

Reflective Listening in Times of Crisis

School Resources to Support Military-Connected Students is a project by the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness an applied research center at The Pennsylvania State University and is funded by the Department of Defense Education Activity Grant number HE1254-19-0009.

For more information click on the links below:

<https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/>

<https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/>

<https://www.psu.edu/>

<https://dodeagrants.org/>

Our goal is to provide school personnel with free, evidence-based resources to support military-connected students. This training is part of our Suicide Prevention series.

Important Reminders

Before starting this training, please read the items below carefully and check the box in front of each item to indicate your understanding.

- The following content discusses suicide and may be upsetting to some individuals.
- Follow all district, local, state, and federal regulations. This training is **NOT** intended to replace or override existing procedures or laws.

Introduction

What is the purpose of this training?

You are likely trained to effectively communicate with students, parents, and other school personnel. However, a refresher in components of effective communication may be beneficial when considering such stressful and emotionally charged topics as risk assessment for self-harm and suicide.

The OARS motivational interviewing framework provides a strong foundation for listening skills, which may help you identify student-specific strengths, protective and risk factors, and warning signs.

Objective

The goal of this training is to increase your confidence in your ability to:

Effectively utilize motivational interviewing techniques with students in times of crisis.

How confident are you in your ability to do this now?

Please click on the link below to submit your response.

https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6Gp3iBHIvhcTluR?modulenumber=suicide13

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below before proceeding with this training.

Answered the survey question in the link.

Clicked the arrow underneath the survey question to submit your response.

Recorded the ID number provided after you submitted your answer to the survey question. You will need it to complete the survey at the end of this training.

Research

What is most important for me to know?

OARS stands for:

- Open questions
- Affirmation
- Reflective listening
- Summarization

The skills may appear simple but require practice.

Open Questions

Open Questions encourage the student to guide the story. As the student speaks, actively listen and begin assessing his or her threat level. One must identify the student's threat level to ensure he or she gets the appropriate help.

Examples of open questions include:

- "What was that like for you?"
- "Can you tell me about...?"
- "Help me understand..."
- "Tell me more about..."

Open-ended questions invite a multiple-word response, which may help students who are having difficulty discussing their feelings and thoughts. They are the opposite of closed questions, which prompt or expect a specific answer, such as "yes" or "no." Leading questions should also be avoided. Leading questions imply that one answer is more favorable than another and may discourage individuals from being honest. An example of a leading question is, "You'd never feel that way, right?"

In addition, "Why" questions can be difficult for students to answer, and often put individuals on the defensive. Using "What" or "How" instead of "Why" can help change the tone of the question and can help get the information you are looking for without making the person have to justify his or her behavior. For example: "Why didn't you tell me this sooner?" could be changed to, "What made it difficult to talk to me about this?" or "How did you decide to come tell me?"

We tend to feel uncomfortable when there are pauses in communication. If the student has stopped talking, be sure to pause for a couple of seconds before speaking. There is a good chance that the student will continue speaking. A general rule is that if you find yourself talking more than the student, you should stop.

Affirmations

Affirmations are statements that acknowledge an individual's personal strengths and/or praise them for what they have already done. When genuine, affirmations build rapport, demonstrate empathy, and help build the student's self-efficacy.

Examples include:

- "I can see how hard it is for you to talk about this."
- "It takes strength to do what you're doing."
- "You're really taking care of yourself."

Affirmations can also be non-verbal and expressed through body posture and appropriate eye contact. Maintaining a calm demeanor and using relaxed voice tone can help express to the student that he or she is in a safe space with someone who will accept him or her.

It is important to always reassure the student by stating, “You are not the first person to feel this way. There is help available and I will be here for you every step of the way.”

Reflective Listening

Reflective Listening is a technique that communicates you are listening and trying to understand the student’s situation by reflecting on his or her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The simplest means of demonstrating reflective listening is to repeat back what the person said in your own words or to reflect on their feelings. When you first practice this skill, it may sound awkward to you; however, it is a very effective technique that helps individuals feel heard. Reflecting on feelings or actions can also provide opportunities for the individual to better explain himself or herself if it reveals that you misunderstood what he or she was saying.

Example 1:

Student: “When my father said that to me, I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t know what to do.” School Personnel: “It sounds like you were in shock.”

Example 2:

Student: “When I saw him in the hospital, I just couldn’t take it. I ran out of the room.” School Personnel: “I’m hearing that you were overwhelmed in that situation. Is that right?”

Summary Statement

Summary statements help to confirm that what you heard and what the person meant to say are the same thing. This can include paraphrasing and can be useful when transitioning to a new subject, linking two subjects together, or closing the conversation.

Examples include:

- “Let’s go over what we’ve talked about so far.”
- “Let me make sure I understand what happened. First,…”

These skills can be used in response to a variety of interactions with students and can help facilitate information gathering from a distressed individual. However, once you identify that a student is at risk and a risk assessment needs to be completed, the focus should move to direct, closed questioning.

Application

How might this look in my professional practice?

The goal of this training is to increase your confidence in your ability to:

Effectively utilize motivational interviewing techniques with students in times of crisis.

Below is a list of examples of each skill that is part of the OARS framework, state which category of the OARS framework you would place these examples in. At the conclusion of this lesson you will be provided with a tool to help you implement the OARS framework in your professional practice.

1. When did you start noticing that?

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening
- d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: a) O- Open Question

2. It’s okay to be nervous. We can do this together.

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening
- d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: b) A- Affirmation

3. What I'm hearing is that you were feeling really lonely.

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening
- d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: c) R- Reflective Listening

4. Here's what we talked about so far: ...

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening
- d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: d) S- Summary Statement

5. Then what happened?

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening
- d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: a) O- Open Question

6. What else do you remember?

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening
- d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: a) O- Open Question

7. I'm wondering if you're anxious because I notice you're twirling your hair.

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening
- d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: c) R- Reflective Listening

8. Take your time. This is really hard.

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening
- d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: b) A- Affirmation

9. I want to make sure I have the story right. So, first...

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening
- d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: d) S- Summary Statement

10. It sounds like this is really hard to understand.

- a) O- Open Questions
- b) A- Affirmation
- c) R- Reflective Listening

d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: c) R- Reflective Listening

11. Can we go over this one more time? What you told me is...

a) O- Open Questions

b) A- Affirmation

c) R- Reflective Listening

d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: d) S- Summary Statement

12. We all feel unsure sometimes.

a) O- Open Questions

b) A- Affirmation

c) R- Reflective Listening

d) S- Summary Statement

Correct answer: b) A- Affirmation

Implementation

How can I effectively implement this content in my professional practice?

Please review the considerations below regarding potential implementation strategies, barriers to implementation, and collaboration strategies related to this content. This will help you coordinate the next steps as you begin to incorporate the information presented in this training into your professional practice.

This information can also be found on a handout that you will be able to download at the end of this training.

Implementation Strategies

- Practice the OARS technique as much as possible in everyday situations. Practicing listening in this way during times of calm makes it easier to use the skills when there is a crisis
- Ask for feedback from colleagues and others about your listening skills after practicing with OARS. There may be verbal and non-verbal habits of behavior that you have not noticed about yourself.

Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

- When in doubt about using listening skills, always seek more training.
- Seek the support of colleagues and practice using new skills together.

Collaboration Strategies

- Be sure that information is shared only on a need-to-know basis, but ensure that the people around you can support students when necessary.
- Offer and seek feedback from colleagues in low-stakes situations as much as possible to support your skills for the event of a crisis.

Resources

Are there any resources available to help me implement this content?

Click on the link below to download a tool that you can use to implement this content in your professional practice.

<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:5dafaec6-be46-4f17-94c2-4279ab5f448c>

Feedback

How can I help improve this training?

The objective of this training was to increase your confidence in your ability to:

Effectively utilize motivational interviewing techniques with students in times of crisis.

Answer the questions in the link below to let us know how well this training increased your confidence in your ability to accomplish this objective. Once you have answered all of the questions, click the blue arrow button underneath to submit your responses.

https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d771mLr9ZgW3kyx?modulenumber=suicide13

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below.

Answered all of the survey questions above. You may have to scroll to see all of the questions.
Clicked the arrow underneath the last survey question to submit your responses.

Additional Readings

Where can I learn more about this content?

The following resources were used to create this training. If you would like more information about the information presented in this training, we encourage you to start here.

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (1991). *Motivational interviewing: Preparing people to change addictive behavior*. The Guilford Press.

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this training. If you have any questions or comments, please email us at schoolresources@psu.edu.

Proceed to the next training

Click on the link below to move on to the next training titled *Student Confidentiality and Parental Rights*. In this training, you will increase your confidence in your ability to respond appropriately to the possible outcomes on the suicide risk screening tool.

https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide_14-student-confidentiality-and-parental-rights_201022/

Return to the module directory

Click on this button to return to the module directory.

<https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/modules/>