

# SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATIONS

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## *Staff/Peer Support*

Supportive conversations following an unusually challenging event may take many forms. The conversation may be informal, as between co-workers or between friends. The conversation may also take a more structured direction as occurs in the context of a peer support or crisis support environment. The circumstances of each situation will vary significantly and all supportive conversation/interactions must be predicated on the context of the circumstances, the timing, and the needs of the individual.

The conversation may be thought of as being comprised of parts or components that need to be modified based on the circumstances and psychological readiness of the individual.

### 1. PREPARATION

- a. **When did the incident/event occur?**
- b. **What prompted the call for support?**
- c. **Who made the call?**
- d. **Where will the interaction take place?**
- e. **Are there special needs or circumstances?**
- f. **Prepare yourself for the interaction: focus on the individual**

### 2. INTERACTION

#### a. Introduction

- i. Introduce yourself
- ii. Explain why you are here
- iii. Rules of interaction: privacy, do not have to talk
- iv. Review the process for the interaction: time-frame, discussion of coping strategies
- v. What do you need at this time?
  1. Can be a physical, emotional, or spiritual need or other
  2. The individual will not likely be aware of what they need
  3. Provide reassurance that this is common

#### b. Conversation

- i. Facts: what happened? (not an intrusive inquiry)
- ii. What, if anything, would you like to discuss?
- iii. Focus on what the individual is relating
- iv. What feelings and/or themes are you hearing?
- v. What are the non-verbal messages being communicated?
- vi. Generally avoid asking: "How are you feeling?"
- vii. Validate feelings (but avoid "that's normal, I know how you are feeling, I've been in your place, I understand how you feel")

# SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATIONS CONT.

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## c. Future

- i. Guide the individual in problem solving for them self
- ii. What are your fears, worries, concerns both for yourself and others
- iii. What is next for you: back to work, home, other?
- iv. When do you work next?
- v. Do you live alone? (support systems)
- vi. Would you like to be with someone at this time?

## d. Self care

- i. What do you usually do to take care of yourself when you are stressed/distressed?
- ii. Provide additional suggestions/recommendations
- iii. Include interacting with family or friends as appropriate

## e. Referral

- i. Immediate need? (safety)
- ii. Near future referral
- iii. As/if a referral is needed in the future

## 3. FOLLOW-UP

- a. Establish a time and day/date to follow-up
- b. Determine how frequently follow-up is required or if a referral should be made at a later time
- c. Self care: as the support person, attend to your own needs and deal with any reactions the interaction may have triggered

## 4. PEARLS

- a. It is about them - not you or what you need to accomplish
- b. Use active listening skills: listening is not waiting for your opportunity to talk
- c. Get comfortable with your emotions
- d. Be aware of your own feelings, history, needs, and personal reactions
- e. Get comfortable with others expressing strong emotions
- f. Do not criticize or critique - even in your own head
- g. Be aware that some innocent questions can appear critical to the individual: choose your words carefully and ask yourself if this information/question will benefit the interaction
- h. Do not ask any questions out of your own curiosity
- i. Don't promise that which you cannot deliver
- j. Listen for clues and information that does not match the non-verbal communication you are observing
- k. Pay close attention to the feelings
- l. Thank the individual for meeting/discussing the situation with you