

# **The Most Powerful Tool for Effective Risk Communication - Active Listening**

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# Approach for Today

- Think of a scenario where you would like to have better communication skills
- Greatest challenge – dealing with feelings
- Start with the other person's message
- The most powerful tool – Active Listening
- Roadblocks to effective communication
- Applications of Active Listening
- Practice
- Summary

# Communication Scenarios

- Please describe one or more scenarios for application of Active Listening
  - Real or hypothetical
- Communication with
  - The media
  - Emergency responders
  - State or local government staff
  - Co-workers
  - Members of the public
  - Friends or Family





# What is Best for Your Scenario?

- Will a better understanding of radiation, risks, etc. be most helpful ?
- Will understanding of feelings, fears, risk perceptions be most helpful ?
- What have you tried or thought of trying ?
- Are there magic words that will make a difference ?
- Is there “An answer ?”

# Challenges for HPs

- **Which may be the greatest challenge for HPs day-to-day**
  - Issues about technology
  - Issues involving people
- **Most of us have extensive training to deal with technical issues**
- **How much of our career has been devoted to dealing with people issues ?**
  - Such as understanding how people feel ?
  - Developing risk communication skills ?

# Our Greatest Challenge

- When the dialogue gets emotional
- What can we do when our best information is not accepted ?
- How do we answer hypothetical questions?
- What if our answers cause more upset ?
- What if we do not have any data ?
- Is there any hope ?

# Questions about Feelings

- Would our jobs be easier if people left their feelings at home?
- Are feelings difficult to comprehend ?
- Does logical analysis of feelings help ?
- Are feelings a foreign language ?
- In our best efforts,  
do our own feelings get hooked ?
- Would we like to run away ?
- If we open the door to feelings,  
will we be overwhelmed ?

# Two Primary Attributes for Risk Communication

## 1. Master of your subject

- How much time do you spend on mastering your material?

## 2. Showing you care

- How much time do you spend on showing that you care?

## ■ Which is more important?

- Knowledge – Technical information
- Caring – Hearing and responding to feelings



# Focus for Today

- **NOT on technology of radiation safety issues**
  - You are radiation experts
- **Focus on “How” to communicate what you know**
- **Caring for your audience**
- **“Your audience does not care how much you know, until they know how much you care”**

# Your Comfort Zone

- Familiar
- Language
- Feelings
- Views
- Secure
- Employment
- Family
- Friends
- Home



# Outside Your Comfort Zone



- Unfamiliar
- Threats and Risks
- Credibility
- Fears and feelings
- Views and Beliefs
- Cultural factors
- Education factors
- Life styles
- Economic factors
- Languages

# Building Bridges



What's in  
It for me?



Communication Tools  
**Active Listening**

Canyon of Differences



What's in  
It for me?

# Listener's Stance

- Goal is for Adult Response - Ability
- $R_t + R_p + C_a$  to TCOL
- Be aware of feelings
  - Anxiety, defensiveness
- How to identify defensiveness and stay non-defensive



# Active Listening

- **Hearing and responding to feelings**
- **A skill that can be easily learned**
  - **Through practice**
- **Most powerful tool for risk communication**
- **Process of Active Listening**
  1. **Paraphrase the content**
  2. **Respond with a synonym that describes the feeling**
  3. **Let the other person correct you as needed**

# Listening

- **Communication is not the message you send, but the response that you get !**
- **Response is in two forms:**
  - Verbal and visual
- **Listening is more than hearing data for understanding**
- **Risk messages also involve feelings**



# What to Do With Response You Get

- **Communication is a two way process**
  - observe verbal and visual cues
- **Hear feelings - How ?**
- **Use Active Listening to develop rapport**
  - restate content and feeling of message
  - keep ownership of problem with other person
- **Be aware of roadblocks that may prevent open communications**

# Active Listening

- **Hearing the message and the feelings**
- **Why bother?**
  - **To establish rapport as basis for presenting your risk message**
  - **To get down to the real issue of concerns for radiation risks**
- **Active listening is not easy for technical experts and managers**

# Hearing and Reflecting Feelings

- 1. Best answer for upset person**
- 2. Describe feeling we perceive**
  - 1. Do not analyze or evaluate**
  - 2. Paraphrase content and reflect feeling**
  - 3. Let other person correct your understanding**
- 3. Temptation for technical people**
  - 1. Go directly to technical answers**
  - 2. Without addressing or connecting with feelings**

# Why Not Troubleshoot Right Away?

- **By giving answers first**
  - You miss an opportunity to connect with feelings and real reasons for concern
- **Hearing feelings establishes basis for rapport and credibility**
  - They may then “hear” your answers
- **When you go directly to answers you may discover you are answering the wrong question**
- **Fearful people may not want specific answers, but rather to know that someone hears their feelings**

# Trying to Solve the Problem, May Lead to:

- 1. Solving the wrong problem
- 2. Solving problems,  
when the audience is not looking for answers
- 3. Missing feelings,  
which the audience wants us to hear
- 4. Taking away the opportunity for others to solve  
their own problems
- 5. Not allowing others to build problem-solving skills
- 6. Inferring that others do not have the *right,*  
*responsibility, or capacity* to solve their own problems
- 7. Giving our answers, that others can reject  
with the game of, "Yes, but ....." "

# Why Hear Feelings Rather than Give Answers ?

1. **Hearing feelings establishes rapport and credibility**
  1. **Otherwise they may not hear your answers**
2. **You may discover your answers are about the wrong question or concern**
3. **Fearful person may not expect answers,**
  1. **Just want someone to hear their fears**
4. **People may not care how much you know, until they know how much you care**

# Asking Questions vs Giving Answers

- People can discount your answers
- Position yourself as a resource to help people find their own answers
  - Behavior guided more by their own answers derived from observations
- Provide options for experience or observation
- Encourage skepticism

# Natural to Give Answers

- **Not a matter of right or wrong responses**
- **Two precautions when giving answers:**
  - Are you answering the right question ?
  - Who owns the problem ?
- **The giver of answers assumes the responsibility**
- **Giving answers sets up opportunities for adversity**

# Roadblocks That May Close Communications

1. **Ordering, directing, commanding**
2. **Warning, threatening, promising**
3. **Moralizing, preaching, shoulds, oughts**
4. **Advising, giving solutions, suggestions**
5. **Teaching, lecturing, logical arguments**
6. **Judging, criticizing, disagreeing**

# Roadblocks That May Close Communications

7. Praising, agreeing
8. Name calling, labeling, stereotyping
9. Interpreting, analyzing, diagnosing
10. Reassuring, sympathizing, consoling
11. Probing, questioning, interrogating
12. Withdrawing, distracting, humoring, sarcasm, diverting, indirection

# Roadblock 11- Asking Questions

- How can asking questions become a roadblock ?
- Typically when technical people ask questions – it is to gather data for giving answers
- A better use of questions could be to lead the other person to resolve their own problems

# Review & Questions

- **Greatest challenge for HPs**
  - Dialogues that involve emotion (feelings)
- **Answer is to hear feelings**
  - By Active Listening
  - Paraphrase content and feelings
- **Requires moving outside our comfort zone**
- **As trained “givers of answers” we want to quickly get into troubleshooting**

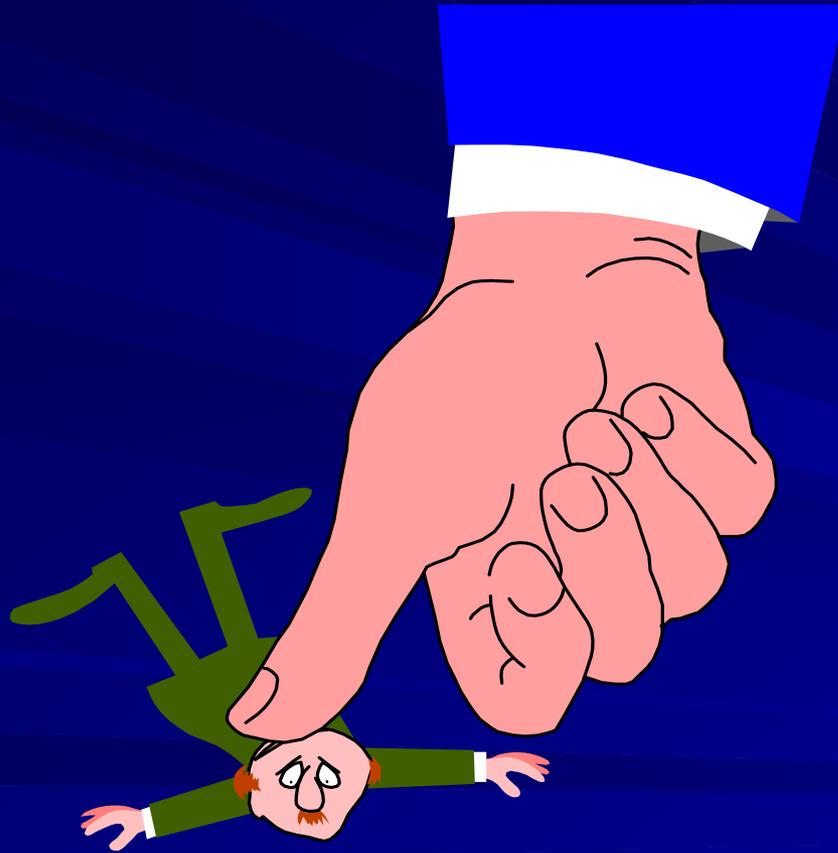
# How Not to Respond

- **Avoid giving an evaluation, opinion, advice, analysis, or questions**
- **Such responses come from your own stuff, so you can take control of the communication**
- **Hard to leave initiative with other person**
- **Especially when you think they are wrong or misconstruing the facts**
- **Try to avoid getting defensive**

# Defensiveness

- We get defensive when our own feelings are hooked
- Emotional elements of communication do affect our feelings
- When we feel frustrated, annoyed, perplexed, or the butt of criticism
  - Our critical judgment takes charge and we feel a need to defend ourselves

# Defensiveness – Natural Response



- Natural for coping
- Fight or flight
- Resistance is a fight response
- Fear of consequences
- Anxiety fuels fear
- Images fuel anxiety
- Images are automatic

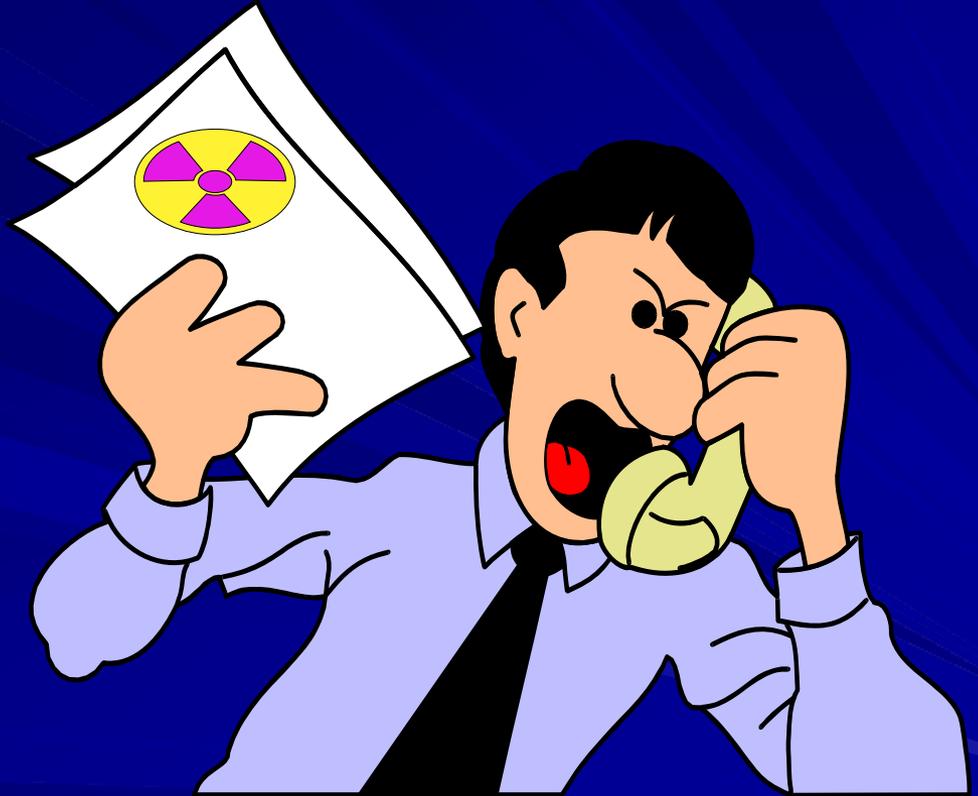
# Knowing Your Defensiveness



- **Tune in to your own defensiveness**
  - Churning in stomach
- **Need to justify yourself**
  - Arguing your point
- **Raising advice to demands**
- **Raising your voice**

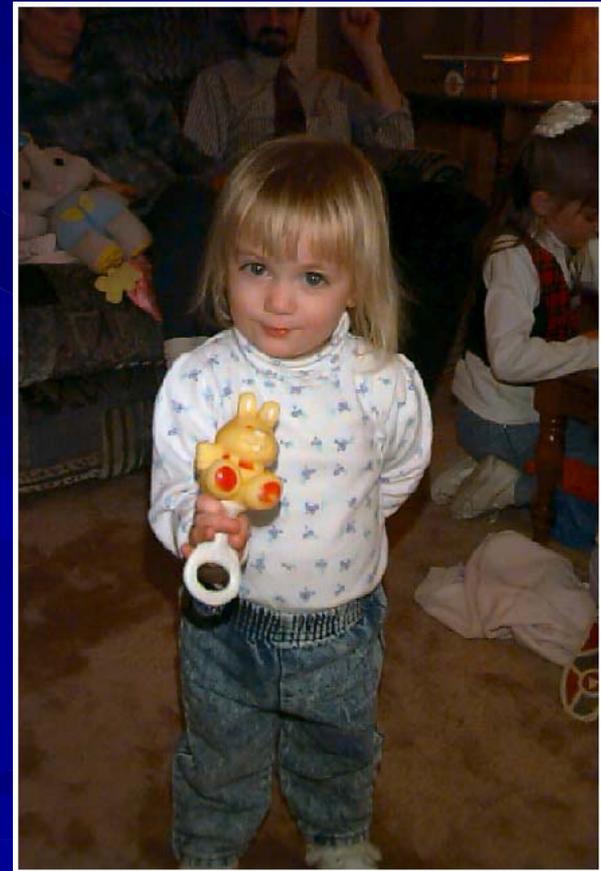
# When We Hook Defensiveness

- We hook images and fears
- Established for survival
- Best to reduce defensiveness
- Do not give anything to push against



# How to Be Non - Defensive

- Turn on feeling switch
- Hear feelings
- Reflect feelings
- Find agreement on concerns
- Establish rapport



# Communicating to Hear Feelings

1. Develop Active Listening skills
2. Talk in terms of -
  1. personal values... caring...  
harmony... appreciation...  
compassion... what is good  
for the people involved.
3. Use criticism gently - look for harmony first
4. Be personal - avoid complex analyses



# Name Some Feelings



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# Active Listening Approach

- Respond to your perception of speaker's message and feelings
- There are four feelings:
  - Mad, Sad, Glad, Afraid
- Opens doors to “real issues”
- Does not take away from:
  - Other person's right, responsibility, and capacity to solve their own problems

# Hearing and Reflecting Feelings

- **Fears are best handled by hearing and reflecting feelings**
- **Do not say, “I know how you feel.”**
  - You can never know another’s feelings
- **Describe the feeling in your own words**
  - Let the other person correct you
  - Four feelings - mad, sad, glad, and afraid
- **Dialogue process**
  - Paraphrase and reflect
  - Do not interpret or rationalize

# Hearing Feelings

- **“I don’t want to go near radiation”**
  - **“Radiation makes you nervous”**
- **“Yes, I might still like to have children”**
  - **“You are afraid that radiation may affect whether you can have children”**
- **“Yes, I do not want children with 3 eyes”**
  - **“So your real concern is whether radiation will affect future children”**
- **“Yes”**
  - **“Ok, here is what I have learned”**

# Examples of Active Listening

- **“Radiation, I don’t want anything to do with it !”**
  - **“Radiation is scary isn’t it ?”**
- **“I don’t believe a word you are saying!”**
  - **“You are concerned that I may not be telling you the truth ?**
- **“I know what happens when you are exposed to radiation ?”**
  - **“If you are exposed to radiation, you feel that something bad will happen?”**

# Listening is the Key

- People's concerns are about images of losses or consequences of radiation
- Identifying the basis for fears requires listening and asking lots of questions
  - Rather than giving answers
- Active listening is difficult for technical people whose lives are about giving answers
- Giving answers also takes ownership of the problem

# Axioms on Listening



- **Feelings are more important than:**
  - What is said
- **Listening is more important than:**
  - Solving problems

# Hearing Feelings

- **Have you noticed when people are repeating their story ?**
- **People will keep on repeating until you hear the feelings**
  - **When you hear the feelings they do not need to tell you their story again**
- **When you really hear the feelings, the feelings will go away**

# Practice of Active Listening

- Review one of your scenarios
- Pick a partner, decide who goes first
- Speaker - Briefly describe the situation
  - 10 to 15 seconds at most
- Listener – Respond with content and feeling
- Switch roles, share scenario and respond
- Note: This is NOT troubleshooting

# How Was Your Experience of Active Listening ?

- Did it work ?
- Was it difficult ?
- Were you able to stay with  
the model of Active Listening ?
- Were you tempted to troubleshoot ?
- Did you find yourself giving answers ?

# Review

- **Greatest challenge for HPs**
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# Review

- Troubleshooting takes ownership and may solve wrong problem
- Listener's Stance
  - $R_t + R_p + C_a$  to TCOL
- Avoid defensiveness
  - Active listening is NON-defensive
- Four feelings – Mad, Sad, Glad, Afraid
- Axioms on listening
- When you hear the feelings, they go away

# Responding to Concerns

1. Hear feelings first
2. Check out views and images
  1. By asking lots of questions
3. Establish rapport by identifying with the perceptions (Active Listening)
4. Share personal experience
5. Lastly, provide factual information

# Example Questions

- Have you ever heard anything good about radiation?
- Have you been exposed to radiation today?
- If you are exposed, what will happen?
- What's so bad about radiation?
- What is safe? Who decides?
- How do we know what is safe?
- What is the evidence for harm of radiation?
- Is what I am saying believable ?

# What will Happen if you are Exposed to Radiation?

- Ask in different ways
- Do not discount any answers
  - One worker said she would get red bumps all over her body!
- Everyone has some idea or images of consequences of exposures
- If they say, “I do not know”
  - Then ask, “What can you imagine?”

# Tools to Deal with People

- **Understanding fears**
- **Can we talk someone out of their fears ?**
- **Fears are always about  
what we imagine**
- **Therefore, rational technical answers  
may not help**
- **Example for fear of heights**

# When Confronting an Upset Person

- When a person is angry
  - Do not confront their fears
- It is not helpful to say:  
“Why are you afraid?”
- The angry person is not aware of their fear
- Better to say:
  - “You seem angry about - - - - -”  
or “How can I help you?”

# Asking Questions – A Powerful Approach



1. People learn from  
their own answers
  1. Better than from your answers
2. Challenge - how to  
communicate in the  
form of questions ?
3. Reinforce answers  
with proofs (data)

# One Answer for Risk Communication

- Deal with the feelings  
and images first
  - Determine feelings and images  
by asking questions
- Lots of questions !!!***

# Review

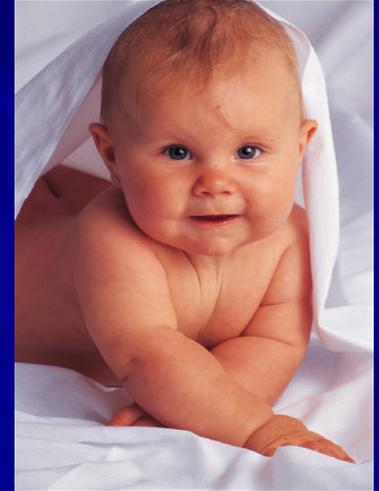
- Many people may have concerns for possible exposures to radiation
- Use Active Listening to hear their fears and feelings
- Ask lots of questions to determine the basis of their fears (images)
- Provide information only as a resource
- Help people find their own answers

# Summary

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# Questions & Evaluation