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THE POWER OF EMPATHY

When we encounter another person's pain, we often respond with sympathy instead of empathy. Although these two terms are often used interchangeably, they are vastly different. Sympathy is feeling sorry or pity for someone who may be experiencing something difficult. Alternatively, empathy is our ability to genuinely try to understand how someone feels. While sympathy is feeling *for* someone, empathy is feeling *with* someone.

Sympathy limits a person to their own understanding and experiences and can create a disconnection between people. Empathy fuels meaningful human connections and involves sitting with someone in their pain. Qualities of empathy include the ability to take the perspective of another person, remaining nonjudgmental, recognizing emotion in other people, and being able to communicate this back to the person.

Practicing empathy is a vulnerable choice which takes practice and self-reflection. To have empathy, we need to connect to something within ourselves that knows that feeling. Empathy allows people to feel supported and less alone in their experiences. Additionally, it allows emotional clarity and strengthens relationships. If a person shares they are scared, overwhelmed, and feel like they are stuck in a deep hole, empathy is climbing down next to them and saying, "You are not alone."

***Empathy fuels
connection, sympathy
drives disconnection
-Brené Brown***

Engaging in empathy is not an easy task. An empathic person can listen to someone sharing without the need to respond or provide unsolicited advice. Some people may believe that the response we provide to someone's pain will make them feel better. However, it is rarely possible to provide words that will immediately make something better. What can make something better is genuine human connection that is created with empathy.

Source: Brené Brown on Empathy vs. Sympathy



SYMPATHY VS. EMPATHY

Here are some examples of common statements using sympathy and how to rephrase using empathy instead.

Sympathy

"I am sorry that you feel this way."



Empathy

"You're showing so much self-awareness in this situation, it's really admirable. Thanks for being brave enough to come to me with this."

"Calm down, don't overthink it."



It seems like all this has left you feeling overwhelmed. Am I getting that right?"

"This will help you, here is what you should do."



"You know yourself best. What do you think would be most helpful to you right now?"

"I'm sorry to hear about the breakup. There are plenty of fish in the sea though."



"That person broke your trust, it makes sense that you're feeling betrayed right now."

"Aw, you poor thing. That really sucks."



"I can see how difficult this all has been. What you are feeling is understandable."

"Don't worry, I am sure things will work out eventually."



"It sounds like you were doing the best you could, even though it was really difficult."

"That's really sad, but at least..."



"I can imagine you feel sad about this situation. I'm here if you ever need someone to talk to."

WORKSHOPS

Our training includes skills training, healthy coping, communication, peer support, and education to prevent and respond to crisis and suicide.

COPE

- This workshop uses the principals of mindfulness to help students in grades 5,6, & 7 achieve better mental wellness and cope with issues like anxiety, overthinking, stress, self-harm, sleep loss, and social media use.

Lifelines

- Lifelines is an evidence-based program for grades 5,6, & 7 designed to integrate youth suicide prevention into both the culture and mission of the school, which is to provide a safe learning environment for its students. Classes emphasize help-seeking behaviours and are aimed at students who encounter peers who may be thinking of suicide.

Reaching Out

- This workshop introduces the topic of suicide to youth and teaches about warning signs, that it's okay to talk about suicide, how participants can respond to suicide, and advises participants it is okay to ask for help and to connect with a safe adult.

Self-Care 101

- A central goal of this workshop is to invite youth to see that each of us has mental health and, similar to caring for our physical health, we can learn to nurture and improve our mental health through our actions, experiences, and lifestyle choices.

GRASP

- This 12-hour skill building program provides youth from Grades 9-12 with self-awareness, communication, and coping skills that will aid them in their personal growth as well as contribute to an overall plan for ongoing youth suicide prevention programs within schools and communities.

ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training)

- Living Works' two day, interactive workshop that prepares caregivers to provide suicide life-assisting first-aid intervention.

safe (Suicide Awareness For Everyone) TALK

- Living Works' three-hour workshop which prepares helpers to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first-aid resources.

suicideTALK

- Ranging from 90 minutes to a half a day, Living Works' suicideTALK invites all participants to become more aware of suicide prevention opportunities in their community.

Contact our **Community Education Coordinator** at community.education@crisis-centre.ca or 778.693.2765 for more information!

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **UPCOMING TRAINING:** ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Volunteer Training

It gives you a new perspective and a new way of looking at your own problems when you have a chance to understand others. The training is invaluable for your own communication skills and relationships.

Please contact Liam Moberg at program.coordinator@crisis-centre.ca to apply or for more information.

ASIST Workshop


(Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training)


Date: July 4 & 5


Location: CNC

Please contact Jody Stronstad at community.education@crisis-centre.ca to register.

Connect with us online!

 @crisiscentrenbc contact us at information@crisiscentre.ca and let us know your thoughts on this newsletter!

 @crisiscentrenbc

 Crisis Prevention, Intervention, and Information Centre for Northern BC



ACTIVE LISTENING

When someone is sharing their experiences with us, it can be challenging to simply listen. Our instinct can be to try and solve their problems and people often fall back on advice-giving or platitudes as a response to someone's pain. Active listening is a technique used to truly listen to what someone is sharing. It requires us to genuinely try to understand the feelings and messages that the person is trying to convey. Active listening is a conscious effort that demands empathy and attention.

Active listening can be portrayed by body language (using eye contact, turning to face them, leaning forward, etc.) and non-verbal cues (comments such as "Mhmm," "I see," "Go on," etc.) It can also be portrayed through the words you say, such as statements that use empathy rather than sympathy. Rather than thinking of the response we will give when the person stops speaking, active listening is focusing on the person and accurately reflecting back what they have told us.

People can worry about "saying the wrong thing" or feel as if they would be inadequate at offering comfort and support. However, our words alone cannot relieve someone of their pain. Sometimes the most helpful thing we can do is use active listening tools to help create an environment that is based on mutual trust and respect where someone can safely talk about their experiences. When people feel heard, it can provide them with relief, and at the same time, increase their coping skills.

LANGUAGE AROUND SUICIDE

When we talk about suicide, language is important. The words we use when we discuss suicide can send a message to others that is okay or not okay to talk about suicide. This can contribute to or break down stigma and shame around the subject.

A common phrase used when discussing suicide is "commit suicide." This phrase comes from a time in the past when suicide was considered committing a crime. Although suicide was decriminalized in 1983, we still use this phrase today. Using this language promotes the idea that people who act on thoughts of suicide or have died by suicide are inherently bad.

Today, we use the following statements instead:

- Suicided
- Died by suicide
- Killed themselves
- Ended their life

Language that is not safe can add to the stigma around suicide and prevent people from seeking help. It can be challenging to readjust the language we have heard and used for most of our lives. However, by being conscious of the statements we use, we can help encourage people to reach out for support when they need it.

Crisis Centre for Northern B.C. Resources

- Northern B.C. Crisis Line: **250-563-1214, 1-888-562-1214**, 24/7
- Northern B.C. Youth Line: **250-564-8336**, 24/7
- BC Suicide Line: **1-800-784-2433**, BC-wide, 24/7
- 310-MENTALHEALTH: **310-6789**, BC-wide, 24/7
- Talk Suicide: **1-833-456-4566**, National, 24/7



**Crisis Prevention,
Intervention & Information Centre
FOR NORTHERN BC**
We are here for you 24-7

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