

Difficult Interactions: How to Have a Nice Day at the Hotline

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The majority of the time our interactions with Callers proceed in a manner that empowers them to confront their presenting situation and develop mechanisms to survive, strive, and thrive. While this is beneficial to the Caller it also provides a degree of satisfaction for us. The equality created by using the Client Centered Model permits a sharing of the positivity experienced by the Caller. However, there are those times when an interaction induces negative feelings in us.

While we would like to maintain that we are not affected by such interactions they do, in fact, engender negative feelings in us. We tend to identify the Caller as being “Difficult”. Once we do that we become judgmental which violates the core concept of Unconditional Positive Regard. This places us at odds with not only the Caller but ourselves and our basic training. We come to view the situation as something being done to us. We come to a point where we are no longer “interacting” but are reacting. We forget or, more pragmatically, fail to admit that feelings of helplessness and frustration can and do result from certain types of calls. In addition, viewing the Caller as difficult introduces the danger that someone in actual need may not receive the full benefit of the services the agency is able to offer.

It is the goal of this two part workshop to develop a set of skills intended to mitigate the impact of such situations. While it is the tendency to speak of Callers as being difficult, it will be postulated that more often than not it is situations or behaviors that we actually find problematic. The reason for this distinction is that while we do not have control over who calls us, we can develop skills to control our reaction to those situations or behaviors presented by those who call us. Once we identify what is within our control we have a basis for developing the skills needed to cope.

We will then examine how the basic tenets and fundamentals of the Client Centered Model create a level of equality between the client and worker that can serve the “needs” of both. Just as these basics can serve to empower Callers, they can empower us to assertively confront and address the dynamics of difficult interactions. In addition, they give a means to measure the appropriateness of our manner of coping with difficult interactions.

The workshop will then point out how the Active Listening Skills the workers already possess can enable them to work with difficult interactions. It will also be introduced that there are some skills they use daily which they may not be aware of that can be helpful. In addition, new skills that they may choose to adapt will be suggested and discussed.

Once the various skills have been introduced and addressed a discussion of the Do’s and Don’ts of working with Difficult Situations will be enjoined. Because it makes being told what to do and not to do more palatable, reasons for each Do and Don’t will be explained and related to situations encountered by the presenter as well as situations introduced by the audience.

The workshop will close with an interactive exchange where those attending will be asked to introduce interactions they find difficult, the goal being for the group to practice their newly learned skills.