathic Responses: Answer the question what is the young person experiencing? It communicates that we understand what the young person is going through. It lets the young person know that they have been heard and are not alone.



Details of this topic are covered in the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) Student Workbook 7th Edition. Refer to Module Three pages S33 – S37.