

2. Communication and helping skills for humanitarian workers

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ABSTRACT

This training manual focuses on the skills required by humanitarian workers in order to communicate effectively in the challenging situations in which we work. Its aims are twofold: to improve the quality of our working relationships, and to enhance our effectiveness as helpers. It concentrates on skills of particular significance to humanitarian workers operating in situations of conflict or post-conflict. It is written in an interactive style, with participative exercises, and can be used both by a training group or by individuals applying the processes to their specific work environments.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this training manual are to provide you with:

- *an understanding of the processes and skills that are involved in effective communication and quality helping with individuals and in groups*
- *opportunities to reflect upon your own communication and helping skills*
- *challenges to practise your skills and to try new ones.*

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INTRODUCTION

People skills

Humanitarian aid professionals work with people to help other people. Central to our work, then, are *people skills*:

- *Attending carefully to others*
- *Actively observing and listening*
- *Responding to others with empathy*
- *Engaging in open and honest relationships*
- *Helping others to solve problems for themselves*
- *Attempting to resolve interpersonal conflicts in ways that satisfy all concerned.*

These are skills that enhance our effectiveness as helpers and add to the quality of the communications in our professional and personal relationships.

1. Communication and helping

Humanitarian workers are constantly communicating with others: other staff, government workers, and refugees. However, what is actually involved in the process of human communication? Similarly, most of us, from time to time, help others sort through things that worry them. This type of helping is sometimes called counselling. However, what is actually meant by the term ‘counselling’ and what are the processes and skills that people use when they help or counsel others?

THE AIM OF THIS SESSION IS TO:

- *increase knowledge and understanding of the processes and skills that are used in communication and counselling.*

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this session it is intended that:

- *you will understand the major processes involved in communication*
- *you will have reflected on your own strengths and weaknesses as a communicator*
- *you will understand the principal ideas involved in helping*
- *you will have examined your own values in helping.*

MODELS OF COMMUNICATION

No one model of communication appears to be adequate in describing the complexities of human communication. In this manual we will use two:

- *a psychological model that attempts to explain the thinking and language processes involved*
- *a sociological model that attempts to show us some of the social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of human communication.*

A psychological model of communication

For the purposes of this model we need two people: the sender of a message and the receiver of that message. We will have one speaker and one listener, but you could have one speaker and many listeners, one writer and one or more readers. *Can you think of any other combinations?*

Step 1: thought and intention

Our speaker starts with ideas, feelings, or needs that they want to convey to the listener. For example, the speaker may want the listener to help transport some people to a town called Kertaine.

Step 2: encoding

This ‘want’ then needs to be translated into a code that can be sent to the listener. The code in this case will be speech, although it could be written language or even a gesture. Our speaker decides to say: ‘Can you take these people to Kertaine?’

Step 3: transmission

The speaker then says these words to the listener and the message is sent. However, the message seldom goes directly to the receiver. It usually goes through a *channel*, such as the air or a telephone line in the case of speech, or via paper or a computer screen in the case of writing. The idea of the channel is important, because the message may be distorted while going through the channel. A very noisy room, a poor-quality phone line, or a radio with a lot of static are examples of channels that may distort a message.

Step 4: receiving and decoding

The listener hears spoken words, decodes them, and gives them meaning, and so the message is received. However, whether the listener actually hears what the speaker meant depends on a number of factors. The quality of the channel is important. Imagine what might happen if, because the room was noisy, the listener thought they heard: ‘Will you take these people to *the train*?’ Similarly, distortions in other channels could leave the receiver with the wrong idea, especially if there are no trains! A second threat to accurate communication can come from

differences in the ways in which the speaker and listener understand words. In this case, the speaker means to *tell* the listener to undertake the transportation. It is an instruction. However, the listener may interpret the words as a question that could lead to a different response.

Step 5: listener replies

The listener's reply again starts as a thought, or feeling, or intention that will need to be translated into a code for sending, usually the same code as the original message. Often, the reply will seek clarification, for example, 'Do you mean, can I arrange this transport today?' or 'Which train?'

Step 6: reply is transmitted

This mirrors Step 3, with the same possibility of distortions.

Step 7: original speaker hears the listener's reply

In Step 7 the original speaker receives and decodes the listener's reply and gives meaning to these words. Now, the speaker has an opportunity to find out whether the original message was received as intended. The response: 'Which train?' would suggest that the original message had become distorted. This process of receiving information in reply to check on the accuracy of the original message is known as *feedback*.

ACTIVITIES

Whispers game

If you are in a group, play the Whispers game, where one person is given a complex secret message and then whispers this message to a second person, who, in turn, whispers what they hear to a third person. This is repeated down the line. Usually, the message becomes distorted, particularly after a large number of people have passed it on.

(Example of a message: At 10am all women under the age of 45 must report to the clinic with their children. They will also need to bring with them a cup and a bag. Those over the age of 45 must come tomorrow with just a cup. The men will be seen in the next weeks and they

must come with their registration book and all children who were not seen this week.)

Feedback game

Sit with a partner, back-to-back. The speaker should have a drawing comprising a number of interconnected geometric shapes, such as:

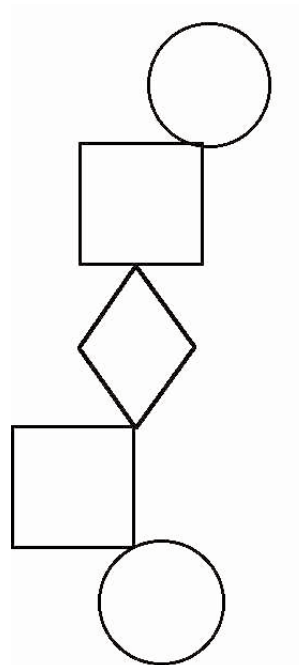


Figure 1

The task for the speaker is to give instructions to the listener on how to reproduce this drawing. The listener attempts to do so without asking any clarifying questions. Here, the speaker receives no feedback. Now repeat the activity allowing the listener to ask questions of clarification. Notice the difference in the two drawings. Talk with your partner about your feelings under both conditions.

- Look out for examples of communication difficulties that may arise from distortions in the channel or a lack of agreement on the meaning of words. This can easily happen if you are communicating with people who speak a different language or who only have a limited knowledge of your language. It can also happen when the message is one that evokes strong emotions, such as, for example, 'We don't want to go to Kertaine.'

A sociological model of communication

The ways in which we communicate and the meanings that we give to words are affected by our *worldview*. The same applies to the people with whom we are communicating. It is important to recognize these contexts of communication, particularly when we attempt to communicate across cultures.

There are four major aspects to our views of the world:

- *Social: The nature of relationships in our society and the structures, institutions, and associations of our communities.*
- *Cultural: The ways in which we describe our society and the different societies that we encounter. What gives us meaning. Our values, ideologies, religion.*
- *Political: The ways in which we organize for decision-making and cooperation. The ways in which power is exercised.*
- *Economic: The ways in which we organize ourselves for material survival. The ways in which we trade and manage resources.*

It is important to note that when we are working with diverse groups and cultures these aspects can vary considerably, and you may find your view of the world to be very different from the views of people surrounding you.

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Think about your own worldview and the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of your life. In what ways do these differ from the experiences and views of the people with whom you work – your clients (the people you seek to help) and your co-workers? Make a list of the differences you have observed with the different groups you have met.
- ◆ Attempt to identify particular examples of challenges to effective communication that have arisen, or continue to arise in your relationships with people who hold views of the world that differ from yours. What steps

could you take to improve the effectiveness of your own communication?

- ◆ If you are studying this course as a member of a group, discuss these points first with a partner. Then, share your discussions with the other members of your group.

DEFINITIONS OF COUNSELLING

Counselling is one particular kind of communication, a kind that attempts to provide help to another person or small group of people. It is also a particular kind of helping. There are numerous definitions of the word ‘counselling’ which reflect the evolution of counselling beliefs and practices over the last 60 years. However, today there is a broad consensus about what constitutes counselling. Most contemporary definitions consider the following points.

Counselling is a particular way of helping that involves:

- *a skilled helper and one or more ‘clients’ (people seeking help). Recognize that in our work we often have more than one client at a time*
- *an accepting, trusting, and safe relationship*
- *a process whereby clients learn how better to understand themselves and their present situations*
- *a process whereby clients are helped to construct goals for the future*
- *a process whereby clients are helped to acquire the skills and courage to pursue these goals.*

Modern counsellors generally do not give advice or attempt to solve clients’ problems for them. Nor do modern counsellors spend a long time helping clients develop insight into any underlying causes of their problems. Rather, contemporary counselling is more concerned with helping clients find solutions for themselves, and at the same time acquire skills better to manage their lives in the future. In this section we recognize that you may not be a counsellor, but we want to help you to see what skills are involved in counselling, as you may find that in your humanitarian work you are asked to do more than just listening.

VALUES IN HELPING

The practices of helping are underpinned by one or more of the following values:

- *Empathy: Attempting to see things from the client's point of view and sharing that understanding with the client*
- *Genuineness: Being open and honest about yourself and refraining from 'playing the role of the counsellor'*
- *Respect: Treating the client with dignity and accepting them without judgement*
- *Client self-responsibility: Helping clients to discover and use their own resources, helping them to become more personally powerful and less dependent on the counsellor*
- *Confidentiality: But for minor, and important exceptions, providing for clients the promise that what they say will not be repeated to anyone else.*

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ What do you value in helping? How would you want to be treated by a counsellor, or any person to whom you might go for help with a personal problem? Can you see these values at work in the refugee setting where you are the helper?
- ◆ There is often debate about whether or not a person needs to be professionally trained in order to be an effective counsellor. Many people hold the view that training is necessary, but others would argue that they know examples of highly effective helpers who have had no formal training in counselling. What are your thoughts about this? List some of the people that you have seen providing this kind of help in refugee settings.
- ◆ If it is possible, try to interview one or more counsellors and ask them about their work, their values, what they think constitutes effective helping, and what advice they would give to anyone wanting to improve their counselling skills.

COMMUNICATION AND HELPING SKILLS

Effective communicators are skilful people. It is possible for us to observe these people and identify the skills that they employ. The skills for effective communication appear to include:

- *being genuine, suspending judgement, and extending respect to the other (perhaps these could be considered as values, rather than skills)*
- *observing and attending*
- *actively listening*
- *responding with empathy*
- *responding honestly*
- *seeking to find solutions to interpersonal conflicts that meet both parties' needs.*

Effective helpers also employ these skills in the service of their clients. Adding to the list above, skilful helpers/counsellors employ additional skills such as:

- *helping clients tell their stories and in so doing gaining greater understanding of their current circumstances*
- *helping clients set realistic goals for the future and feasible ways to implement these goals*
- *helping clients put their plans into action.*

We will examine these skills in greater depth in the next six sections of this manual.

2. Attending and observing

We finished the last session by looking at values in communication. This needs to be the start of this session, for to attend effectively to another person we must give fully of ourselves in order to really hear what it is that the other person is saying or trying to say. This state of mind for active listening involves skills and values. We will look at both of these. We will also discuss observation – that act of collecting information with our eyes, or to put it another way, listening with our eyes.

THE AIM OF THIS SESSION IS TO:

- *increase knowledge about attending and observing, and to advance skills to attend effectively to other people and to observe them skilfully.*

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this session, it is intended that:

- *you will understand what is meant by attending and you will have learned what values and skills contribute to effective attending*
- *you will have practised attending to other people in communication situations and your skills in this area will have improved*
- *you will have advanced your knowledge about body language and practised your skills of observation*
- *you will be sensitive to the attending and observing practices of different cultural groups.*

WHAT IS ATTENDING?

Attending is the skill of creating a climate of attention and respect which aims to:

- *prepare the listener to hear fully what the speaker is saying*
- *communicate interest to the speaker.*

It is both a receptive language skill and a skill in expressive language. In refugee work you are often working in a setting where the dominant language

of the refugees is not your own. When people come to see you with requests or information it is important that they have a sense that you are attentive to them.

From a receptive language point of view, attending helps the listener to concentrate on what the speaker is saying or trying to say. The aim of attending is to focus completely on the speaker, to still inner distractions such as talking to yourself or thinking about other things while you are listening. When we attend well, we try to ignore external distractions such as other people or noises in the vicinity, or even any distracting mannerisms of the speaker themselves. If we are using an interpreter it is equally important that you and the interpreter use good attending skills.

From an expressive language point of view, attending behaviours attempt to tell the speaker that we are there for them, that we really want to listen and to understand what is being said. When we attend well, the speaker is likely to feel confident to share their thoughts with us, and more confident to explore inner thoughts and feelings.

HOW TO ATTEND WELL

There are three ways to think about attending:

- *psychologically*
- *contextually*
- *behaviourally.*

Psychologically

Attending *psychologically* firstly means suspending our preconceived ideas about the speaker or the subject on which the speaker is talking. It means suspending our values and trying not to judge the speaker. We are sometimes put in the position of trying to help people who behave in ways of which we disapprove, or who hold values that are different from ours. This can make it hard for us to give them our full attention. However, with practice, we can learn to take a neutral position and focus our energies on the ‘here and now’ moment of the speaker’s attempts to express themselves. This is often difficult when we are overwhelmed with people seeking our attention, and especially if we

have preconceived ideas of what the topic of discussion is going to be.

The behavioural techniques listed below will help us stay psychologically focused.

Contextually

The *contextual* features of attending involve ensuring that the communication setting is comfortable, free of distractions or interruptions (or as free as possible), and one in which the client(s) feel(s) safe and secure. In many field settings we need to manage with what is possible. If either you or the client is concerned about being interrupted, then it will be hard for you to concentrate on the communication. If the communication is to take place in a room, make sure that it is identifiable with appropriate signs. If possible, arrange the furniture so that it is suitable for discussions to take place. You may ask someone else to answer the radio or telephone for the duration of the meeting.

Behaviourally

Effective attending is often described in terms of five *behaviours* that are introduced by the acronym SOLER. Research in the USA has suggested that speakers feel more trusting of listeners who use these attending behaviours.

- **S stands for Square:** *This means facing the speaker square on, with your shoulders parallel to those of the speaker.*
- **O stands for Open:** *This involves an open posture, particularly with your arms. It is suggested that speakers offer less trust to listeners who have their arms crossed.*
- **L stands for Lean:** *When sitting, listeners who lean slightly forward engender a greater sense of intimacy than listeners who lean back in their chairs. You may have noticed this in your own experience. In some cultural groups the gender of the people who are communicating influences what is appropriate.*
- **E stands for Eye:** *Eye contact is an important part of attending. Our clients are less likely to communicate freely with us if we avoid eye contact with them. In fact, people will usually stop talking with another person if the listener withdraws eye*

contact. However, intense eye contact can also make communication difficult for the speaker. Here we need to engage in soft eye contact – regular, gentle eye contact that neither avoids direct gaze nor stares too intensely. It is important to be aware of cultural practices with eye contact.

- **R stands for Relax:** *Finally, speakers are more likely to feel comfortable with listeners who are calm and relaxed. This means refraining from fidgeting, foot-tapping, wringing hands, cracking knuckles, breathing rapidly, and so on. Being relaxed is a state of mind that is shown in the body. However, concentrating on the body can aid relaxation. We all have our own ways of imposing a relaxed state on our bodies and for most of us this will involve gentle, deep, and regular breathing, relaxed muscles, and a still posture.*

CAUTION: The behaviours outlined in SOLER have been found to promote increased trust and communication in cultural contexts similar to those in which this research was conducted. They may not all be applicable in the cultures in which you work. For example, you may prefer not to face your clients square on, or it may be more appropriate for you to avoid a direct gaze in particular circumstances. Observe closely the ways in which people attend to one another in the cultural settings in which you are working, and take your lead from them.

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Think back on times when you can remember someone really attending to you. What did they do? Think of times when you felt that someone was not attending to you whilst you spoke. What happened on these occasions?
- ◆ Think about the settings in which you attempt to listen to your 'clients'. Are there ways in which these settings can be improved? Can you reduce interruptions or distractions? If so, how?
- ◆ How do you physically attend to others while they are speaking with you? Does the SOLER

method provide you with any ideas that may be useful to you?

- ◆ If you are training in a group, practise attending to each other using some of the ideas that we have discussed. Take turns with one person being the speaker, and the other the listener.
- ◆ Discuss SOLER in regard to the particular groups with whom you work. What advice would you give to trainees who were attempting to improve their attending skills with clients in the setting in which you work?
- ◆ Identify a co-worker who you believe has excellent communication skills. Note how they attend to you and others during different types of communication: conversations, meetings, group activities, helping, or problem-solving sessions.
- ◆ Identify a colleague, family member, friend, or client with whom you have regular contact. Develop a plan to improve your attending behaviour with this particular person for the next week or two. Think about your frame of mind, the settings in which you communicate, and the skills that you use. Think of your cross-cultural communication experiences and share these insights. Put this plan into operation. If you are a member of a group, discuss this plan with other group members and discuss the results with them as well.

WHAT IS OBSERVATION?

Observation is the skill of using one's eyes to collect the widest possible range of communication information. In effective communication, we observe in order to:

- *gain information*
- *avoid misunderstandings*
- *work out how others feel*
- *determine what is appropriate.*

Given that a large proportion of communication is nonverbal, particularly communication about emotional issues, we are clearly better able to understand others if we sharpen our capacity to read and understand nonverbal information.

Nonverbal information, which is more than just body language, can be considered under three headings:

- *context and environment*
- *appearance*
- *behaviour.*

Context and environment

Context is the immediate setting of a communication behaviour. It is the particular circumstances under which the communication occurs. As such, the context plays an important part in understanding communication. For example, a furrowed brow usually means that a person is puzzled or thinking hard about something. However, in a physical context of very poor light, it could mean that the person is having difficulty seeing and the furrowed brow may be associated with eye strain.

An example of *cultural context* can be seen in the avoidance of eye contact. In many cultures, avoiding eye contact could mean that the person is embarrassed, ashamed, or may even be thought to be telling a lie. However, among tribal aborigines in Australia, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect.

Many behaviours which are appropriate in one context change their meaning in another context. For example, the loud back-slapping camaraderie of a party would be totally out of place at a funeral. What is or what is not appropriate behaviour is determined by the norms of a group. These norms, or rules for behaving, are seldom stated explicitly. Usually, they are implied and only become apparent when they are broken. For example, we may only become aware of a group's custom of removing shoes to enter a house when we fail to do so and someone brings it to our attention.

Environment, in a communication sense, refers to the surroundings immediately adjacent to the physical context. It is an extension of the idea of

physical context. For example, imagine a person running down a rural road at twilight. This behaviour might be thought of as quite normal, especially if the person is wearing jogging clothes. However, the behaviour changes its meaning if another person is seen to be chasing the runner, or if we notice a car that has crashed into a tree near the running person.

To understand fully the meaning of a person's communication, we need to understand the physical, cultural, and social contexts of their world.

Appearance

Appearance refers to what is seen of a person apart from the person's behaviour.

A great deal of information can be gained from a person's clothing. This may include group affiliation, social class, role, wealth or poverty, personal distress, and recent history.

For people that you know, changes in appearance may provide important information. An example was reported by a health worker who noticed that a normally energetic unaccompanied minor came to the camp school one day looking sad and underfed. A later inquiry revealed that the child's neighbour had been sick and since she had been taken to the camp hospital, the child no longer had a caregiver to help prepare meals.

Other aspects of appearance that contribute to nonverbal communication include posture and deportment, eye clarity, weight, skin colour, and the presence of wounds.

Behaviour

The ways people use space, move, gesture, seek or avoid eye contact, and express personal idiosyncrasies are all under voluntary control. Behaviours such as rate of breathing, swallowing, blushing, and crying are under involuntary control. All of these behaviours add additional information to the communication process. The voluntary behaviours are more likely to be culture-specific than the involuntary behaviours. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of universality among nonverbal behaviours. This can be seen in gestures that show:

- *liking (closeness, touching, smiling, increased eye contact)*
- *anxiety (twirling of jewellery, adjusting clothing, frequent swallowing, rubbing palms against clothes, adjusting clothing)*
- *defensiveness (folded or clasped arms, eyes downcast and turned away)*
- *boredom (drumming on a table, tapping feet, jiggling foot, standing around)*
- *self-control (locking ankles, clenching hands, gripping the wrist).*

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Identify examples of behaviour that have different meanings in different contexts. Focus particularly on your clients. Are there particular cultural contexts that give different meanings to their communication?
- ◆ What have you learned about your clients from their physical appearance? What do your physical attributes (including clothing) say about you, especially in your refugee work?
- ◆ Add to the list of universal gestures above. Can you think of universal (or culture-specific) gestures that signal: openness, enthusiasm, evaluation, confidence, hiding, rejection, dominance, joy?
- ◆ Identify someone you know and then take note of the nonverbal language that they use. You may consider informing them of your intention to observe them, and seek their permission in advance. What are some of the ethical issues involved here? What difference will telling the person about your intentions have on their behaviour?
- ◆ What are some of the nonverbal messages that your organization expresses through: its policies, its environment, its documents, its culture, and its work practices? Could any of these messages be more positive? How?

3. Listening and responding

THE AIM OF THIS SESSION IS TO:

- increase knowledge about listening and responding, and to advance skills to listen and respond to other people effectively.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this session it is intended that:

- you will understand what is meant by active listening and you will have explored ways of enhancing your listening skills
- you will have learned about the skills of paraphrasing, responding to feelings, empathy, and summarizing what has been said (and meant) by others
- your skills as a listener will be enhanced
- you will have a deeper understanding of the role of listening in your refugee work.

WHAT IS LISTENING?

There are numerous definitions of the word ‘listen’, many of which attempt to differentiate between listening and hearing. Bolton (1986) makes this distinction by referring to hearing as ‘a word used to describe the physiological sensory process by which auditory sensations are received by the ears and transmitted to the brain’. He goes on to say that ‘listening, on the other hand refers to a more complex psychological procedure involving interpreting and understanding the significance of the sensory process’. Put more succinctly, Bolton cites the teenager who says: ‘My friends listen to what I say, but my parents only hear me talk.’

Sanders and Kranz (1986) distinguish between the words ‘listen’ and ‘hear’ in a different way, yet we are able to understand both Bolton’s definition and that of Sanders and Krantz. To them, ‘listening is the process of actively suspending internal distraction in order to fully HEAR’. The important aspect of this definition is not the different use of the word ‘hear’, but rather the idea of actively suspending internal

distractions. *Active listening* is a term often used in counselling. It implies that listening needs to be an active pursuit, rather than a passive one. Indeed, effective listening is often hard work. Your work may not be specifically counselling, but it involves a lot of listening, listening to staff and those you help. Active listening can make you a more effective listener in whatever role you play.

Active listening involves all of the aspects of attending discussed earlier. It also involves observation, the suspension of one’s own judgements, values, and preconceived ideas, resisting internal distractions, and then focusing on the speaker’s content – both the words and the paralinguistic. ‘Paralinguistic’ refers to the accent, fluency, inflection, intonation, volume, and speed of the speaker’s voice. All of these paralinguistic features add to the information that the speaker is sharing.

A further aspect of active listening is *responding*. This is where the listener attempts to communicate to the speaker an accurate understanding of what has been heard. This will be discussed a little later in this section.

HOW TO LISTEN AND WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Once we have followed the steps for active listening listed above we are in a position to focus on the content – what is being communicated. A number of writers have offered ideas about listening to content. A well-known technique is the 5WH technique which poses the following questions to bear in mind as you are listening:

- Who is being discussed?
- What specifically is being discussed?
- Where are the people/events located?
- When did the events occur?
- Why is this content important?
- How are things being tackled?

A further ‘WH’ word that could be added at the end is:

- What are the implications of what is being said for this person (the speaker)?

This technique is particularly useful when a lot of details are being discussed. It provides a structure for organizing and understanding the content.

However, we should not use these as a list of questions to ask the speaker. If this were to happen, the interaction might seem like an interrogation. Rather, these are key words for the listener to keep in mind when trying to make sense of what is being said.

However, sometimes these details may not seem to be so significant to the helper. In this case, Egan's (1998) approach might be more useful. Egan suggests that we listen for information about people's:

- *experiences: what has happened, or is happening to the person*
- *behaviours: what the speaker has done (or, has not done, if the problem arises because they have not taken action)*
- *affect: the feelings that the person is experiencing at the moment that they are talking.*

An example of these three types of content can be seen in the following:

Experience

'The soldiers came to our village and started rounding up all of the men. They forced me into a truck.'

Behaviour

'I jumped from the truck and ran into the forest.'

Affect

'I feel extremely guilty that I survived, and the other men in the truck were never seen again.'

This type of listening forms the basis of the skill of responding which we will discuss later.

'FOLLOWING' SKILLS

Robert Bolton (1986) argues that: 'One of the primary tasks of a listener is to stay out of the speaker's way, so that the listener can discover how the speaker views his situation'. He suggests that the average listener interrupts and diverts the speaker by

asking too many questions or making too many statements. Bolton suggests four following skills for effective listening:

Door openers

A door opener is a non-coercive invitation to talk. A person who may have something on their mind will often give nonverbal clues of a desire to talk. An attentive listener will notice these and invite the other to share their concerns: for example, 'You seem a bit down at the moment, would you like to talk about it?' Alternatively, you may say to another: 'Hi, how are things going for you at the moment?' This would need to be accompanied by body language that showed that you had the time and desire to wait and listen to the answer – which could take some time.

Minimal encouragements

Minimal encouragements are brief indicators to the other person that you are with them. They are extremely short and their aim is to encourage the speaker to keep speaking. The most common are sounds like 'ah-hah' or 'mm-hmm'. People also use words such as: 'Really?', 'I see', 'Right', 'Go on', or simply 'Yes'. You'll find that these are used a lot in telephone conversations. They are also vitally important in face-to-face communication. These utterances are not meant to indicate that you agree with what the speaker is saying, rather you are telling the speaker that you are listening.

Infrequent questions

Bolton is not alone among communication experts when he says that 'most people ask far too many questions'. Questions usually focus on the needs of the listener, rather than on the needs of the speaker. We often ask questions that seek the information we need in order to complete the theories that we are developing about the other person and their problems. When this happens, questions can become a barrier to communication.

However, questions need not always be a barrier to communication. There are times when the right question will open up communication. Such questions are usually 'open'. Closed questions usually

direct the speaker to give short, specific answers. For example: 'Are your children well?' Here the question calls for an answer that is either yes or no.

Open questions, on the other hand, allow the speaker to choose what they want to say about the topic. For example: 'How are your children?' provides a much wider range of possibilities for the speaker. The speaker may talk about the children's health, emotional well-being, current activities, or any number of things.

Useful advice for listeners is to ask as few questions as possible, but when they do to ask open questions, to ask only one question at a time, and always to follow a question with a response that shows their understanding of what has been said, rather than to ask another question. For example:

- Helper: How are your children?
 Client: My children are well. They are both going to school now. They are sleeping better and the younger one has started to put on weight.
 Helper: It's a relief for you to know that things are improving for them.

In this case the question gave the client the opportunity to say a number of things, and the helper's response is likely to lead to the client continuing to talk.

Attentive silence

Bolton quotes the Hebrew sage who said: 'The beginning of wisdom is silence. The second stage is listening.' Silence on behalf of the listener gives the speaker space in which to think about the issues at hand and what they might want to say. However, it is difficult, especially for inexperienced helpers, to remain silent. Fortunately, with practice we can learn to be more relaxed with silence and to give speakers greater space in which to reflect.

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Plan to listen more actively to one particular person this week. Note what happens.

- ◆ Generate a list of closed questions. Questions that only require a yes or no answer, or an answer requiring a few words. Now try changing each one into an open question. Practice using open questions, but make sure that you have the time to listen to the answers.
- ◆ Talk with study colleagues (or write a few notes if you are studying on your own) about the idea of attentive silence. Share your thoughts and feelings. Talk about ways to overcome any feelings of discomfort.

WHAT IS RESPONDING?

Responding is the skill of communicating accurate understanding of what the speaker has said. This is done by reflecting the speaker's messages, feelings, and meanings. The terms 'reflective listening' and 'responding' are often used interchangeably. Kotzman (1989) says that: 'Reflective listening is a particular way of responding to the thoughts and feelings communicated to us by another person, a technique which increases and communicates understanding.'

Another word to describe responding with understanding is 'empathy'. Egan (1998) helps us understand empathy when he says: 'If attending and listening are the skills that enable helpers to get in touch with the world of the client, then empathy enables them to communicate their understanding of this world.'

How to respond effectively

Responding firstly involves the skills of attending, observing, and listening, which we have already discussed. From this base of 'being in touch' with the speaker, the helper employs four levels of reflecting skills. These are:

- *reflecting content (paraphrasing)*
- *reflecting feelings*
- *reflecting meanings*
- *summative statements.*

Reflecting content

Bolton says that a paraphrase is ‘a *concise* response to the speaker which states the essence of the other’s content in the *listener’s own words*’. (The italicized words represent the essential ingredients of an effective paraphrase.)

While the distinction between content (that is, what the speaker is saying) and feelings (the emotion the speaker is expressing at the time) is somewhat artificial, content refers to the facts and ideas of the speaker.

The first task for the listener is to sift through all of the details and to arrive at the central message that the speaker is trying to convey. The listener then needs to express this to the speaker concisely. This expression needs to be in the listener’s own words. This is one of the differences between parroting (repeating the speaker’s words) and effective responding. Responding requires us to see things from the speaker’s point of view. We need to understand what the speaker is saying from their perspective and then to express this in our own words. For example:

Speaker: At the moment, I am trying to organize school for the children, get shoes for the young one, get medical treatment for my mother, and register for a training scheme for myself.

Listener: You’ve clearly got a lot on your plate at the moment. I guess more than you can comfortably handle?

(The first part of the listener’s response is a straightforward example of reflecting content. The second part extends that reflection to take into account some of the feelings that might have been expressed.)

Note: Reflections are often delivered in a tentative tone which implies the question: ‘Is that right?’ This tone invites either agreement, or else a negotiation of meaning if we are not quite accurate. The important thing to remember is that the helper is not trying to tell the client what they are thinking or feeling, but

rather, the helper is attempting to share and confirm their understanding with the client.

Reflecting feelings

When we reflect feelings, we share with the speaker our best attempt at understanding the speaker’s current feelings. This too, is done in as few words as possible. It is also delivered tentatively. We do not want to tell people what they are or should be feeling. Rather, we are seeking to confirm with them that our understandings are accurate.

A response to the example above might be: ‘You’re feeling overwhelmed?’

This invites confirmation. For example: ‘Yes, I am overwhelmed and I just don’t know if I am going to be able to cope.’ Alternatively, the response invites a correction if it is not accurate. For example: ‘No, I am not overwhelmed, I am just exhausted. I’ll be okay if I can get a good night’s sleep.’

The challenge in reflecting feelings is to be able to use the right words to describe the speaker’s feelings. Whilst we all experience a myriad of feelings, and each to a wide range of degrees, and whilst we are able to recognize many of these emotions in others, it is often difficult for us to find the right words. Here it is important for us to expand our vocabulary of feeling words.

Armed with an extensive vocabulary, there are at least two ways of framing an accurate feeling response. Both involve asking a *feeling question*. In the first way, we ask:

If I was the client, how would this make me feel?

In the second way, we seek to ask how a person in this unique set of circumstances might feel:

How does it feel to be this person (race/age/sex/role) in these (circumstances) with this (history) and these (expectations) under these (pressures or constraints) from (within or without)?

Either way, the purpose of the question is to identify a feeling word. It should be as accurate as

possible and with the right degree of intensity. It should also be a word that the client would be likely to use or understand. Above all, our attempts to identify how others are feeling should be from a basis of genuineness and respect. If we make a genuine attempt to understand how our clients are feeling, they will most likely tolerate any inaccuracies in our understanding, and will probably assist us (and themselves) by volunteering more precise statements of feeling.

Reflecting meanings

Once we have learned how to reflect content and feelings separately, it is reasonably easy to combine them into reflections of meaning or empathy statements.

Some people are helped in constructing reflections of meaning (or empathy statements) by the formula: ‘You feel ... because ..’

For example: *You feel overwhelmed because you have so many different things that you have to do.*

Client: I just want to cry. My 19-year-old daughter just doesn’t want to stay home any more. She doesn’t want to visit friends with us, nor stay and eat dinner when friends come over. What has happened to her? What can we do about it?

Helper: Your daughter’s withdrawing from the family [reflection of content].

Client: That’s right. She is like that with all of the family. It’s heart-breaking.

Helper: You’re really hurt and disappointed [reflection of feelings].

Client: Yes, I am.

Helper: You feel hurt and disappointed because your daughter is drifting away from the family [reflection of meaning].

Reflecting meanings is assisted by building a base of negotiated understanding through frequent use of content and feeling responses. Again meaning statements should be concise, with minimal interruption to the client’s train of thought.

Summative reflections

A summative reflection (or summary) is a brief statement that attempts to draw together the thoughts and feelings that have been expressed through a session or part of a session. The helper attempts to identify the main themes, common thread, or essential issue to emerge during that period of time. Summative reflections are appropriate at the end of a session, but are also useful during a session to help a client refocus on central issues, or to help the listener check their understanding of the issues. Summative reflections provide opportunities to confirm shared understandings, to conclude discussions about a particular issue, or to make a transition to an action stage of the helping process (see later discussion on ‘Problem solving’).

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Make a list of feeling words (either as a group or individually). Add to the list as you think of new words throughout the rest of this course.
- ◆ If studying in a group, form small groups of three. One person can practice being the helper, another the ‘client’ and the third takes on the role of observer. The ‘client’ shares an issue of moderate concern with the helper, who should practise all of the skills discussed so far, particularly reflecting content, feelings, and meaning. The observer can provide feedback to the helper.
- ◆ Take any opportunity, whenever you can, to practise reflecting skills. Discuss (or write about) what happened.
- ◆ What do you think of reflective listening? Are you comfortable with the ideas and/or practices? What can you do to improve your skills in this area?
- ◆ Can you think of times in your work when active listening may be effective?

4. Assertiveness: communicating your own ideas and feelings

THE AIM OF THIS SESSION IS TO:

- increase knowledge about assertiveness, and to help people be more assertive in their communications with others.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this session it is intended that:

- you will understand the roles of submissive, assertive, and aggressive behaviour in communication
- you will have learned more about the skills of assertive communication
- you will have reflected on your own ways of relating to others and how appropriate assertive behaviour may be used in your humanitarian work.

WHAT IS ASSERTIVENESS?

Assertiveness is the capacity to

- make requests,
- actively disagree,
- express positive or negative personal rights or feelings,
- initiate, maintain or disengage from conversations, and,
- stand up for one's self

without attacking another.

(McCroskey et al., 1986)

All of the above are activities that you employ in your daily life. In this session you might benefit by reflecting on how assertive you are with your co-workers.

Terms that are commonly used to describe a person who engages in assertive communication behaviours include:

- willing to defend own beliefs,
- independent, forceful, strong of personality,
- dominant,
- willing to take a stand,
- acts as a leader, (and of course),
- assertive.

(McCroskey et al., 1986)

Do you recognize these terms in your work and the work of others?

Many interpersonal encounters will provide an opportunity to practise assertiveness. Working with other people in refugee settings will not be totally smooth and trouble free. There will be times when you will experience differences with other people, maybe even whole groups of people. These may be differences in ideas, thoughts about the best way to solve a problem, or differences in goals or needs. It may even be differences in how people perceive the situation they are in and the problems they are encountering. Opportunities to practise assertiveness occur whenever there is a conflict of interest between two people or two groups of people.

Assertiveness can be seen on a continuum of behaviour choices. The key word here is 'choice'. A person can choose to behave using submissive behaviours, assertive behaviours, or aggressive behaviours. Again it is important to note that different cultures will have different expressions of these behaviours. They will also have different understandings of how appropriate these behaviours are. In refugee work and other humanitarian work you will often encounter all behaviours on the continuum.

An aggressor is someone who tries to get her (or his) needs met, even at the expense of others ... The aggressive person is usually very controlling. Through charisma or the naked use of power, she controls others. She gets others to do her bidding. Things tend to go her way. She is very active in shaping her own destiny. This control is usually valued by aggressive people.

(Bolton, 1986)

Bolton describes several penalties associated with aggressive behaviours:

- *Fear – that is, many people behave aggressively because they are fearful. Continuing to act using aggressive behaviours feeds that fear.*
- *Aggression creates its own opposition and fosters its own destruction.*
- *It often results in a loss of control which is just the opposite to the purpose of the aggression, which is to keep control. Keeping control over others requires time and energy, which reduce the energies available to the aggressor for other activities.*
- *Aggressive people tend to experience alienation from other people.*

Can you think of examples of aggressive behaviours that you have encountered in your work? Describe some of these and the penalties associated with the behaviours.

At the other end of the continuum is submission.

Submission is a way of avoiding, postponing or at least hiding the conflict that is so fearful to submissive people ... Submission is often a way of trying to purchase the approval of others ... The submissive person carries a much smaller load of responsibility than does the assertive or aggressive person.

(Bolton, 1986)

The costs of submission include:

- *The individual lives an unlived life; they do not determine their destiny.*
- *Relationships tend to be less satisfying and intimate because the submissive person forfeits him or herself.*
- *An inability by the individual to control their emotions. Emotions are denied or repressed, and have their outworking in a number of ways.*

Kotzman (1989) compares submissive, assertive, and aggressive behaviours in terms of your behaviour and feelings, and the feelings of the other person towards you and themselves. Her suggestions are shown in Table 1 (p. 46).

THE BENEFITS OF BEHAVING ASSERTIVELY

Bolton (1986) suggests that assertive people like themselves. They are in a much better position to feel good about themselves than submissive or aggressive individuals. Kotzman (1989) describes the benefits of choosing to act assertively and among these she lists that:

- *assertive people feel better about themselves*
- *people respond to an assertive person more positively*
- *the assertive person feels that they are being heard*
- *the assertive person often gets what they want*
- *frustration, anger, and resentment are lessened*
- *the assertive individual is more able to cope with conflict and arrive at mutually acceptable compromises*
- *assertive people no longer feel totally annihilated by others' criticisms and are more able to judge them objectively and use them constructively.*

HOW TO ACT ASSERTIVELY

There are a number of different techniques for acting assertively. By far the most popular is the *three-part assertion message*. The aim of this message is to convey to another person your needs and bring about a change in the other person's behaviour. For example, if another person is continually late for meetings made with you, the three-part assertion message will provide you with the opportunity to let that person know how this is frustrating you and form the basis of a negotiated solution to this problem. However, before employing this technique Bolton (1986) suggests that we assess the situation with six criteria. According to Bolton, to be successful, we need to choose a method that will meet the following criteria:

- *There is a high probability that the other will alter the troublesome behaviour.*
- *There is a low probability of violating the other person's space.*
- *There is little likelihood of diminishing the other person's self esteem.*
- *There is low risk of damaging the relationship.*
- *There is a low risk of diminishing motivation.*

When your behaviour is	submissive	aggressive	assertive
you are likely to be	indirect dishonest self-denying inhibited withdrawn	inappropriately direct self-enhancing at other's expense	appropriately direct and honest expressive respectful of self and others
you are likely to feel	hurt powerless anxious angry inside resentful a loser	self-righteous superior sometimes guilty dominant a winner	confident self-respecting sometimes anxious positive a winner
the other person's feelings about you are likely to be	irritation disgust guilt pity disrespect	anger defensive punitive vengeful hostile	respectful sometimes annoyed
the other person's feelings about him/herself	superiority guilt discomfort	hurt humiliated put down inadequate	self-valuing self-respecting positive

Table 1: Submissive, aggressive, and assertive behaviours

- *There is little likelihood that defensiveness will escalate to destructive levels.*

A three-part assertion message begins with a description of the offending behaviour and includes a description of the consequences on your life and how you feel about those consequences. For example:

When you are late for our meetings [offending behaviour], I waste time waiting for you; time that could be spent on other work [consequences or effect]. This is frustrating for me [feelings]. I would like us to solve this problem.*

* This final sentence adds to the three-part assertion message and leads to seeking a solution to the problem that has been raised.

The following formula can be helpful for those beginning to use assertion messages:

When you [state the offending behaviour non-judgementally],
 I feel ... [disclose your feelings]
 because ... [state the effect the behaviour has on your life]

For example:

When you pay more attention to the ideas of the men on our committee than those of the women, I feel angry because it suggests that my contributions and those of the other women in our group are of little value.

ACTIVITIES

'Bill of Assertive Rights'

Here is a list of personal rights, some of which you may wish to assert. Think about or discuss this list. Which rights would you want to assert and under what circumstances? What would you add to the list?

It is reasonable and proper for me ...

- *to be treated with respect*
- *to hold my own views and have them heard*
- *to have my own feelings and have them taken seriously*
- *to arrange my own priorities*
- *to make mistakes*
- *to change my mind*
- *to choose not to answer questions which are personal or intrusive*
- *to choose if and when to assert myself*
- *to define and protect the physical space I need*
- *to refuse without feeling guilty*
- *to get what I pay for*
- *to ask for what I want*
- *to be given information (by doctors, lawyers, etc.) without being patronized*

Any right I claim as my own, I extend to others.

Other activities

- ◆ Reflect on your behaviour at times of personal conflict. How do you see yourself behaving in these situations?
 - ◆ Outline at least two examples of circumstances when you are (or were) likely not to be as assertive as you would want. Describe each situation and what you would typically say or do. Write out, or practise with your partner, assertive messages that you could use in each of these situations.
 - ◆ What, for you, are the penalties that you pay when you act submissively or aggressively? What would be some of the benefits to you in acting assertively?
-

During the next few days, take opportunities to practise some assertive messages. Take note of what happens. Discuss this with your colleagues in training.

5. Problem solving

THE AIM OF THIS SESSION IS TO:

- *increase knowledge about problem solving in order to be in a position better to solve your own problems and help others to do the same.*

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this session it is intended that:

- *you will have developed an understanding of personal problem solving*
- *you will have learned how to establish goals and how to develop action plans to meet those goals*
- *you will be more skilful in your efforts to solve personal problems and to help others do the same.*

WHAT IS MEANT BY PROBLEM SOLVING

Problem solving is a step-by-step method for:

- *understanding a personal problem*
- *identifying a future state (or goal) whereby this problem is either solved or you are better able to manage it*
- *identifying the things that you will need to do to reach your goal*
- *making plans to carry out those actions*
- *doing it.*

Helping people manage their personal difficulties involves problem solving. In humanitarian work people often look to you to solve their problems. This session will help you to assist them to help themselves where appropriate.

Our examination of problem solving will take the form of a guided example using steps outlined by Egan (1998). You are asked to identify an aspect of your own life and then complete the nine exercises that follow. In doing so, it is hoped that you will gain a better understanding of these processes than by just reading about them. The processes that you will use to help yourself are the same processes that you would use to help another person solve their personal problems.

Setting the scene

The process that we have followed to date has involved you in attending fully to your client, in observing, and in actively listening. You have used reflective listening in order to build rapport and to assist your client in telling their story. Essentially, you have been helping your client describe and understand things *as they are at present*.

The next stage involves helping your client identify a future state in which the circumstances are less problematic. Egan (1998) calls this *helping clients construct the future* or *developing preferred scenarios*. Once a preferred scenario has been identified, its broad intent is translated into aims and then operationalized into achievable goals. In humanitarian work you often encounter people with little sense of future. It is challenging to help them to see beyond their current situation. Brainstorming is used to list possible strategies that could be used to achieve these goals. The helper then assists the client to use criteria to select the best strategies for the particular circumstances. These strategies are then formulated into an action plan. Finally, the helper assists the client to review their progress in putting this plan to work.

Choosing a problem of your own to work on

For this exercise the client is you. You'll be working on your own material. First, you need to identify a problem area in your life. There are many techniques that you can use to identify these areas. The following might stimulate your thinking. Use any method you like, but end up with an identified problem.

-
- ◆ List some of the problems, issues, concerns you have about your work

or

- ◆ Identify some of the things that are not going as well as you would like in your life

or

- ◆ Sentence completion assessment of personal problems:

- ◆ My biggest problem is ...
- ◆ I'm quite concerned about ...
- ◆ One of my other problems is ...
- ◆ Something that I do that gives me trouble is ...
- ◆ The person that I have most trouble with is ...
- ◆ The most negative feelings in my life are ...
- ◆ Life would be better if ...
- ◆ I wish I ...
- ◆ I wish I didn't ...
- ◆ If I could change one thing about me it would be ...

Once you have identified a problem area that you feel motivated to tackle, write it down. Of course, choose an area in which you are likely to achieve some measure of success.

Example

My biggest problem is that I am disorganized. I never finish the work I have to do and I react to anything that comes to my attention.

ACTIVITY 1: DEVELOPING NEW SCENARIOS

Pictures of a better future

Write down what the preferred scenario might look like. Use the following future-oriented questions to help you:

- ◆ What would the current problem look like if it were better?
- ◆ What would I be doing that I am not doing now?
- ◆ What would I stop doing that I am doing now?
- ◆ What accomplishments would exist that do not exist now?

- ◆ What would be fractionally better? What would be substantially better? What would be dramatically better?
- ◆ What would this opportunity look like if it were developed?
- ◆ What would be happening that is not happening now?
- ◆ What would I be doing differently with people in my life?

Example

If things were better for me, I would be able to prioritize my work and spend time doing the work that must be completed before reacting to whatever catches my attention.

ACTIVITY 2: WRITE DOWN AN AIM

Now that you have imagined a future situation in which your situation is less problematic, write down an aim that declares your intention to do something about your problem.

Example

My aim is to manage my work pattern more efficiently.

ACTIVITY 3: SHAPING GOALS FOR YOURSELF

Shaping goals that are likely to be achieved is a crucial part of the helping process – or indeed of any individual or group endeavour. Egan lists seven criteria, or tools, that we can use to help the goal-setting process:

- *It must be stated as an accomplishment, an outcome, an achievement rather than a programme.*
- *It must be behaviourally clear and specific.*
- *It must be measurable or verifiable.*
- *It must be realistic, that is, within the control of the client, within their resources, and environmentally possible. To be motivationally realistic, the goal should have some appeal.*

- *It must be substantive, that is, if accomplished, it should contribute in some substantive way to handling the problem situation or some substantive part of it.*
- *It must be in keeping with the values of the client.*
- *It must be set within a reasonable timeframe.*

Using the criteria above, shape your general aim into one or more specific goals. Record these.

Example

- My first goal is to prioritize my work.
- My second goal is to plan and timetable my work activities.
- My third goal is to find a way to manage the unexpected appropriately.

ACTIVITY 4: MANAGING YOUR COMMITMENT TO YOUR GOALS

In this exercise you are asked to review the goals you have just written down with a view to examining your commitment. Egan suggests the following questions be addressed to gauge your level of commitment:

-
- ◆ To what degree are you choosing this goal freely?
 - ◆ Are your goals chosen from among a number of possibilities?
 - ◆ How highly do you rate the appeal of your goals?
 - ◆ Name any ways in which your goals do not appeal to you.
 - ◆ What's pushing you to achieve these goals?
 - ◆ If any of your goals are imposed by others, rather than freely chosen, what incentives are there besides mere compliance?
-

If you have any hesitations about committing yourself to any of your goals, consider the following questions:

-
- ◆ What is your state of readiness for change in this area at this time?
 - ◆ What difficulties do you experience in committing yourself to your agenda or any part of it?
 - ◆ What stands in the way of your commitment?
 - ◆ What can you do to get rid of the disincentives and overcome the obstacles?
 - ◆ What can you do to increase your commitment?
 - ◆ To what degree is it possible that your commitment is not a true commitment?
 - ◆ In what ways can the agenda be reformulated to make it more appealing?
 - ◆ In what ways does it make sense to step back from this problem or opportunity right now? To what degree is the timing poor?
-

Reformulate any of your goals in light of what you may have learned from considering the questions above.

Example

I don't think that I am ready to tackle three goals like this all at the same time. Therefore, I will keep the goal of prioritizing my work and managing the unexpected, and I will see what that makes my working week look like. I will attend to goal three once I have that information.

ACTIVITY 5: BRAINSTORMING ACTION STRATEGIES FOR YOUR OWN GOALS

Brainstorming is a technique you can use to help yourself and your clients move beyond overly constricted thinking. Use the following rules of brainstorming to generate a list of action strategies for each of your goals:

- *Encourage quantity. Deal with the quality of suggestions later.*
- *Do not criticize any suggestion. Merely record it.*
- *Combine suggestions to make new ones.*
- *Encourage wild possibilities, 'One way to keep to my diet and lose weight is to have my mouth sewn up.'*
- *When you feel you have said all you can say, put the list aside and come back to it later to try once more.*

When you have finished your lists, take one of them to a friend, and see if, through interaction with them, you can expand your list. Be careful to follow the rules of brainstorming. Keep both strategy lists. You'll use them in the next exercise.

Example

- go to work at 8 am each morning
- write on a calendar the deadlines I must meet
- close my office door when I do not want to be interrupted
- ask the receptionist to invite people to come back in the afternoon
- ask another staff person to handle emergencies in the morning
- ask another staff person to answer the telephone.

ACTIVITY 6: CHOOSING BEST-FIT STRATEGIES FOR YOURSELF

The brainstorming exercise above was an exercise in divergent thinking. You were aiming for quantity of ideas without any form of evaluation. In this exercise, you are asked to select from these lists strategies that best fit your circumstances. First, make a preliminary scan of each strategy list and star the ideas that make most sense to you. Just use common-sense judgement. From now on, work with just one list. You can return to the second list later. From among the starred items choose two strategies that you might like to employ in pursuing your goal. Check the viability of each strategy by considering the following questions:

- **Clarity:** *Is the strategy clear?*
- **Relevance:** *Is it relevant? Will it get me to my goal?*
- **Realism:** *Is it realistic? Can I do it?*

- **Appeal:** *Does it appeal to me?*
- **Values:** *Is it consistent with my values?*
- **Efficacy:** *Is it effective enough? Does it have bite?*

Egan suggests that these questions can be recalled through the acronym CRRAVE, on the assumption that clients 'crave' to accomplish their goals.

Example

- go to work at 8 am each morning
- ** write on a calendar the deadlines I must meet
- close my office door when I do not want to be interrupted
- * ask the receptionist to invite people to come back in the afternoon
- ask another staff person to handle emergencies in the morning
- *** ask another staff person to answer the telephone.

ACTIVITY 7: SHAPING THE ACTION PLAN

An action plan is a step-by-step procedure for accomplishing each goal of an agenda. Egan says that if a plan is to drive action, then it must be well-shaped. That is, it must first clearly specify subgoals leading up to the accomplishment of the overall goal. It must then specify the sequence of activities through which each subgoal is accomplished. A timeframe for the activities is also needed.

Shape a plan of action for each of your goals. Write it out as a series of steps along a time line. Prepare a contingency, or back-up plan in case things don't work out the way you expect. If you are working with a friend, share your plan and revise in the light of any feedback.

Example

1. Call a staff meeting to discuss the problem.
2. Ask staff members to help plan how to manage the office.
3. Make a list of office tasks.
4. Checklist of deadlines to be met.
5. Prioritize the tasks to be done.
6. Strategize about how to do each task.

ACTIVITY 8: IDENTIFYING RESOURCES NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT YOUR PLANS

Most plans call for resources of one kind or another. In this exercise you are asked to review your plans and ask yourself: 'What kinds of resources do I need to develop to implement these plans?' For instance, you may lack the kinds of skills needed to implement the plan. It may be a matter of acquiring some particular knowledge, or the assistance of another. Identify the resources you need to implement your plan, and work out how you intend to get these resources. At this stage, you may need to modify your plans in the light of their resource implications.

Example

Staff roster
Office calendar
Telephone lines

ACTIVITY 9: ACTION STAGE – DO IT!

Now it is time for action. Implement your plans.

Monitoring the implementation of plans

Egan suggests that one of the main reasons problem-management programmes fail is that they are not monitored. Participation in a programme slackens off sometimes without being noticed. This would mean that monitoring had not been built into the programme itself. Use the following questions to examine your programme whilst it is in action:

-
- ◆ **Involvement:** Are you participating or not?
 - ◆ **Degree of involvement:** If you are participating, how fully are you participating? What are you doing? What are you failing to do?
 - ◆ **Monitoring:** In what ways is monitoring built into the programme itself? How can key people be tapped for feedback?

- ◆ **Progress indicators:** Are there some clear indications that, by implementing your plan, you are moving towards your goal or subgoal? What are these indications?
- ◆ **Changes in plan:** To what degree does monitoring indicate that some changes in the plan are called for? What changes would you make?
- ◆ **Link to original problem:** If the goal has been totally, or even partially, achieved, has it led to, or is it leading to some kind of management of the original problem situation?
- ◆ **Changes in goal:** Does your monitoring indicate that more fundamental changes are called for in the goal or agenda itself?
- ◆ **Recycling:** What kind of further recycling of the problem-management process might be useful at this point?

It is hoped that through this exercise you have developed an understanding of the steps of personal problem solving and that you have developed (and implemented) a plan to deal with one of your own problems. These are the same steps that you would use in helping another person seek to solve a personal problem. To be an effective helper, you will need to practise the skills and steps that you have studied.

6. Resolving interpersonal conflicts

THE AIM OF THIS SESSION IS TO:

- *increase knowledge about conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships so that you are in a better position to resolve conflicts that you may have, and so that you might be able to help others resolve their interpersonal conflicts.*

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this session it is hoped that:

- *you will better understand your own patterns of behaviour in interpersonal conflicts*
- *you will have learned a simple method of interpersonal conflict resolution*
- *you will have explored collaborative problem solving as a method of resolving interpersonal conflicts.*

WHAT IS INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT?

Whenever we interact with another person, some of our needs and goals are congruent with theirs and some are incongruent ... A conflict of interest exists when the actions of one person attempting to maximize his or her needs and benefits, block, interfere with, injure, or in some way make less effective the actions of another person attempting to maximize his or her needs or benefits.

(Johnson & Johnson, 1994)

As Bolton says 'To be human is to experience conflict' (1986).

Interpersonal conflict is a daily part of human existence. We have all developed various ways of dealing with conflict. Some of our approaches were learned as children as we observed adults in their interactions. We have developed some strategies through trial and error, or adopted others because we have seen them used effectively by another person.

SIMPLE CONFLICT RESOLUTION METHOD

The following method of resolving interpersonal conflicts is called the 'simple' method, not because the resolution of interpersonal conflict is easy, or simple, but because the method that is suggested has only three stages, and as such, is simple in comparison with the more complex six-stage models.

Stage 1: treat the other with respect

Bolton says that:

Respect for another person is an attitude conveyed by specific behaviours. The way I listen to the other, look at him, my tone of voice, my selection of words, the type of reasoning I use – these either convey my respect or they communicate disrespect.
(Bolton, 1986)

It is often difficult to treat another person with respect when we are in conflict with that person. However, if we hope to resolve that conflict, we will need to work very hard at looking beyond the current difficulties and see the person as another human being just like us, with needs just like our own. We need to recognize the humanity in the other, and extend to the other the respect that we would wish others to extend to us.

Stage 2: listen until you 'experience the other side'

When we are engaged in interpersonal conflict we tend not to listen to the other person. We are so busy stating our own point of view. So, in stage 2, we are called on to use the skills of active listening that we studied earlier.

Bolton suggests that one of the best ways to communicate during disagreements and to resolve conflicts is to use the technique proposed by Carl Rogers. Rogers suggested that: 'Each person can speak up for himself only after he has first stated the ideas and feelings of the previous speaker accurately, and to the speaker's satisfaction.'

Here, we need to attend fully, listen to the other person's content (ideas, needs, proposals, position),

listen to their feelings, and try to see the situation from their point of view. We do not have to agree with the other person, but we should make every effort to arrive at an honest understanding of their position.

Having listened until we reach that level of understanding, we can enhance the communication between us by attempting to express our understanding of the other person's point of view. This can be expressed as an empathy statement.

Example

'You are obviously angry because I have not given you the supplies to which you believe you are entitled.'

Stage 3: state your own views, needs, and feelings

Now that you have shown respect for the other person, listened carefully to their needs and feelings, and expressed your attempts to understand their point of view, it is time for you to put your case. This usually takes the form of an assertive statement.

Bolton (1986) suggests five guidelines for this, the third stage of the method:

- *Be brief.*
- *Avoid loaded words (words that are emotional or that carry judgements).*
- *Be honest and say what you mean.*
- *Disclose your feelings.*
- *Avoid stage 3 if it is not needed. Sometimes just being respectful and listening carefully to the other person's point of view may resolve the conflict.*

Example

'I am disappointed that I am not able to give you the quantity you want, but I have to share this small amount between everyone.'

SIX-STEP COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING METHOD

The collaborative problem solving method uses the same basic ideas that we studied earlier when we looked at problem solving. The method assumes that the parties to the conflict have undertaken the

simple conflict resolution method above, i.e. that they have extended respect to each other, that they have listened until they have understood one another, and that they have each stated their own points of view.

The steps of the collaborative problem solving method which are outlined by Bolton (1986) are:

1. Define the problem in terms of needs not solutions

We often define interpersonal problems in terms of conflict between solutions to having our needs met, rather than in terms of the needs themselves. For example: two people share the one office. One wants the window open and one wants it closed. The conflict exists between their solutions. However, if we look at their needs, other solutions become apparent. The first person has a need for fresh air, the second a need to be away from draughts.

Bolton suggests that to discover people's needs, ask *why* they want the solution they are fighting for.

2. Brainstorm possible solutions

Brainstorming is defined as the rapid generation and listing of solution ideas without clarification and without evaluation of their merits.

There are six rules for brainstorming:

- *Don't evaluate ideas until later.*
- *Don't seek clarification of suggestions.*
- *Go for creative (zany, silly) ideas as well as 'sensible' ones.*
- *Expand on each other's ideas.*
- *List every idea.*
- *Avoid attaching people's names to the ideas.*

3. Select the solution(s) that will best meet both parties' needs and check possible consequences

Bolton suggests the following guidelines in selecting (a) solution(s):

- *Ask the other which solutions they favour.*
- *State the ones you favour.*
- *See which choices coincide.*
- *Jointly decide on one (or more) of the solutions.*

4. Plan who will do what, where, and by when

Make sure all of the details are agreed upon and if necessary, write them down.

5. Implement the plan

Make sure that you carry out your part of the plan as soon as possible.

6. Evaluate the process and the outcomes

After the problem solving session, step back from it for a moment and check that both parties are happy with the process. Later, after the selected solution(s) has (have) been tried, take time to evaluate its (their) effectiveness.

Interpersonal conflict resolution requires high level interpersonal skills, many of which we have covered in this course. Understanding the range of behaviour choices available to manage conflict, as well as our preferred style add considerably to our skills as refugee workers. As we experiment and try different ways of behaving in conflict we also provide a model for those we work with. They too will see alternative ways of handling disagreement.

ACTIVITIES

1.

The point here is that, while my emotions are throbbing with these fears, angers, and self-defensive urges, I am in no condition to have an open minded, honest and loving discussion with you or with anyone else. I will need ... emotional clearance and ventilation ... before I will be ready for this discussion.

(Bolton, 1986)

This quotation is both descriptive and illustrative of common responses to conflict. Is it a response you feel able to make in conflict situations? Can you remember a situation where you claimed space (emotional, physical) to deal with your response before actually tackling the

issue(s)? Take some time to write, reflecting on the event, your response, and the outcome.

2.

If you are in a group, undertake a discussion about a controversial topic, but introduce Carl Rogers' rule about summarizing the other person's point of view before speaking yourself.

3.

Describe a situation of conflict that was handled well. What were the characteristics that made this time stand out in your mind?

4.

When the occasion arises, employ either of the techniques for resolving conflicts that we have studied. Write or talk about what happened.

7. Working with groups

THE AIM OF THIS SESSION IS TO:

- increase knowledge about group dynamics so that you are better able to run successful groups and work in effective teams.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this session it is hoped that:

- you will better understand why people behave the way they do when they are in groups
- you will have learned more about your own communication skills working with groups
- you will have developed a better understanding of individual and group goals, and the contribution that goals make to group life
- you will better understand what it is that makes some teams more effective than others
- you will have reflected on your own leadership in groups and teams..

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION IN GROUPS

In Session 1, we looked at two models of interpersonal communication. Both assumed that we were communicating with one other person at the time. A more useful model for understanding communication in groups is the Johari window (Luft, 1969). Despite the fact that it was developed in the late 1960s, it still has relevance today in understanding the roles played by *feedback* and *self-disclosure*. The model comprises four quadrants of a window through which individuals give and receive information about themselves in a group. Each quadrant represents a different aspect of a person's experience in a group with respect to behaviour, feelings, and motivation. Some behaviours, feelings, or motivations are known only to the individual concerned, whilst others are shared with group members. Similarly, there are some aspects of awareness about an individual's behaviour that are only known by the other members of the group, and again aspects that are shared by all group members. This may be best illustrated by looking at the window itself.

	Known to Self	Not Known to Self
Known to Others	1 OPEN	2 BLIND
Not Known to Others	3 HIDDEN	4 UNKNOWN

Figure 2

Quadrant 1 refers to all of the behaviour, feelings, and motivation that are known to both the individual and the other members of the group. This area is often referred to as the Arena and it is characterized by free and open exchange of information. It is within this quadrant that effective communication takes place. The aim for effective group communication is to increase the size of this quadrant.

Quadrant 2 refers to the behaviour, feelings, and motivation that are known to others, but not to the individual. This area is also called the blind spot. It contains all those aspects of communication behaviour that others know about, but to which the individual is blind. It could be the way others read the individual's body language, the mannerisms of which the individual is unaware, or the impact that they have on others in a group. This quadrant records the degree to which individuals are sensitive to their own behaviour and the impact it has on others.

Quadrant 3 refers to the behaviour, feelings, and motivation that individuals know about themselves, but which they are not prepared to share with others. Often referred to as the facade, this area represents people's defences against being rejected by the rest of the group, or simply views about what individuals regard as private. It is likely that when people first join a group, their hidden quadrant might be quite large. Hopefully, as they get to know other members, and they learn to trust them, they are likely to divulge more about themselves and as a consequence this quadrant will start to shrink.

Quadrant 4 refers to the behaviour, feelings, and motivations that may impact on people's behaviour

in groups which are beyond the awareness of both the individual and other group members. This area is sometimes called the unconscious.

FEEDBACK AND SELF-DISCLOSURE

The aim of the Johari window is to increase the size of the open quadrant by simultaneously decreasing the sizes of the other quadrants. To increase the open quadrant at the expense of the blind spot, people need to solicit feedback. If people ask for feedback, or provide opportunities for others to give them feedback, and they respond to that feedback in positive ways then communication opens up between them. Examples of this may include asking others if what you are saying makes sense to them, distributing evaluation sheets for those who may have participated in a workshop that you have run, or, as a chairperson, asking the group (or committee) members to stop and step back from events for a moment to talk about the process of a meeting – Is this working well for us? Are we on track? Are your needs being met?

The open quadrant can also be expanded at the expense of the hidden quadrant or facade. Here people can share their thoughts with others or provide others with information about themselves. There are always going to be thoughts and feelings that individuals would prefer to keep to themselves. Doing so at times may in fact contribute to group functioning. However, when people open up a little and give more of themselves, the quality of group communication is improved. This may be the case with feelings that people have about others, or the way things are going in the group. It is important here to remind ourselves of some of the things we know about feedback.

Feedback is most effective when:

- *it is asked for*
- *it is behaviourally specific*
- *it is positive.*

Seeking feedback and disclosing about one's self (or providing feedback) can help to increase the open quadrant if undertaken with positive intentions.

When this happens the unknown quadrant shrinks, giving way to insight.

The Johari window gives just one perspective on communication in groups. Remember also that the topics covered earlier in the course – attending, listening, reflecting, being assertive, and the skills of problem solving – all contribute to effective group communication.

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ If you are in a group, *disclose* some of your thoughts and feelings about the training programme that you are undergoing. Alternatively, share with other participants some of your thoughts and feelings about being a member of the group.
- ◆ If you are undertaking this course on your own, find an opportunity to share a little more of your self when you are next in a group.
- ◆ Find an opportunity to give feedback to a member of a group in which you participate. Remember to be specific and positive. Note what happens.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNICATION IN GROUPS

While the degree to which people share thoughts and feelings with others has a significant impact, there are many other factors that influence the quality of our communications in groups. Among these are group size, the physical environment in which the group meets, time for communication, and power and influence among the members.

Group size

There is no hard and fast rule to govern the ideal size of a group. To a large extent it depends on the purpose of the group or the tasks it is undertaking. However, size is an important influence on communication, for the more members there are, the larger are the numbers of potential relationships

in any one group. It has been noted that in a group of two people, there is only one relationship, in a group of three, there are six potential relationships, in a group of five, there are ninety potential relationships and in a group of seven, there are 966 potential relationships. Therefore, as a group grows in size, so too does the likelihood that it will split into a number of sub-groups. Another feature of large groups is the increased likelihood of dominant members who are likely to compete with one another. A further concern about large groups, especially discussion groups, is that more members means reduced speaking time for all. However, an advantage of larger groups is the increased diversity of contributions and the capacity of the group to achieve a greater number of tasks.

ACTIVITY

- ◆ What would be the ideal size of the groups that you run or in which you participate? How would communication be affected by reducing or increasing the number of members in each group?
-

Physical environment

Physical features of the environment can have a significant impact on the quality of communication in that setting. Such features include noise, ventilation, light, size of room, type of seating, arrangement of seating, other furniture, crowding, comfort, aesthetics, distractions, food and drinks, warmth or coolness.

ACTIVITY

- ◆ Discuss, or think about, the impact each of the above-mentioned environmental factors would have on the quality of communication in the groups in which you are involved. What could you do to improve the physical environment for your group activities?
-

Time for communication

As group size increases, the time for each individual to contribute to communication in the group decreases. Therefore, both the size of the group and the amount of time set aside for group business is important. The time for starting a group meeting and the management of time during that meeting can also be significant. Here, there are considerable variations between cultures. This can be challenging for people running mixed-cultural groups or for people working cross-culturally. Sharing available time and ensuring that individuals feel that they have been heard, or have contributed, is also important.

ACTIVITY

- ◆ Reflect upon the groups that you lead or in which you participate. Is time used efficiently, given the tasks to be achieved and other important social needs? Is time shared fairly among members of the group? Do certain individuals dominate available time? How could time be managed better?
-

Power and influence

Usually, there are some individuals who have more influence than others in the group. This may be associated with the status that they bring with them to the group meeting. It may also be associated with the role that they perform within the group, or with personal characteristics or skills. Successful group leaders find ways to broaden participation in group discussions. These may include: providing opportunities for partner- and small-group discussions that are later reported back to the larger group; calling on less-influential members to contribute their ideas and then affirming these contributions; limiting the time taken by more powerful members; and asking more powerful members to help others develop their contributions to the group.

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Reflect on your own group and think about the extent to which powerful members influence the proceedings or outcomes of the group. How can you intervene to enhance the overall quality of the group's communications in this area?
 - ◆ What other factors influence communication in the groups in which you work? What else could you do to enhance group communication?
-

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP GOALS

Group and individual goals and the relationship of each to the other are central to an understanding of group behaviour.

Johnson and Johnson (1994) define a goal as:

a desired place to which people are working, a state of affairs that people value.

Put simply, a goal is: 'how we want things to end up'.

A group goal is defined by Johnson & Johnson as:

a future state of affairs desired by enough members of a group to motivate the group to work towards its achievement.

Goals are a central feature of group life for they are the primary motivation for the behaviour of the group. It is the group's goals that motivate and direct the members' behaviour.

A group goal is not just the sum of the goals of the individuals, it is also the interaction of the individual goals which produces a single goal and is distinctly different from the individual goals (Napier & Gershenfeld, 1989).

Effective group goals

Johnson and Johnson (1994) list a number of variables shown by research that contribute to the effectiveness of group goals:

- the extent to which the goals are operationally defined, countable, and observable
- the extent to which group members see the goals as meaningful, relevant, realistic, acceptable, and attainable
- how cooperative the goal structure is and how cooperatively oriented the group members are
- the degree to which both group goals and individual members' goals can be achieved by the same tasks and activities
- the degree to which conflict exists among the group members about the group's goals and the tasks the group must complete to achieve its goals
- the extent to which the goals are challenging and offer a moderate risk of failure
- the degree of coordination achieved among group members
- the availability of the resources needed for accomplishing the group's tasks and goals
- how specific the goals are, because specific goals indicate what needs to be done next
- how easily the goals can be modified and clarified
- how long a group has to attain its goals.

Of particular importance are:

- that goals are clear
- that goals are operationally defined.

Clarity of goals

Johnson and Johnson (1994) suggest that to be useful, goals have to be clear. They state that for individual members to perform effectively within a group, they must:

- know what the group's goals are
- understand what actions need to be taken to accomplish these goals
- know the criteria by which the group can tell when it has reached its goals
- be aware of how their own behaviour can contribute to the group's actions.

Operational goals

Operational goals are goals for which specific steps to achievement are clear and identifiable. Non-operational goals are abstract in that the specific

steps that are required to achieve them are not discernible (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

Whilst goal precision is central to the work of the special educator, we nonetheless often see goals in our schools stated in vague terms. Although we may have overcome this in our work with individual students, we can still see education departments, school staffs, and workgroups setting out long-term, broad goals. For these goals to be successful, they will often need to be translated into sub-goals, and these in turn will need to describe the kinds of accomplishments that we expect to be in place at the end of a particular period of time.

Hidden agendas

One of the most important dynamics in group life is the *hidden agenda*. Hidden agendas refer to the personal goals that are unknown to all the other group members and are at cross-purposes with the dominant group goal (see earlier discussion on the Johari window).

To be effective, a group must both increase consensus among members on what the group's goals should be, and decrease disagreement among different members' goals. Johnson and Johnson (1994) suggest five ways of increasing group effectiveness by reducing hidden agendas:

- 1 Thoroughly discuss your goals (even when they are imposed). Discuss until a sense of 'ownership' of the goals is reached.
- 2 Remember that groups operate on two levels and continually look for hidden agendas.
- 3 Be aware that you can bring hidden agendas to the surface, but that at other times it might be best left hidden. Exercise judgement and be aware of the consequence of confronting hidden agendas.
- 4 Do not put pressure on others to discuss hidden agendas or put them down when they do.
- 4 Build in ways for checking on how people are perceiving the group and evaluate the group's progress towards its goals.

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Identify the goals for the groups in which you are involved.
 - ◆ What are your goals?
 - ◆ What do you think are the goals of other members of the group?
 - ◆ Are your goals and the group's goals explicitly stated?
 - ◆ What could be done to increase the likelihood that the group's goals could be achieved?
 - ◆ Are 'hidden agendas' at work in your group? If so, what could be done to deal with them?
-

LEADERSHIP

There is a lot written on the subject of leadership of groups and teams. One of the most useful models of effective leadership for humanitarian workers in the field is the idea of *situational leadership* suggested by Hersey and Blanchard (1977). These writers start by questioning the popularly held view that a leader is concerned with either getting the job done or with maintaining good relationships, but not both. Hersey and Blanchard argue that rather than thinking in terms of either/or, both task and relationship dimensions are at work in good leadership, and it is possible for a leader to be strong in both. Not that high-task / high-relationship leadership is always the ideal. Hersey and Blanchard suggest that the emphasis on task or relationship depends on two things: the situation at the time and the maturity of the group. In an emergency evacuation, for example, the group could be best served by a decisive leader who is focused on getting the task completed as efficiently as possible. In contrast, a person who is concerned with setting up and running a camp committee, for example, might devote much more energy to building good-quality relationships between the members of the group. Hence, different

situations call for differing mixes of task and relationship energy.

Groups that stay together for some time, particularly work teams, require differing mixes of task and relationship leadership at different times in the group's life-cycle. Hersey and Blanchard suggest that at the beginning, a high-task/low-relationship style of leadership is the most helpful. At this time, group members want to know what the task is, what they have to do, and what others are going to do. They want to know that someone is in charge and that there is a plan to get things done. Once group members are assured of the task and the part that they have to play in it, they become more interested in building relationships with one another. Hence, the second stage in the model emphasizes both high task and high relationship. However, over time, members need less and less leadership concerning the tasks that the group has to complete, yet they still value high quality relationships with each other. So, the third phase of the model suggests that a low-task/high-relationship style of leadership is needed. Finally, it is suggested that highly mature groups need only a low-task/low-relationship style of leadership. This is because the individuals know how to undertake the tasks that the group has to complete and they can do this autonomously. Also, these group members have, by now, developed high-quality relationships with one another, and therefore need very little leadership to maintain these relationships.

This situational leadership model leads on to the idea of *functional leadership*, which suggests that leadership can be performed by any member of the group. This model is particularly attractive to professional teams of peers who work together in what might be called leader-less groups, or to those who, whilst charged with a leadership role, wish to empower group members to assume greater and greater responsibility for the group. The emphasis here is on task and relationship skills.

Johnson and Johnson (1994) argue that any action that helps a group complete its tasks is a leadership action, and that any action that helps a group maintain effective working relationships among its

members is a leadership action. Such leadership actions may include the following task actions:

- *Giving information and opinions*
- *Seeking information or opinions*
- *Defining tasks and giving direction to the group*
- *Summarizing*
- *Energizing the group*
- *Checking that group members understand the task.*

They may also include the following relationship actions:

- *Encouraging participation*
- *Facilitating communication*
- *Releasing tension*
- *Observing and reflecting on the processes the group are using*
- *Solving interpersonal problems*
- *Supporting and praising other members.*

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Reflect on one of the teams or professional groups of which you are a member. Can you recognize these various leadership roles and the members who perform them?
- ◆ If you are undertaking this training with your group, take this opportunity to discuss leadership in your group.
- ◆ How would you characterize your own leadership style? More importantly, how could you improve the quality of your own leadership?
- ◆ In your group, talk about ways in which you could increase the participation of members of the leadership.

EFFECTIVE TEAMS

The features of effective teams

Johnson and Johnson (1994) provide a very useful model for examining effectiveness in groups (see Figure 3).

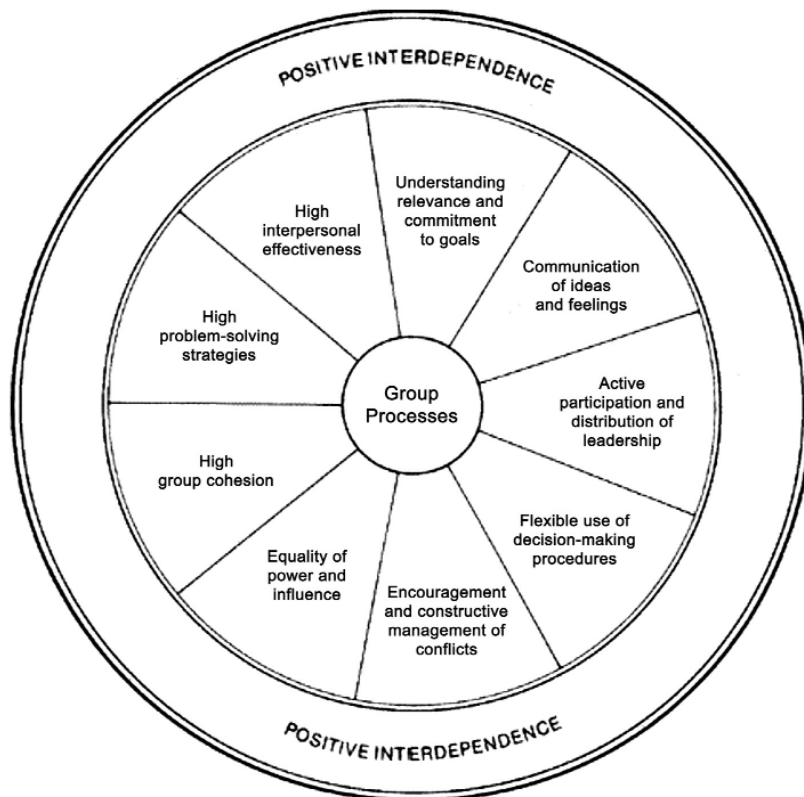


Figure 3

Start by looking at *goals* at the 12 o'clock position in the diagram. In effective teams, goals are usually developed by the team members. They are later clarified and changed to achieve the best possible match between the needs of the individuals and the needs of the team as a whole.

Communication in effective teams is usually two-way and provides for the accurate expression of both ideas and feelings. Feedback and self-disclosure occur.

Participation and leadership in effective teams are distributed among all members. Task and relationship behaviours are seen as contributing to leadership. *Power* is usually shared and is based on ability and information. The decision-making procedures are matched to the situation with different methods being used at different times. Consensus is sought for important decisions.

Conflict and controversy are seen as a positive key to members' involvement. Group *cohesion* in effective teams is advanced through high levels of inclusion, affection, acceptance, and trust. Individuality is endorsed. Members of effective

teams employ *highly developed problem solving skills*. Finally, in effective teams, *interpersonal effectiveness*, self-actualization, and innovation are encouraged.

ACTIVITIES

- ◆ Use Johnson and Johnson's diagram of the components of effective groups to analyse a group in which you are either a member, or the leader. Think about each of the components. What are your group's strengths and weaknesses? What could be done to improve your group's effectiveness?

CONCLUSION

In our work with refugees we are constantly using our *people skills* as Bolton puts it, or our *helping skills* as they are called by Egan. At the beginning of this module we examined ideas about communication and helping and realized that we need high levels of skill in our communications with our co-workers and our clients. Skilful communication with co-workers can reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings occurring between us, and lead to more productive and personally satisfying working relationships. This in turn will aid in the delivery of more effective services to our clients.

Using counselling or helping skills is one of the ways in which we might help our clients and co-workers even if we are not professionally trained counsellors. We found early in the module that counselling is one way of helping – a way that involves the systematic use of basic and advanced communication skills.

In all, we examined six sets of communication and helping skills:

1. ATTENDING AND OBSERVING

In attending and observing, we learned that the act of attending is both an aid to receiving information from other people more effectively and, at the same time, a way of telling other people that we are sincerely trying to listen to and understand what they are saying. Both the receptive and expressive components of attending involve body language. In observing, we pay special attention to body language, realizing that a large part of human communication is nonverbal and that nonverbal communication plays a big role in cross-cultural communication. In this module we thought of observing as ‘listening with our eyes’.

2. LISTENING AND RESPONDING

The discussions and activities in this part of the module stressed the idea of active listening. Viewed in this way, listening is hard work and requires

considerable concentration. However, we did learn two techniques to help us listen more effectively: the 5WH method, and listening for experience, behaviour and feelings. Listening is just one part of the story – we also need to know what to say. In responding, we learned that the skills of open-ended questioning, following, paraphrasing, reflecting feelings and meanings, and summarizing, all encourage our clients and co-workers to explore their concerns. If we listen and respond skilfully, we help other people learn more about themselves.

3. ASSERTIVENESS

The skills of assertiveness allow us to express our needs, ideas, and feelings in ways that do not infringe upon the needs of others. We learned that assertiveness is one of three possible ways of communicating our needs to other people. Aggressive and submissive behaviours have many drawbacks that do not serve us well in the long run. There may also be a price to pay when we behave assertively. However, our study in this section has provided us with sufficient information for us to be able to make a choice about the way in which we communicate our needs. We also had a chance in this section to reflect upon the basic rights which each of us might like to assert in our relationships with other people.

4. PROBLEM SOLVING

In the preface to his 1998 book *The Skilled Helper*, Egan suggests that the basic problem solving method – the one that we have just studied – is a universal approach used by people across cultures. It is certainly the most frequently used method of counselling in western cultures, and recently, Egan’s book has been translated and widely distributed in China. In problem solving we explored three steps. The first was to help our clients tell their stories – to outline the present scenario. That is, to provide an answer to the question: ‘How are things for you right now?’ The second stage involved helping our clients answer the question: ‘How would you like things to be?’ This would result in them constructing a preferred scenario. The third stage involved developing the plans to move towards the preferred scenario, that is, plans for our clients to achieve their

goals. We explored this model by reflecting on a personal problem of our own. Hopefully, we not only learned about this model of counselling, but many of us would have successfully counselled ourselves.

5. INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Much of our work is against a background of conflict. This may have caused some of us to question the effectiveness of schemes to resolve conflict, which at times appears endemic. However, whilst we may be able to do very little to resolve political and military conflict, we are better able to handle the interpersonal conflict that occurs in our own lives. This final section helped us to better understand our own patterns of behaviour in interpersonal conflicts, to learn a simple method of interpersonal conflict resolution, and to explore collaborative problem solving as a method of resolving interpersonal conflicts. We can use these techniques to improve the quality of our relationships with our co-workers, and we can teach these skills to our clients, who in turn may be able to enjoy more successful relationships themselves.

6. WORKING WITH GROUPS

Whilst we examined these sets of skills as they pertain to our relationships with other individuals, we recognize that much of our work occurs in groups. We usually work as members of teams, and we often work with our clients in groups. Hence, our final section dealt with knowledge about group dynamics. We learned that self-disclosure and feedback are essential for effective communication in groups and that other factors need to be considered, including: group size, physical environment, time, and status. We also learned that the goals of individuals needed to be taken into account when constructing goals for the group.

Leading groups involves attention to both the tasks that the group has to complete and the quality of the relationships within the group. We learned that the emphasis on the task and relationship components of our leadership needs to vary according to the situation, and the level of maturity of the group itself. We also learned that any action

that helps a group to complete its tasks is a leadership action and that any action that helps build good-quality relationships within the group is also a leadership action. Therefore, it is possible to see how everyone can contribute to leadership in a group.

Finally we learned that group effectiveness is dependent on the quality of: goals, communication, leadership, decision-making procedures, the management of conflicts, the distribution of power and influence, group cohesion, problem solving strategies, and interpersonal effectiveness.

Whether we are working with individuals on a one-to-one basis or in groups, the quality of our work is dependent on the quality of our communication and helping skills. This brings us back to the joint aims of this module: to improve the quality of our working relationships and to be in a better position to help others. Good luck with both of these important goals.

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