
DE-ESCALATION AND PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGIES

Working with clients in moments of challenge and conflict can be exhausting. Yet these moments represent important opportunities for growth – both for the client and for ourselves. This workshop will help you develop the confidence and skill to de-escalate tensions in the moment, and begin to foster a lasting change in the attitude and behavior of your clients.

Instructor: Aaron Lyons, M.A.

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Wilderness Mental Health First Aid



www.justoutcomesconsulting.com

info@justoutcomesconsulting.com

FIVE LISTENING PRINCIPLES

Listening and understanding is about *respect*, not about *agreement*.

Listen loosely to the *words* and tightly to the *meaning*.

Stay *curious* and *open*, rather than assuming and judging.

The other person will usually listen to you *after* (but only after) being heard and understood by you.

Listening is more an act of *will* than an act of *skill*.

CREDIT CAROLYN SCHROCK-SHENK

DE-ESCALATION IN 4 STEPS

1. AWARENESS

2. CONTAINMENT

3. PROBLEM-SOLVING

4. FOLLOW-UP

CONTAINMENT STRATEGIES

Containment is the act of keeping something within limits. In working with challenging behaviours, it means working to safely interrupt a harmful behaviour and/or diffuse the situation. Containment is essential before productive problem-solving can take place.

Key Strategies

Intervene Promptly

As the situation escalates, it becomes more difficult for both you and the client to process information rationally.

Use Names

Most people are very sensitized to perceptions of respect and disrespect. The use of a person's name usually signifies a show of respect.

Listen

People will be more willing to hear your perspective after they feel they've been heard. Engaged listening provides a chance for them to express feelings in words, rather than by harmful behaviours.

You're angry because you feel like you're being singled out. What makes you feel that way?

Help the Client Save Face

If at all possible, avoid confronting client about their behaviour in front of their peers: the tendency will be for them to defend and deflect. Removing the client from the situation and having the conversation in private will usually be more successful. When having the conversation, use validation and reframing to help make it easier for the client to reverse earlier resistance.

"I can see how you would have felt that way. Fairness is important to you, and I respect that."

Change Settings

A change of setting can signal a 'fresh start' to the interaction. Where triggers are present, find a space which allows for greater calm. If possible, walk and talk: the movement and change of scenery can help to de-escalate defensiveness and anger.

Give Choices

Clients usually work hard to defend their autonomy and control. While their current behaviour may not be acceptable, you can provide choices within a range of appropriate options. By providing limited autonomy you are restoring some control to the client while ensuring safety.

"Would you like to go ahead and clean this up on your own? Or would you like some help?"

Use Non-Threatening Language

Using the words "I" and "We" when setting limits on behaviour can have a greater chance of being heard without defensiveness than using "You."

"I'm not comfortable with being spoken to that way."

"Why don't we try..." (instead of "You need to...")

PARAPHRASING

Why Paraphrase

1. Supports the listener in maintaining presence and focus.
2. Reassures the speaker that they are being heard.
3. Clarifies meaning for the listener and the speaker.
4. Slows the pace of the interaction.
5. Can have a calming / de-escalating effect on the speaker and listener.

How to Paraphrase

1. Focus on the speaker – avoid internal and external distractions.
2. Use your own words to reflect what you believe the speaker is trying to communicate.
3. Reflect both content and feelings when possible and appropriate.
4. Keep it simple and short.
5. Practice, practice, practice.

Paraphrasing Examples

Mr. Meyers hates me. He told me that I was talking back, but I was just trying to explain what happened.

SO YOU'RE FRUSTRATED BECAUSE MR. MEYERS MISUNDERSTOOD YOUR INTENT?

He didn't even ask. He took my paper, and when he wouldn't give it back I hit him. He deserved it!

SO YOU FELT DISRESPECTED WHEN HE TOOK YOUR PAPER?

Common Paraphrasing Blunders

Contrived Paraphrase: "So it sounds like . . ."

Science Thesis Paraphrase

Copy-Cat Paraphrase

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Types of Questions

Direct Questions – Questions that can be answered with “Yes” or “No”

“Do you think it’s okay to hit John?”

Leading Questions – Questions that contain our judgement within the question. The speaker’s inflection is often the give-away for a leading question. Leading questions can be direct or open-ended.

*“What were you **thinking**?”*

Open-Ended Questions – Open-ended questions are questions that encourage the speaker to talk more, and lead to a clarification and deepening of the meaning behind what is being said. Open-ended questions reflect a curious and humble intent.

“What was going on for you when you hit John?” “How did hitting John make you feel?” “What happened between you and John?”

Practice

Translate the following direct and/or leading questions into open-ended questions:

Example: Didn’t you clearly explain our policies? *What do you think created their misunderstanding?*

1. Did you talk back to Mr. Robinson? _____
2. Were you mean to John? _____
3. Don’t you know the rules? _____
4. What were you **thinking**? _____
5. Was there a reason you didn’t prioritize your homework? _____

6. Why are you so grumpy today? _____

POSITIONS VS INTERESTS

“What I Want” vs. “Why I Want It”

WHEN I’M FOCUSED ON MY POSITION, I:

1. communicate one solution that I believe is the answer to an issue or problem;
2. believe what I am suggesting is the right way as compared to the wrong way;
3. express it as a demand; and,
4. fear that my needs will not be met if I don’t get “what I want”.

WHEN I AM ABLE TO IDENTIFY AND ARTICULATE MY INTERESTS, I:

1. focus on communicating the underlying needs or values that the position is meant to address;
2. find my interests difficult for others to challenge due to the universal nature of interests and needs; and,
3. recognize there may be ways of meeting my goals that I haven’t thought of yet.

EXAMPLES:

POSITIONS

INTERESTS

I want to sit in the back of the classroom!

I want to feel safe.

Homework is stupid!

I am struggling to understand this material, and I need to feel competent.

I’m not leaving, and you can’t make me!

I need a voice in this situation.

Positions limit solutions. They limit the outcome of a discussion or conflict to a win/lose outcome. Interests allow for multiple solutions to be explored that can potentially result in a win/win outcome.

Getting ourselves or others to the place where we can articulate interests can be challenging. We are often taught to get our needs met by strongly defending our positions.

“I” STATEMENTS

Why Use “I”

- Allows the speaker to express perspectives and emotions while minimizing the defensiveness of the listener
- Places control of the speaker’s experience more in the hands of the speaker
- Models self-responsibility and accountability
- Minimizes the likelihood of debate about the speaker’s experience or observations

How to Use “I”

- State the impact of the behavior, starting with “I”
 - When using “I feel,” ensure you are following this with an emotion word
 - “I” can also be used to describe unemotional observations about the impact of a behavior (e.g. “I notice...”)
- If necessary/appropriate, give context around the emotions you are describing by naming interests or needs that are unmet

“I” Statement Examples

“When I hear her being described in that way, I feel disappointed and protective.”

“I get uncomfortable when you use that tone and I find myself getting defensive. I’m wondering if you could find a different way to say that.”

“I remember asking you earlier to keep your hands off other students. I’m starting to feel frustrated and annoyed because I see a lot of people sitting near you getting distracted.”

Common “I” Statement Blunders

The Interpreted-Behavior Observation: “When you gripe at me like that, I feel...”

Accusatory “I” Statement: “I feel like you’re bullying me”

TMI-Statement: “I feel insecure when you look at me like that.”

SOME FEELING WORDS

Ashamed

Heartbroken

Tense

Optimistic

Joyful

Grateful

Shocked

Embarrassed

Hopeful

Frightened

Confused

Horrified

Impatient

Awkward

Touched

Proud

Angry

Glad

Enraged

Exasperated

Upset

Hurt

Righteous

Perplexed

Alone

Self-Conscious

Relieved

Sad

Inferior

Jealous

Disappointed

Frustrated

Secure

Remorseful

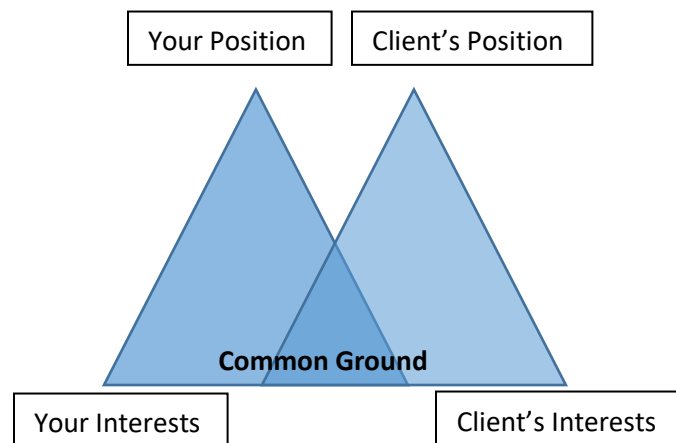
PROBLEM SOLVING & PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Problem Solving Tips

Work Toward Client Empowerment: If possible, ask the client about their ideas for how to put things right and resolve the situation. Use open-questions and paraphrasing to explore gain clarity.

Offer Your Perspective When Necessary: If the solutions being proposed by the young person are not realistic or adequate, offer your own ideas on what could happen next. Let the client know of any non-negotiable issues (e.g. safety).

Focus on Interests, Not Positions. Throughout the dialogue, keep the conversation on track by focusing on interests – both yours and that of the young person.



“I get that catching up with your friends is important. I also know that when there laughing and chatting during class, it can pretty hard for everyone to keep focused on the learning. It’s important that the classroom stay a place for learning. How can you make sure that you get caught up with your friends AND make sure the classroom stays focused?”

S.M.A.R.T Plans

Plans or solutions need to be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-Specific.

