

Worksheet 5.2.2: Role play for emotion coaching

Role play is a very effective way of illustrating how the ALVS approach can work in conversation with Edi.

As a group or in pairs, think up a scenario in which Edi is very upset about something. Take it in turns to act as the carer using the ALVS approach.

Alternatively use this script to consider how Edi might feel when the carer uses this approach:

Heather says her daughter Charlie often says 'I feel fat and ugly' and when this happens Heather often bursts into tears. Heather uses ALVS as an alternative to bursting into tears. Heather notices Charlie's emotional cues and labels the emotion:

Heather: I notice that your fists are really clenched and that you may be feeling really angry, sad, ashamed, frightened... [Attend and Label].

Charlie: Yes I feel fat and ugly and disgusting.

Heather's automatic emotional reaction is to then cry. This can be a block and prevent the conversation developing, unless Heather owns the emotion thus:

Heather: I'm going to cry, that doesn't mean we can't talk about it *or* I am angry this is happening and that makes me upset too, we should still talk about it *or* I'm going to cry and it's my emotions and I'm going to deal with it.

Notice that Heather doesn't try to reassure Charlie that she is not fat and ugly as this will simply serve to encourage further 'fat' talk. Heather carries on with trying to understand the emotion:

Heather: So you must be in a really bad place.

Charlie: I feel disgusting.

Heather: I understand you don't like things about yourself, so you feel sad.

Charlie: No not sad, disgusting.

Heather: So you feel disgusting.

Charlie looks really disgusted with herself and Heather can take this a step further and take a guess at how bad Charlie is feeling right now. This takes some courage from the carer as it can be painful to acknowledge how bad Edi is feeling.

Heather: So you hate yourself, it is hard for me to hear that. I can see you feel really wretched and it must be horrible for you to feel like that. I am here and I can be your sounding board.

Heather is validating and soothing at the same time. It is too soon for a physical hug, so a verbal hug acts as a stepping stone. Discuss what else Heather might be thinking that is unspoken. Do you think this approach might open the door for further conversations at a later stage?

This exercise illustrates the power of the carer exploring and then validating Edi's emotions. While conversations like this can be difficult, they convey so much to Edi in terms of the unconditional love and support the carer is prepared to give to help Edi, however uncomfortable it might feel at the time.