

Providing Support to Families

The purpose of the welfare calls to families is to check on the wellbeing of students and their families and offer support where we can. There are a variety of ways that we can offer support. This includes

1. Active Listening

Active listening is the ability to focus completely on a speaker, understand their message, comprehend the information and respond thoughtfully.

Skills of Active Listening

Show you are listening: Active listening involves listening with all senses, even when using the phone. Give someone your full attention and show you are listening e.g. with appropriately spaced interjections “Yes”, “I can imagine” or simply ‘Mmm hmm’. By providing this 'feedback' the person speaking will usually feel more at ease and therefore communicate more easily, openly and honestly.

Questioning and Clarifying: The listener can demonstrate that they have been paying attention by asking relevant questions and/or making statements that build or help to clarify what the speaker has said. By asking relevant questions the listener also helps to reinforce that they have an interest in what the speaker has been saying. A mixture of Open questions (eg “what are your concerns about”) clarifying questions (“Tell me more about”, “what did you mean by”) And hypothetical questions (what do you think would happen if)

Reflecting and paraphrasing: Reflecting is closely repeating or paraphrasing what the speaker has said in order to show comprehension. Reflection is a powerful skill that can reinforce the message of the speaker and demonstrate understanding.

Summarising and agreeing any goals: Repeating a summary of what has been said back to the speaker is a powerful way of showing that you are listening and builds rapport. You may also want to take this opportunity to plan with the family any actions that they may want to put in place and support problem solving of working towards these actions.

2. Offering Containment

“Containment is thought to occur when one person receives and understands the emotional communication of another without being overwhelmed by it, processes it and then communicates understanding and recognition back to the other person. This process can restore the capacity to think in the other person” (Douglas, 2007, p.33).

Containment is a simple but powerful concept. Infants project unmanageable feelings onto the primary care giver, who in turn reflects them back such that they become more tolerable for the infant. Early, ongoing experiences of containment enable the development of thinking to manage experiences and emotion. When individuals' experiences of containment are inadequate or significantly interrupted, cognitive and emotional development are affected.

OneEducation

Putting children first

Uncontainable feelings and experiences are normal and arise throughout the lifespan. It is likely and normal that people may feel uncontainable emotions during this crisis.

In dealing with families, the 'container' is the key adult who is able to acknowledge and accept distress and make experiences safe for families by offering a temporary way of hearing and accepting anxieties in a calm manner, until family members are in a position to understand and regulate their emotions themselves.

The thoughts and feelings that give rise to fears and anxieties and which prevent families from understanding and managing their own feelings are 'contained' by the other adult.

The primary purposes of containment are to

- prevent someone from feeling overwhelmed
- increase the person's ability to cope with stressors
- prevent potentially dangerous or risky behaviours
- allow the person to feel more in control of their thoughts and emotions.

The secondary purpose of containment in this situation is to model containing behaviour so that the adults we are working with are able to offer this emotional containment to the children within their care.

So how can containment work in this situation?

In some way your communication with the adult needs to allow them opportunity to express their feelings (see active listening above) allowing you the opportunity to acknowledge any difficult feelings. This provides you with the opportunity to find a way of acknowledging their feelings or to help name the emotion that they may be feeling e.g. anxiety, likely in this current crisis. You can allow space for the person to agree or correct about the emotion you have named. By containing the person's emotions you allow them the opportunity and space to regulate their emotions and to think about their own and their family's needs.

3. Reinforcing Self Care Message for Parents

Remembering that prioritising your own wellbeing benefits not only you but your whole family

As all of us spend more time indoors and with our families, looking after ourselves becomes a luxury as we tend to the needs of our children, cook meals, attempt learning at home and maybe even try and work from home too. But during this difficult time, when stress and anxiety levels are heightened, looking after yourself becomes essential, not a luxury.

Here are 5 reasons we need self-care

- To help us cope in the moment and to respond more appropriately at the most testing times
- To help us restore and replenish physically, emotionally and mentally
- To support our resilience and energy supply
- So we can access the kind of parent we all want to be – kind, supporting, loving and so on
- So we can empower our children with the toolkits for a lifetime so they can become compassionate and resilient adults

See attached Self-care leaflet

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