

Sharing Sensitive Information

Telling Adolescents Sensitive Information

Working with adolescents frequently requires discussions of sensitive information about themselves, family members and future planning. Workers can be hesitant to tell them things when they believe the information will result in reactions that make workers uncomfortable. We recognize that adolescents want answers to their questions and that they need relationships of trust with known adults who support their development and decision making. This tip sheet describes these difficulties and presents practices to support successful and effective approaches to assuring that adolescents are provided this information.

What are the challenges in telling sensitive information to adolescents?

Knowing your own biases and cultural expectations

Having knowledge of the developmental stage of adolescence-both normal and trauma influenced.

Worker fears:

- I will make the situation worse
- I will create more hurt for youth
- I feel guilty for causing more pain
- I won't know how to respond to their reactions
- I won't be able to respond
- I feel inadequate for not know what to do
- I don't know what words to use to share the sensitive information

What practices support these engagements?

Using the 7 Skills of the 3-5-7 Model®

- After the information is briefly shared, PAUSE allowing for the information to be heard, taken in
- BE PRESENT providing time for initial responses and delayed responses
- LISTEN and follow behaviors, comments, questions
- When responding, SPEAK BRIEFLY, limit talking, explaining, advice giving
- AFFIRM feelings and experiences: recognize feelings, hurt, anger, confusion, sadness, joy
- Allow for decision options towards resolution – immediate and afterward

During the sharing of information:

Share the information without phrases such as:

- "I have something to tell you that is difficult for me." – makes it about you
- "Do you know why I am here?" - heightens anxiety
- "You might feel sad/or...when I tell you this." – predicting their feelings

Encourage expression of feelings, allow youth to give meaning to experiences

- Do not rush to reframe their feelings expressions or use your words to describe this event. Be sensitive to youth responses that may be different that yours.

View explosive words and actions as indicators of painful feelings

- Reactions are generally the behaviors of their ongoing grief experiences, one of which is anger

Affirm feelings, empathize but do not offer advice to fix it; remember, it is their work to do

- Be cautious as to attempts to rush them to change feelings; feelings may be positive when you were expecting negative reactions.

Provide acceptance, withhold judgment about negative behaviors directed towards you

- The pain/hurt has not been caused by you; however, as they perceive safety with you, these feelings may be directed at you

Provide encouragement and sense of hope

- Follow their lead about what they may need to hear and convey your belief in them to do their work.



After the sharing of information:

- Communicate and affirm all feeling and thinking expressions
- Allow youth to give meaning to the information shared
- Support contact with all relationships of importance to them
- Affirm love and acceptance for the youth
- Decide together any consequences that may be needed
- Use the Life Story Book to capture this event: thoughts, feelings, reactions

Personal self-care:

After intense experiences with adolescents, have options to care for self

Activity

The Process of Sharing Sensitive Information

1. Brainstorm how people want to hear sensitive/difficult information; who do they want to hear it from; where do they want to be when they hear it.

2. Create a list of sensitive information that they are going to tell adolescents, e.g.:

- a. Moving from a placement
- b. Separation from sibling
- c. Termination of parental rights
- d. Death of parent or relative



3. Have them identify reasons it is difficult to share this sensitive information – list on board/flip chart

4. Break into small groups. Select a recorder.

- a. Have them choose one topic of sensitive information generated from list created.
- b. Select a youth: identify age and gender
- c. Give 3-4 minutes to determine the words they will use to share the information; no story or scenario.
- d. Practice/role play the sharing of information and their responses

5. Have each group report to larger group the words they would use to share the information. Discuss using the practice of the 7 Skills.

- a. Emphasize sharing the information - direct and factual
- b. Identify responses they might have
- c. Encourage preparation with colleagues for actual situations of sharing information
- d. Discuss feedback to the exercise

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TASKS

- Clarification
- Integration
- Actualization

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QUESTIONS

- Who am I?
- What happened to me?
- Where am I going?
- How will I get there?
- When will I know I belong?

7

SKILLS

- RECOGNIZING and ACCEPTING that current BEHAVIORS reflect GRIEF RESPONSES
- BEING PRESENT to the individual
- Providing OPPORTUNITIES to EXPLORE feelings and life events
- AFFIRMING perceptions and feelings
- LISTENING to the stories
- BRIEFLY SPEAKING in response to questions, comments, and reactions of individual
- Establishing the perception of SAFETY