

LCC Session: Dealing With Difficult/Angry People

CanMEDS Competency: Professional & Communicator

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***GOAL:** The purpose of this session is to offer an opportunity for the residents to debrief with colleagues and trusted mentors around difficult clinical encounters with people who are angry. The reflective exercise will offer an opportunity to explore our own relationship with anger.*

PRE-SESSION MATERIALS

1. Required materials:

- VIDEO De-escalation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6S9UJwvyJ8>
- Ted Talks Article <https://ideas.ted.com/should-emotions-be-taught-in-schools/>

2. Anger Handout – see pages 2 & 3

PRE-SESSION PREPARATION

Prior to this session, we ask that all residents reflect on clinical situations where you were dealing with a parent or patient who was angry. Think about the situation and the ways in which the individual expressed their emotion. How did you respond to the situation? What did you feel after the situation was over? Did your feelings linger? Did you doubt your response?

Anger Handout

- Expressive and strong energy
- We have been conditioned away from anger
- We often reject anger and become fearful
- Aggressive anger is like a bomb that drops. There is no opportunity for healthy communication about what is needed
- Taught to respond to anger with avoidance, defensiveness or frustration
- Defensiveness is a normal physiological response. It is a self-protective stance. In this reaction, we may not hear what the other person is saying*
- Our own nervous system may get overwhelmed when someone else is angry
- Healthy approach to anger means we process emotion versus it coming out sideways
- Boundaries are important
- Can have a good relationship with anger
- Anger calls for feeling heard, creating space or setting boundaries
- No one calms down by being told "calm down"

What to do with an angry parent?

Listen....

VALIDATION! VALIDATION! VALIDATION!

Validation means **we acknowledge feelings**.

Helium Balloon Analogy: There is a balloon in the air, up high, floating and prominent. When you validate a person's emotion, you are slowly helping them let the air out of the balloon so that the person can come down and put their feet back on the ground.

Steps to validation:

1. Put yourself in their shoes and convey understanding of *how they would have experienced* the event. The less defensive you are, the more they can hear you. We are not trying to give them a reality check OR tell them how they should have seen it OR what was happening for you OR what other people that about it.
2. Can validate content, emotions or both!
3. Move from "I hear you but" to "I hear you because"...convey why the feeling makes sense for someone in their shoes
4. Make a plan with them and *follow through*

PRACTICE AND EXAMPLES

Try this practice with family members or friends the next time some is angry or emotional. See how it feels and works for you!

Take a breath, put yourself in their shoes. Find 3 possible reasons why they might be feeling the emotion. Hear what they are telling you without evaluating the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of what they are saying. Come up with responses that show you understand their feeling. Moving from BUT to because. Stating 2-3 'because's is said to be helpful and deescalating. You do not necessarily have to say the word because in between ideas, you just have to convey a deeper understanding of the feeling.

Practice these two phrases and notice the difference:

I can understand why you might feel angry *but...*

I can understand why you might feel angry *because ...*

Example:

"I can understand why you might feel angry about waiting for results. It is always so hard when you feel worried. And you were expecting them sooner"

"I can see why you might feel angry because you have been here a long time and you must be worried and you would like to understand what is happening with your child"

"No wonder you are so angry, that must be really hard"

"That must be difficult because you are trying to do the right thing for your child. It must be hard because you feel it has been too long of a wait".

"I can understand why you feel hopeless, things have been really hard. Not to mention exhausting. So tough to see the light at the end of the tunnel".

*Notice that validating does not suggest that what they are doing or saying is correct. Nor is it validating their behaviour. There may be times when you have to set a physical boundary if the person cannot calm down. If there is an escalation of the emotion, chances are you have not been able to validate them. If you walk away too soon without giving them a chance to feel heard, that may escalate the emotion as well.

Validation Traps

1. Going to the bright side too quickly eg. "This is hard" "No it's not, you can do it!"
2. Explaining with logic or helping them to see it YOUR way is not validating their experience
3. Correcting reality will not validate their emotion
4. *Rushing to problem solving before you have heard their concerns

Explore your feelings about using the technique of validation at work. Are you worried that you might be admitting to the parent that a mistake that occurred? Important to explore how you can validate without colluding with ideas that are unrealistic or unfounded.