

How to Handle Delicate Conversations

Include a Charity



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In the spirit of reconciliation, the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement acknowledges the traditional and historical owners of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



Learning Outcome

- An understanding of how to manage difficult conversations
- How to implement effective communication strategies for difficult conversations
- Self-care

Case Study Application

Case Study

Pauline's mother recently died suddenly and unexpectedly after attending the hospital for a routine check up. Pauline was the sole carer of her mother and believes the hospital had something to do with her death. Once Pauline received her mother's Will she found she left money for a charity. Pauline doesn't understand how this happened because her mother never mentioned it to her and blames you for forcing her mother to put this in her Will. Pauline doesn't believe this is legal and demands this is removed from her Will and the system.

You suggest for her to speak to a manager, but she doesn't want to be transferred. Every time you suggest this, Pauline becomes more agitated.



How to Manage Delicate Conversations with Donors

Why is it so hard?

We tend to:

- Avoid the person
- Don't mention the deceased name
- Talk about our own experiences
- Say something that takes them away from their feelings
- Use platitudes and clichés

Because we are:

- Scared to say the wrong thing
- Scared that we will make it worse
- Confronted by our own mortality
- Not enough time
- We want to take their pain away
- We want to fix it

What comes up for you...

It is important to be aware of your own assumptions and biases when communicating with bereaved people.

- Is there a right and wrong way to grieve?
- What is a 'normal' grief reaction for you?
- Do you think some donors have the right to grieve and others don't?
- Do you think talking about your own morality is helpful?
- When you think of an older or younger person dying?
- When you think of someone dying of natural causes or a suicide?



Where do these views come from?

- Society
- Childhood
- School
- Culture
- Religion

How does grief support differ?

Providing grief and loss support presents its own challenges for workers in this field. The grief experience impedes our ability to help as we are unable to give the griever what they want, e.g., take their pain away, bring back their loved one.

This can leave the worker feeling frustrated, angry or uncomfortable witnessing the pain in another.

(Worden, 2009)

How does working with grieving individuals affect us?

Additionally, the experience of grief affects us personally. This is done in three different ways.

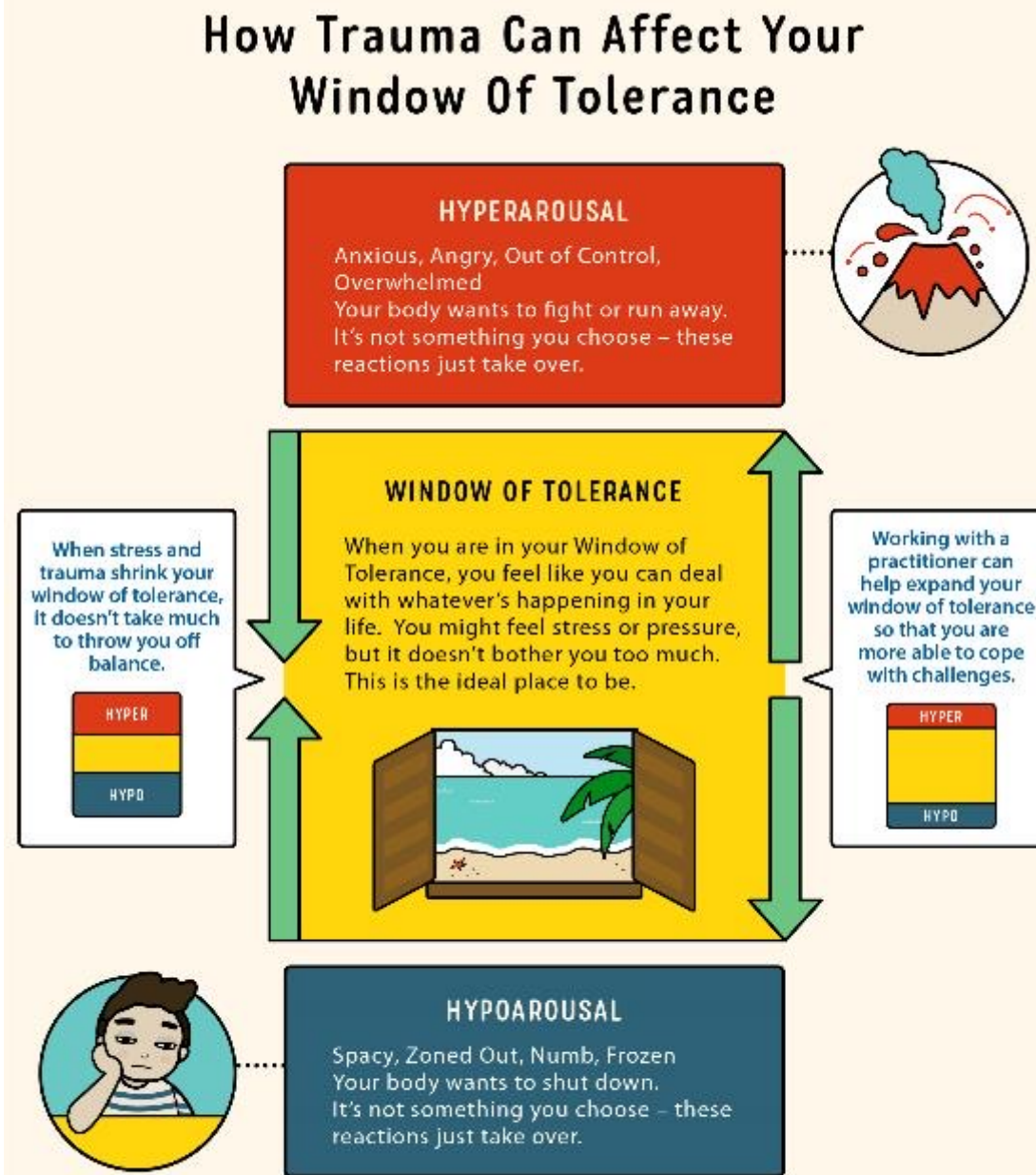
- 1) It makes us aware of our own losses, especially if it is like a loss we have experienced.
- 2) It creates awareness of our own fears of losing a loved one.
- 3) Increases existential anxiety and one's own personal death awareness.

(Worden, 2009, p.252)



How to Implement Effective Communication with Donors

What can help?



(Nicabm, 2017)

nicabm

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What can help?



*"You don't need solutions. You don't need to move
on from your grief."*

*You need someone to see your grief, to
acknowledge it.*

*You need someone to hold your hands while you
stand there in blinking horror, staring at the hole
that was your life.*

*Telling the truth about grief is the only way forward:
your loss is exactly as bad as you think."*

(Devine, 2017, pp. 3,4)



Effective Communication Strategies when Talking with Donors



(Rogers & Farson, 1987)

Face-to-face communication with donors

S: Face the Client **Squarely**

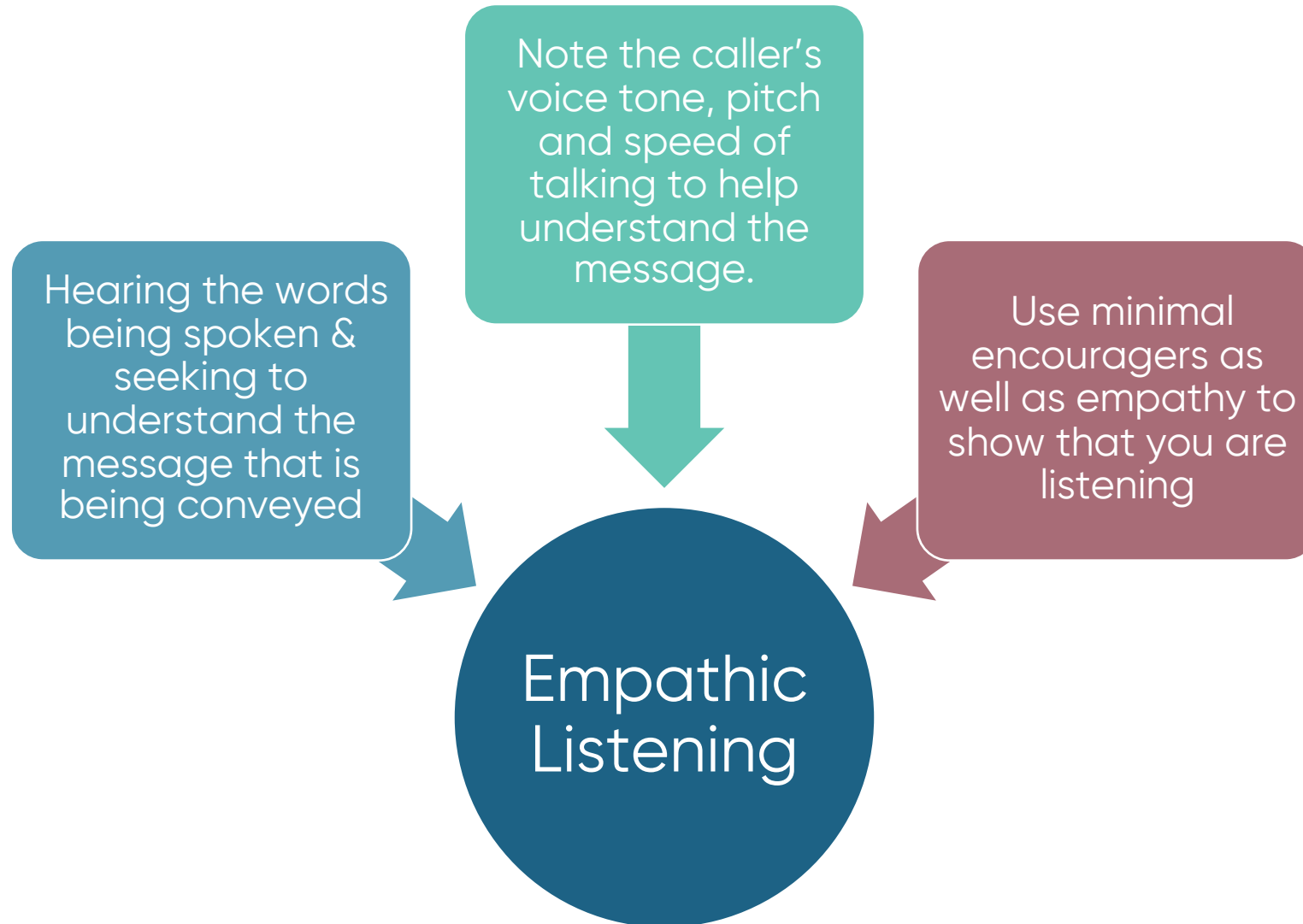
O: Adopt an **open** posture

L: **Lean**

E: Maintain good **eye** contact

R: Try to be relatively **relaxed** or natural in these behaviors

Telephone Communication Skills



Demonstrating Empathy for Donors

- More difficult over the phone where language cues such as facial expressions are absent
- Must rely more heavily on voice, language and vocal responses to help the caller feel understood, accepted and valued
- By simply softening your voice and lowering your tone demonstrates empathy
- Providing feedback by recognising, acknowledging and validating feelings and the difficulties and challenges facing the client also shows empathy

Voice Tone and Characteristics

- Grief and loss support almost guarantees, at some point that the individual on the other end of the phone will be crying. It is often best to leave a short silence while people cry and reassure them with words like "*take your time, there's no rush to talk...*" And then wait to see what happens next.
- It is okay to sit in silence on the other end of the phone.

Paraphrasing

Appropriate empathic reflections.

- Paraphrasing: you put into your own words the essence of what you have heard and repeat these back to the caller, in your own words
 - This can be a reflection of **content** in what they said or a **emotion/feeling** in what they have said

These are *not* questions ...

Functions of Paraphrasing

- Let's the caller know that they have been heard correctly and accurately.
- Enables the caller to hear another perspective which can help them to clarify their thoughts and feelings.
- Encourages the caller to say more or to rephrase what they were conveying because the reflection it did not feel accurate.
- Note—the shorter the paraphrase, the more likely it is that the person can identify with it... so keep it short!

| VERBAL COMMUNICATION | EXAMPLE |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Empathy | "It sounds like..." "What I am hearing..." |
| Nonjudgmental | "You have a lot going on right now, I think anyone if your position would be feeling overwhelmed" |
| Normalising and validating | "That makes sense that you are struggling, as you have a lot on your plate" |
| Open ended questions | "What has been happening for you?" "What do you believe would help you now?" |
| Paraphrasing | "What I'm hearing you say is that you are feeling overwhelmed and not sure what to do. Did I get that right?" "What you've just told me is..." |
| Reflecting back emotions/meaning | "It sounds like you are feeling sad..." "It sounds like you are really struggling at the moment..." |
| Encouraging more information | "Tell me more about..." |

| WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A DONOR WHO IS... | I MIGHT SAY.... |
|---|---|
| Crying | "I can hear how upset you are" |
| Angry | "That make sense you are so angry. If I was you, I would be angry too!" |
| Confused | "Did you want to sit down and talk about what is happening for you?" |
| Doesn't talk much | "I can hear you are unsure at the moment and that is OK" |
| Talks a lot | <p>"Can I just stop you for a second. I really want to understand what you are saying. Can I just check I have this right so far?"</p> <p>"There seems to be a lot going on for you, what do you think would help right now?"</p> |

Appropriate time to speak

What if the donor is deteriorating, forgetful or unable to communicate?

What if the donor doesn't want to talk, vulnerable or their grief experience is strong?

We need to walk alongside the donor, meet them where they are at and give them space if they ask for it.

"What would help right now?"

"Would you prefer a call back at a later date?"



"The more we practice these skills, the more they become available to us when conversations become tense and emotionally charged. Old habits of reactivity are replaced by new habits of inquiry and open-mindedness. Developing our skills makes for better working relationships – and better relationships form the basis of clear, efficient activity."

(Loh et al., 2020, p. 189)

Case Study Application

Case Study

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Personal and Professional Self-Care Strategies



PROFESSIONAL SPACE SUIT

Wearing your space suit

Understand
your role and
its limitations

Be aware of
your personal
limitations

Implement
self-care
strategies

Don't try and
tackle
everything

Breathe
before
responding

Introduce
more self-
compassion

Increase
adequate
support

Eliminate
unrealistic
expectations

Increase self-
awareness
skills

Ground
yourself

Practice
empathic
listening

SELF CARE

Self-care is taking care of yourself mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually and socially. When supporting bereaved people, it is important to take care of yourself.

- Self care looks different for everyone
- Self care should be flexible
- Self care is knowing your limits
- Self care is checking in on yourself



Self Care Wheel

Six dimensions;

- Physical
- Psychological
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Personal
- Professional





"The expectation that we can be immersed by suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet."

(Remen, 1996)





THANK YOU



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