

**CAPS VOLUNTEERS**



**BASIC HELPING  
SKILLS**

**COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, BOULDER**

# 5 Step Helping Skills Model



- Setting the Stage
- Building trust
- Listening Stage
- Identify Problem and Analysis
- Resolution
- Follow Up

# Basic Counseling Skills



- Building trust and rapport
- Attending Behavior
- Active Listening

# Building Trust and Rapport



- Establish safety
  - As the Volunteer
    - ✦ Be present and accessible
    - ✦ Prepare yourself
    - ✦ Be clear about how much time you have
    - ✦ If so, use “door openers” or invitations to talk
      - “Want to talk about it?”
      - “Can I be of any help or support?”
  - Environment
    - ✦ Whenever possible, locate a private space free of distractions
    - ✦ Ask the student where they might feel comfortable talking

# Attending Skills



*Helps establish a feeling of caring and respect that builds rapport and trust*

What are your NONVERBALS communicating?

- **Sit** directly across
- **Open** posture
- **Lean** toward speaker when necessary
- **Eye** contact
- **Relaxed** posture

Are your nonverbals communicating that you're not really listening? (i.e., wandering eyes, fidgeting hands, tapping your feet, etc.)

# Barriers to Effective Listening



- Too many Distractions
- Letting mind wander
- Pre-judging the speaker
- Rushing to solve the problem
- Signs of needing to leave
- Talking the student out of their feelings
- Not keeping confidentiality- no sense of trust that information will be kept private

# Active Listening



- Seeking to understand the student's situation, meaning, and emotions
- Listen for CONTENT and FEELING
- ◉ Minimal Encouragers
  - “Uh, huh”
  - “I see”
  - “I understand”
- Non-verbal gestures that say, “I’m listening, please continue”
- Bridges

# More Active Listening...



- Open-ended Questions/Statements
  - “Can you tell me what you mean...”
  - “Explain more about....”
  - Practice with these
    - ✦ Do you want to drop the class?
    - ✦ Do you want to break up with her?
    - ✦ Are you going to talk to your roommate about it?
- Emphasizers
  - Speaker- I feel so overwhelmed with work”
  - Listener: Overwhelmed?



# Reflecting and Clarifying



- Reflection of Feeling and Paraphrasing (be their mirror)
  - Highlight the feeling words
    - ✦ “So, what I heard you say is.....”
    - ✦ “So basically, you are feeling...”
  - Provides feedback loop to you and the student
  - Listen for common themes
  - Listening for “but”
- Clarification as needed, Check out/clarify key words
  - ✦ “What more can you tell me...”
  - ✦ “So, how *are* you experiencing it?”
  - ✦ “What do you mean when you say....”
  - ✦ “What makes you believe that?”
- Provide feedback as needed while remaining neutral
- Validate concerns and feelings

# Talk Less, Listen More



- Avoid “waiting for my turn to talk”
- Add a gap of silence
  - Reduces tendency to interrupt
  - Encourages others to open up and share more
  - Gives others space to think about what they said, feel different emotions, or express new ideas
  - Gives you the opportunity to learn more

# Keep in Mind...



- **Empathy:** Step into their shoes
- **Context Matters**
- **Objective and Nonjudgmental Attitude:** Be objective and open.
  - **NOTHING SHUTS DOWN CONVERSATION FASTER THAN JUDGEMENT**
    - Conveys the message you are not safe to discuss this with
    - People are often embarrassed to begin with
- **Awareness**

# Explicit and Implicit Attitudes



(c) Tracey says



$(\sqrt{2} + \sqrt{8})$  is an irrational number  
 $(\sqrt{2} + \sqrt{8})^2 = 18$   
I think that if you square an  
number you always get a ratio

Tracey is wrong.

Use an example to show that Tracey is wrong.

*She's a woman*

*2nd or 3rd power*

# Don't Forget...



- **Avoid Minimizing**
- **Avoid Over-identifying or generalizing-**
  - (“I know just how you feel”):
- **Avoid over questioning**
- **Facilitate Decision Making**
- **Role**
- **Ask Permission to Provide Feedback**
- **Refer out**

# Guide to Problem Solving



Key Message: Help the student find their own solution!

- Assess what the student is needing in the moment
  - Are they seeking guidance in decision making?
  - Are they just needing to process thoughts and feelings and to feel understood and supported?
- **BREATHE**
  - We exercise clearer judgment and make better decisions when we are calm and relaxed
- Break decision down into problem-solving steps
  - Identify information needed to make the decision
  - Clarify the student's goals, values, interests, needs, and desires
  - List options and alternatives
  - Weigh the pros and cons and explore compromises

Finally,

- Help student recognize that the decision is theirs alone
- Recognize that there is seldom a single “right” answer
- Avoid false reassurances

# Communicating Across Differences



- Ask Questions
- Pay attention to your own biases
- Different values, backgrounds, cultures, languages, ways of communicating, ways of making decisions, comfort levels, personal histories
- Communication Glitches
- Hang in There
- Intent v Impact

# Other Considerations



- Expectations re: communication are a reflection of, and embedded in specific cultures
- “cultural differences” can stem from ethnic/racial sources; gender; sexual orientation; geographical; political; SES; generational/zeitgeist, etc.
- There are familial, cultural, and individual influences on how one communicates
- How one expresses distress, and what they believe can be done about it...will vary among individuals.



# Signs of Distress



- Persistent, excessive anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Social withdrawal
- Depressed affect, persistent tearfulness, lethargic
- Increased irritability, restlessness, agitation, acting out
- Unusual/bizarre behavior
- Rapid and/or rambling speech
- Mood swings
- Emotional outbursts (i.e., anger, uncontrolled crying)
- Disorientation (i.e., inability to concentrate or make decisions, not thinking, speaking, or behaving in a coherent manner)
- Physical symptoms (i.e., headaches, fatigue, sleep problems, stomach pains, changes in eating patterns)
- Destructive coping behaviors (i.e., substance abuse, self-medicating, ED behaviors,
- Suicidal ideation, self-harm behaviors

# How to Intervene



- Talk to the student promptly and in private
- State your reasons for concern gently and in a nonjudgmental manner
- Assure the student of available resources and presence of people that can and want to help, remind them of confidential nature of counseling
- Know your limits and boundaries
- Make a referral to the appropriate resource
  - CAPS
  - After hours line
  - 911

# Putting it Into Practice



## Scenario #1

A student tells a volunteer that other students in one of their classes are making jokes that are inappropriate, often offensive and racist. The student is starting to feel uncomfortable in this class and he is having a difficult time staying focused on what the professor is saying.

# Putting it Into Practice



## Scenario #2

A student tells you that her parents want her to switch her major from Sociology to Business because she will make more money in the future. She doesn't like Business. She tells you that a friend told her that she shouldn't listen to what her family thinks when it comes to school anymore, after all, she's at CU now as an adult and should be making her own decisions. She tells you that it's important to her to make her parents proud, happy, and to respect their opinion. She feels confused about what to do.

# Putting it Into Practice



## Scenario #3

A student shares with a volunteer that they are feeling out of place at CU. Classes are too big, it feels too scary to talk to the professors, and it's been hard connecting with others. He tells you that there's not a lot of people who look or think like him in his classes and this has made him feel lonely and doubt himself. Sometimes he wonders if he belongs in CU, or in college at all.