

Communication, de escalation, decision making

Kathy Harowski, PhD, LP

Talking with your teen

- As parents and caregivers, we may approach communication with teens with a number of goals....even though de escalation has a short term focus, our long view encompasses: mentoring; teaching life lessons; empathy development; tools to manage strong feelings including anger and frustration; sometimes all of the above

Interventions with teens

- Kids/youth/adolescents differ widely even at the same chronological age
- Age range, developmental issues
- Where, when , who for the intervention- always aware of family, cultural, other concerns

Can we agree?

- Adolescence is a time of risk taking and experimentation
- Teens make decisions differently than adults

Communications with teens

- In most situations, even when de-escalating or in a crisis incident, when possible, would want to emphasize skill building, highlight resilience and strengths. This strategy fits well with crisis intervention approaches.
- Empathy development
- Mentoring

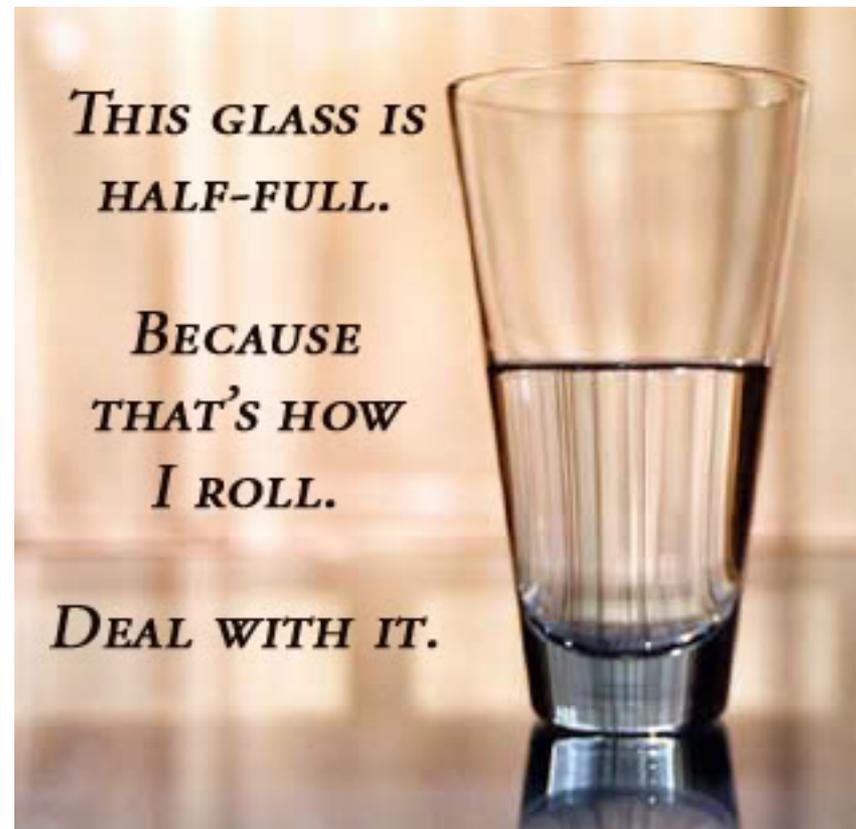
Considerations in communications with teens

- Risk assessment in terms of harm to self/others
- High level of impulsivity
- Special needs, developmental issues/delays

Middle youth and adolescent developmental stages

- Middle youth(6-12) industry vs inferiority; academic achievement, focus; moving closer to friends; control of emotions
- Adolescence(12-18) identity vs role confusion, physical/sexual maturation , experimentation, expression; identity tied to career and educational path

Personality and other stable traits



Focus today on de escalation

- Most have heard the definition of crisis as challenge and opportunity; other layers to consider- it's a subjective experience, perceived threat which impacts people in different ways- disorganizing for some, super focusing for others; emotional response now or later; acute or chronic; some crisis are normal as related to life cycle, developmental crisis and some are not

De escalation occurs...

- Precipitating event
- Perception of the event leads to subjective distress(the event is seen as meaningful, threatening)
- Usual coping methods fail or do not apply which helps anxiety, tension, other emotional discomfort build- loss of emotional equilibrium; the person is motivated to return to emotional equilibrium

Need information quickly in order to determine direction and options

- Everly and Mitchell(2001) whose crisis intervention module is used by the military talk about seven basic communication techniques: silence, nonverbal attending, restatement, paraphrasing, reflection of emotion, open ended questions, closed ended questions

Model for kids/youth acting out

- Seeking attention, make us feel annoyed
- Seeking power/control, make the adult feel intimidated
- Seeking revenge, make the adult feel hurt
- Feeling inadequate, incapable or helpless, make the adult feel helpless

Silence

- Allows the person to vent, does not interrupt catharsis/venting; be aware of cultural differences and do not let silence go on too long

Non verbal/ body language

- Observe changes in the other and be aware of your own body language
- This is a particularly sensitive issue across cultures- aware that each of you has examples. This is also sensitive within a family based on history.

Non verbal communication

- 7 % of communication is verbal.... 93% is nonverbal
- Eye contact, posture, gestures, body positioning, facial expressions
- how do you express impatience? Disbelief? Annoyance?

Restatement/paraphrasing, reflection of emotion

- Restatement- use the same key words, to help with questioning/clarity of understanding
- Paraphrasing- more of a summary, reflection to build empathy- the cliché is I hear you saying...
- Reflection of emotion- reflect back the emotion with feedback or comments

Use open and closed ended questions for different purposes

- Open ended, encourage the client to tell you more, more variable responses in that the person answering has more control
- Closed ended: to get specifics, facts, information that you would likely need from everyone, Y or N

An issue specific to de escalation: calming

- Be able to assess the teen's immediate needs: showing understanding; modeling calm behavior; reassuring; encouraging talking; using distraction; using humor; repeating and outshouting; involving trusted others; ignoring aspects, what I call face saving.....these techniques are split between what are called conversational methods and assertive methods

Empathy

- See the world through the client's point of view, perspective- get enough information, allow venting as needed, step away from one's own point of view

Acceptance

- Recognizing that the other person has a right to his or her own thoughts, feelings or behaviors and deserves to be respected as a human being.

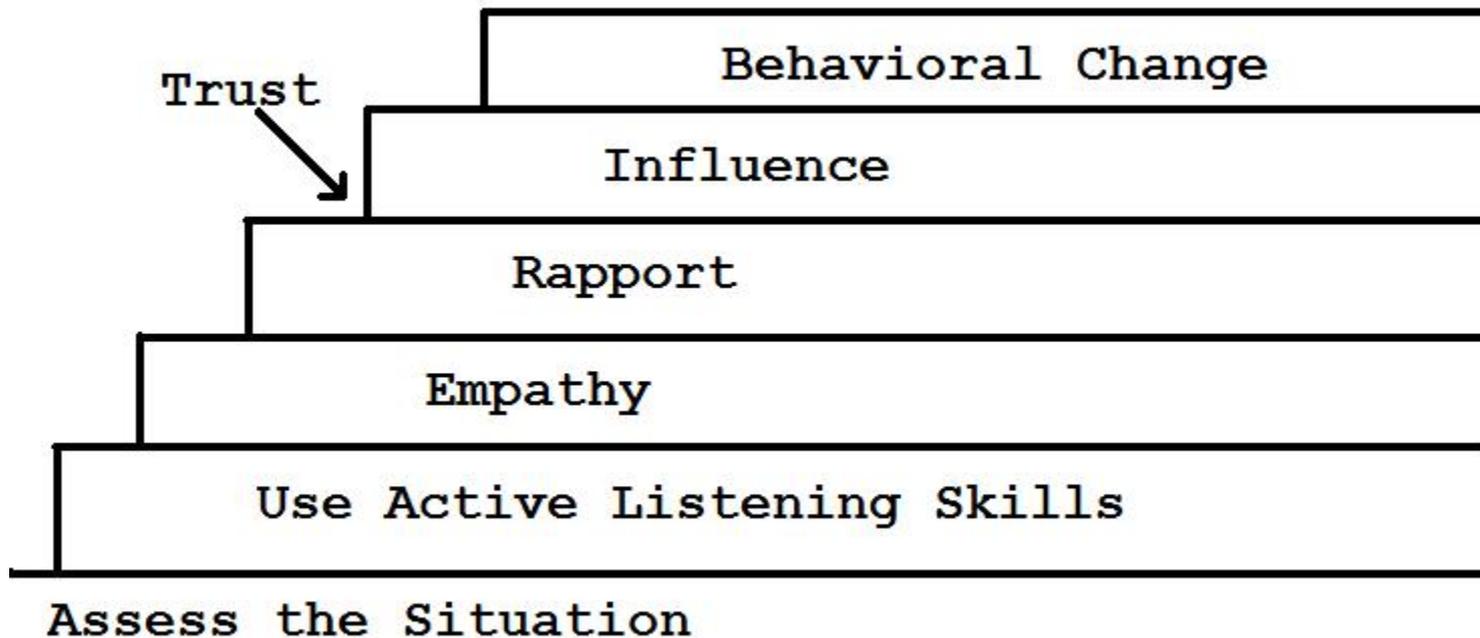
Congruence

- Idea of being present emotionally , just being there in your role as helper- not more or less than this, honest about limitations, what you can bring

Unconditional positive regard

- Aim for listening connection, respect, lack of judgment to encourage the teen to continue-creating a non threatening situation

Behavior Change Staircase



Adapted from the FBI & Dr. D. Fuselier Communication Model.

Habit change

- Habit : a routine, behavior that becomes routine.
- Theories on how to change habits/patterns
- Stop and consider your own experience with the change process so you can be realistic

Keep in mind

- Mirror calm
- Be attentive and confident
- Explain you are there to help
- Ask for cooperation
- Ask, can we get to agreement on something?
- Stay in the moment(that is, do not shift focus to past issues or frustrations, keep focused on what needs to be resolved at this time and place

Contemporary concerns: youth & adolescent decision making

- Puberty moves to younger levels
- More and more powerful technology used by ever younger humans
- Risk level to self and others is higher and society is paying more attention to these issues; we have agreed that adolescence is a time of risk taking
- The adolescent brain
- Breakthrough research regarding adult decision making about risk

Tversky & Kahnemann

- Adults tend to believe that they will have a more positive experience , that they will be less likely than others to experience negative outcomes. Adults favor their own prior experiences and anecdotal evidence rather than statistics or probabilistic information

Fischhoff et al research program (studies through the 1990s)

- See only either or choices not a range
- May lack the experience, knowledge or feeling of control over their lives to come up with alternative choices OR to quickly come to the best decision
- Difficulty interpreting the meaning or credibility of information when making decisions
- May focus more on the social reactions of their peers when deciding to engage in risky behaviors
- May not be accurately able to estimate the probability of negative consequences
- Influenced by their emotions more than adults

Building on these studies: “ the gist ”

- Adolescents are very aware of their vulnerability
- Adolescents overestimate their risk BUT due to their way of thinking, they go ahead and do it because to the teen, the benefit seems more likely than the risk(Reyna& Farley, 2007)

“ the gist”

- These studies challenge a myth and a response-
- challenge the statement that teens feel invulnerable- teens know they are vulnerable
- just say no to just fear tactics or attempts to increase risk awareness, they don't work so well with teens

Closer to how teens think

- Teens make a rational decision, sort of a math like calculation but since they miss the gist, they do the math wrong.. If I only do this once or twice, what could be the risk???
- An adult would start with the gist, gut , big picture reaction and ask what is the point of going down that road at all....

One more tip to consider

- In studies, teens take longer to say NO- just a bit more time, not even a second... but, if you add in the lack of gist and the higher impulsivity of teens and that it might take them longer to process to no... and to illustrate the questions in the research study included items such as....

Age brings humans to the gist more quickly

- For adults, our experiences, learning from our own outcomes and consequences, gets us to the bottom line or “gist” more quickly- the researchers also use the term being able to see the forest more than the trees
- Teaching teens to get to the gist- learn to say no if you want to and not be so focused on the consequences(social, loss of relationship)

Additional highlights for teens

- Help teens see benefits differently not just highlight the risks
- Highlight short term benefits and risks as these are most salient to teens
- Help them develop personal cues- simple, basic, individualized
- Teach self efficacy, skills; teach so that the skill is ready to GO even with high emotion

Social and cultural response includes law enforcement and public policy response

- Society reacts to these patterns:Recent news media: high levels of stealing related to smart phones across major cities
- Bath salts
- Legislation related to teen age driving
- Roper Vs Simmons, US Supreme Court, 2005
- Sexting

Brings our discussion back to the issue of decision making and prevention

- Prevention means educating youth in general and of course, finding ways to educate and move kids away from malicious, abusive, reckless, or even criminal behavior. Parents and caregivers- you have the edge with the idea of individualized, personal cues. You can give examples, use relevant analogy/metaphor stories or questions

Getting to the “gist”

- Move away from just providing information about risks- the Reyna & Farley research indicates that teens use risk information in a different manner than adults, a different risk calculation. Teens calculate that the risk is less than they thought, so, the benefit outweighs the risk. They use the example of a “normal adult”- Russian roulette, no thanks.....

The “gist”

- Talking, training, practice decision making... when to swerve the car and when not too, when to have sex and when not too.... Similar to the models used for adolescent aggression management- put the decision in a context, peer driven
- And of course, society keeps trying to take the risk out such as the changes to teen driving laws, no texting while driving, etc

Strategies to improve decision making

- Provide teens accurate information on risk taking among their peers to counteract media spin/distortion, reliance on internet
- Practice and rehearse decisions and decision making skills with relevant examples
- How to search for new and accurate information to help make decisions

Recognize this communication?



Paul Revere paradigm

- He was known to be highly credible, an expert and trustworthy
- His alarm was focused on a specific event and it was short term
- His alarm was focused on a specific anticipated event
- He wanted to get those he contacted to act
- Concrete steps were in order for the response

Questions

- ???????
- Kathy Harowski, PhD, LP
- Program Chair, MA in forensic psychology, MS in human services, Argosy University twin cities
- Kharowski@argosy.edu