



CARE SKILLS No. 3

EMPATHY, REFLECTION AND A CURIOUS STANCE

Goal: Make sure others feel seen, heard and understood.

- All of us want to be seen, heard and understood.
- In order to make sure others feel seen, heard and understood, we must accurately read a person's cues and respond calmly instead of reacting to their behaviour.
- Start by being curious about the needs behind the behaviour. What might be happening and why?
- At times, we try to fix, respond, or problem solve before we stop, listen, and sit with the person's experience. It is important to understand and reflect before we respond.

Techniques:

- **Accept and respect all of a person's feelings.** Even if a person's feelings do not make sense to you, they are real and valid for the person. Avoid trying to "change" a person's feelings or telling the person they should feel something different.
- **Show that you are listening, engaged, and curious to understand.** Use active listening skills by nodding, responding verbally, and showing an interest in understanding the person's perspective. Wonder to yourself and with others what might be happening.
- **Name and validate the feelings.** Be curious and listen for the person's feelings. If the person doesn't state a feeling, offer a guess (name at least two possibilities) and tell them why you are guessing that. Always allow the person to correct you. Let them know that you accept their feelings and they make sense. Even though you might not agree with those feelings, it is important to validate them.
- **Reflect back what you hear and see.** Simply rephrase what the other person said or take some guesses about what might be behind the words. You can also reflect the body language and facial expressions of the other person like a mirror.
- **Normalise the experience and feelings.** A person who has experienced trauma can sometimes feel as though there is something wrong with them, they are bad, and/or they are vastly different from their peers. Helping a person understand that his or her experience is normal and other people sometimes feel the same way can reassure the person that their feelings are valid. Some examples include: "Many people would feel (insert feeling) in the same circumstances." "I would feel hurt/upset if that happened to me."



What Can You Do?

- **Wait 10 seconds** and think before responding to a child or young person's behaviour.
- **Before responding**, make sure the child or young person has felt "seen, heard and understood."
- **Be curious.** What is the underlying feeling or need behind the behaviour? What might be bothering the child or young person?
- **Go beyond "I'm angry!"** People often say they are angry when upset. However, there are a lot of feelings that may be behind anger (hurt, sad, disappointed, fearful, and ashamed). These feelings may be harder to express, because they suggest vulnerability. Help the child or young person find words to describe feelings beyond angry, mad, or a string of swear words.
- **Try out some mindfulness ideas** to help keep yourself centred <http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations>
- **Recognise the importance of being attuned** to children, young people and family members.

With other staff and carers...

- **Teach** colleagues and carers to identify and respond to a child or young person's feelings (happy, sad, excited, angry, etc.) across situations, not just when dysregulated.
- **Reflect what you hear** with colleagues and carers to help prevent miscommunication, i.e.
"So, what I hear you saying is"
- **Use validation** with colleagues and carers to help build stronger relationships and better working teams. *"I see where you are coming from..."*
- **Be curious about the responses** of your colleagues and carers. Be careful not to assume what another person feels. Instead, reach out to colleagues and carers and have discussions to better understand.