

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Health and Wellbeing Check-ins

The information below is intended as a guide to assist community house workers in supporting community members to navigate emotional experiences they may be having, and not 'get in over their heads'. Listening to someone and being present with them during their experience is an honour and a gift in itself. It tells the other person that they have been heard, understood and valued – that they matter.

1. **Attend to the client** – Give them your undivided attention to let them know that you are listening and value what they are saying using a warm and friendly, positive, and interested tone of voice. Focus on the person's conversation and tune out to any external environmental distractions or internal thoughts you might have.
2. **Affirm that you are actively listening** – with voice intonations such as "Hmmm...", "Okay...", "Oh, right", "I understand" during pauses in the conversation, without interrupting the client.
3. **Reflective listening**: paraphrase back to the person what they have said to let them know that you have heard and understood them correctly. For example – Client: "I used to see my grandkids every week, but it's horrible.... I haven't been able to see them for ages". Worker: "You're really missing not being able to see your grandkids"
4. **Validate their experience** without bringing in any other issues. Focus on the core message. For example - Client: "I'm really over this self-isolation thing, it's ridiculous, this seems to have gone on forever". Worker: "Yes, it can feel like we've been in isolation for a long time"
5. **Reflect emotion**. Respond don't react! If someone is expressing a strong emotion reflect it back to them – respond to the emotion, try not to be affected by it (be a mirror so the client can see what they are feeling by reflecting it back to them). For example – Client: "I'm so pissed off, I'm #@*% over having the kids at home all the time. I didn't ask for this!" Worker – "Yes, you sound really frustrated with the situation. It's a new experience for everyone".
6. **Adopt a non-judgmental and neutral viewpoint** to issues that are raised in conversation. Don't share your values or opinion on matters that come up – you are there as a 'mirror' to reflect the persons thoughts/experience back to them so that they can gain better clarity and a deeper understanding of THEIR feelings, not yours.
7. **'Bracket' your thoughts**. We all have thoughts that pop into our heads but before saying it stop and think "Will this be a helpful response?" Think before you speak!
8. **Try not to jolly or cajole the client out of their experience** or offer platitudes or reassurances. All emotions are good (even the negative ones). Joy, happiness, anger, sadness etc are all parts of the human condition. They just need to be expressed in a safe way. You need to sit with your discomfort of their expression of emotion. Remember it is not being directed at you. You are just the sounding board for that person's experience. Comments such as "Oh well, we should be grateful for what we have" or "You've got so many other good things going on in your life, you should focus on them" are unhelpful,

avoidant and leave the person feeling unheard and invalidated. Return to Steps 1, 2 and 3 of validating the persons experience and reflecting their emotion.

9. **Sit with the emotion** knowing that by sharing their experience, the intensity of their emotion will ease and dissipate. Trust in the process. **You don't need to fix anything.** They have all the tools within them to solve the situation. Do not offer advice unless asked – this disempowers the person and sends them the message that you know better than them.
10. **Receive, Respond, Refer** - RECEIVE the information (non-judgmentally) that the person is sharing with you, RESPOND to their emotions with reflective listening, REFER the client to additional information and support services if required.
11. **Self-reflect.** It is important not to over-identify with a person or their issues. Remember that it is happening to them, not you. We all have our own personal vulnerabilities. Be aware of yours. What sort of things trigger you emotionally...? Did that person remind you of your own grandma...? Did their anger make you feel like you were in trouble or being blamed (like when you were at school, or as a child...?) Are you a fixer...? Do you have a tendency to want to take another's pain or discomfort away by 'fixing' the situation....? Is that your job? (No) Who owns the problem...? (they do, not you). Ultimately it will be the other person's responsibility to solve their problem, not yours. Your role is to witness their experience so they don't feel so alone with it in that moment.

12. Self-care.

- **Go for a walk outside** (if possible) to ground yourself with your five senses and 'bring you back into your body'. What can you see, smell, touch, taste, hear, feel in that moment. Can you feel a breeze on your face, smell the garden or something else, hear the gravel crunching underfoot, feel the soft fabric of your hands in your pocket..?
- **Take some big deep breaths** of fresh air into your lungs and breathe out slowly through the mouth. Repeat four to five times.
- **Have a cup of tea or something to eat.**
- **Debrief with a co-worker** (confidentially) about how you feel. Focus on your own reactions and *how you are left feeling rather than what was said.*
- **Reflect and connect with your own emotional experience.** Ask yourself, why am I feeling this way? What has this triggered in me?
- **Write your thoughts and feelings down in a journal.**
- **Say some positive affirmations to yourself.**

Positive affirmation suggestions.....

- I bear witness to another's experience
- I did the best that I can
- I release (the client) with love in my heart
- I can only control me, and let other's be
- All is well in my world