

Effective Responding Exercise

Learning to recognize the different types of Communication Responses

This exercise is designed to help you improve your responses to people. After you have finished reading each example write down in your journal the type of response which has been used in it and each of the 34 examples given.

Eight responses with a high probability of creating healthy communication are presented. These responses are highly rated because they are perceived as empathic, caring, warm, and helpee-centered.

The eight facilitating responses are listed from the least (1) to the most facilitating (8):

1. Advice or evaluation indicates your judgment of relative goodness, appropriateness, effectiveness, or correctness.
2. Analytical or interpretation shows your intent to teach, to impart insight, to show meaning.
3. Reassuring or supportive implies your intent to reduce the anxiety or intense feelings in the other helpee.
4. Information giving signals your desire to share basic, needed information with the other helpee.
5. Probe or question reveals an intent to seek additional information, provide further discussion, to query.
6. Self-disclosure exhibits your intent to share the fact that you have experienced what the other helpee has.
7. Summary or clarification denotes your intent to understand what the other helpee is saying, or to identify the most significant ideas or feelings that seem to be emerging.
8. Understanding or reflection conveys your understanding or ability to read others' feelings.

In the following examples, a helpee's comment is followed by a response. You are to identify in your journal the type of response being used. Identify the response using the eight responses listed above. Once you have marked the response type for all the examples in your journal then check your answers with the answer key at the end of this exercise.

1. Helpee: It just seems like year after year goes by without my being able to get pregnant.

Response: You feel discouraged because we can't seem to have children.

Type of response:

2. Helpee: My parents are getting a divorce, and I wish they wouldn't.

Response: You feel upset because your parents are splitting up.

Type of response:

3. Helpee: I am caught in the middle. I am unable to handle both my job and the household chores. I need help. Either I need to stay home more, or I need assistance with the work around my house.

Response: You should hire a maid.

Type of response:

4. Helpee: It has been hard for me to adjust since I had my son. The days seem so busy, and I need help with him.

Response: Do you know about the programs available at the child development center for children with his problems? There are many children like him who go there for school and therapy on a daily basis.

Type of response:

5. Helpee: I am always picking on my kids. Sometimes I think I am too hard on them.

Response: You are worried about the way you discipline the children because it brings up the horrible memories of the abuse your father inflicted on you.

Type of response:

6. Helpee: I am bored at home all day long. There is nothing for me to do but clean the house and take care of the kids.

Response: Before I went back to work, I felt the same way.

Type of response:

7. Helpee: I just hate it. The house is a mess.

Response: Maybe this experience will remind you to help your wife more with the chores.

Type of response:

8. Helpee: Just facing my mother tomorrow has me frightened to death.

Response: What about your mom has you so upset?

Type of response:

9. Helpee: It is frightening to consider moving after all these years. But I know I have to accept the transfer if I am ever to get ahead.

Response: The prospect of moving is unpleasant, but you want to advance your career.

Type of response:

10. Helpee: It is frightening to consider moving after all these years. They may have been full of misery and pain, but still, this was home.

Response: It's natural to feel that way at a time like this.

Type of response:

11. Helpee: (Silence)

Response: That last comment of mine must have struck home. I can see by your reaction you still feel some guilt about the way you have treated your children.

Type of response:

12. Helpee: I wish I had never gotten involved with those bastards.

Response: You seem to be really upset right now.

Type of response:

13. Helpee: How do you know how I feel; you never had a child with a handicap.

Response: How does it feel, then, to have a child with a handicap?

Type of response:

14. Helpee: So I finally had to place him in the home. Since then, I have had nothing but trouble with the other kids.

Response: The problems became so unbearable that you had to place your child in a group home, but your problems have not ended after getting help for him.

Type of response:

15. Helpee: I feel so stressed every time she visits our house.

Response: What have you done so far to take care of yourself?

Type of response:

16. Helpee: The way they all look at him bothers me.

Response: The way others look at your child is upsetting.

Type of response:

17. Helpee: I am very anxious around my father's new girlfriend.

Response: You probably have this anxiety because of an unresolved Oedipal conflict.

Type of response:

18. Helpee: (Silence – tears)

Response: I know that it is hard for you to talk about this now. Just begin when you want to.

Type of response:

19. Helpee: You can imagine how I felt when I discovered she was disabled. What was I supposed to do, just stand there and watch their abusive behavior? I let them know how I felt!

Response: You really were angry and upset.

Type of response:

20. Helpee: There are times when I wish my husband wasn't so busy, that our son could have a father to grow up with.

Response: He might benefit from the father's program. It was begun just this past year for dad's with disabled kids.

Type of response:

21. Helpee: There are times when I could just kill them.

Response: You get so rattled with your relatives; you are totally frustrated.

Type of response:

22. Helpee: I know that drinking doesn't really help me in the long run, and it sure doesn't help our family. She keeps threatening to leave. I know all this, but it is hard to stay away from the booze.

Response: You are aware of some of the ways that drinking is harmful, and yet you can't leave it alone.

Type of response:

23. Helpee: I am really discouraged since his last operation. I feel that since he has come home from the hospital, the other kids stay farther and farther away from him.

Response: This would be a good thing to bring up in your next family meeting: How the kids are reacting to his latest operation and how it affects you.

Type of response:

24. Helpee: Arriving one hour late: Sorry I am late; the bus was delayed.

Response: This makes the fifth time you have been late to our session. It gives me the feeling that you are not too interested

Type of response:

25. Helpee: I don't want you to tell my parents what I am telling you. They will be annoyed with me again.

Response: Don't worry about me telling them; what you share with me stays with me

Type of response

26. Helpee: When the doctor told me that the baby was retarded and that we should put him away in some institution, I blew up and ran out of his office.

Response: His lack of sensitivity was acute

Type of response

27. Helpee: His parents have been out to get me from the first time I met them.

Response: What gives you that feeling?

Type of response:

28. Helpee: He is always telling me what to do, what to think, what to like. What a jerk!

Response: What did he say to you this time?

Type of response

29. Helpee: I get so nervous when I have to go to the doctor.

Response: The last time I went to your doctor he was uncaring and impersonal. It makes it hard to feel comfortable as his patient

Type of response

30. Helpee: Please help me figure out how to get help for my son.

Response: Call the County Information Hotline for the numbers of the clinic closest to you

Type of response

31. Helpee: Please help me figure out how to get help for my son.

Response: I can see that you are really confused about this

Type of response

32. Helpee: (Silence – tears)

Response: You are upset about your son's developmental problems because of guilt over the way you have treated retarded kids in the past

Type of response

33. Helpee: You have to help me with this. I am so lost and frustrated.

Response: I know just how you feel

Type of Response

34. Helpee: Why does this have to happen to me?

Response: The situation seems so unfair

Type of response