

BASIC COUNSELLING SKILLS FOR CIRCLES OF SUPPORT



INTRODUCTION

Neighbourhood agents and school convenors face difficult situations when they deal with children whose lives have been disturbed or disrupted by HIV and AIDS and other reasons. They need to learn to use basic counselling skills in order to help children and adults to cope with great hardship.

Children experience great hardship when they watch a parent or caregiver get sicker and sicker. They are badly affected by the loss of a parent or caregiver. In the case of illness or death, children may have to adjust to living with a new caregiver in their own home or somewhere else.

Basic counselling skills are helpful tools that neighbourhood agents and school convenors can use when they visit households in need. In these households they will face situations where children and adults are struggling to cope with problems. These problems may seem to be overwhelming.

The basic counselling skills that neighbourhood agents and school convenors will learn through the Circles of Support Project will help them not to feel powerless in the face of great suffering. Neighbourhood agents and school convenors should start to see themselves as important human resources that can show care and concern and offer different forms of support to children and adults in need.

This session has been written as a guide for facilitators. It provides an outline of a process that participants, with the help of a facilitator, can work through to do the following:

1. Think carefully about your role as a counsellor.
2. Practise some basic counselling skills.
3. Prepare yourself to cope with difficult situations.

This process has been divided into three steps:

- **Step 1:**
Learn to be more comfortable with your role as a counsellor (page 84)
- **Step 2:**
Practise some basic counselling skills (page 88)
- **Step 3:**
Learn how to deal with difficult situations (page 92)

At different stages in this session you will see a box called **Main teaching points**. The points that are written here are the most important messages that you should be thinking about and discussing with participants in this session.



STEP 1

Learn to be more comfortable with your role as a counsellor

Who is involved: neighbourhood agents and school convenors

What you need: Talking Card 1 – **The role of a counsellor**

flipchart

Worksheet – **Facing our fears about counselling others**

TIME
60
mins

In this step, participants learn to become more comfortable with their role as counsellors for the Circles of Support Project. Some participants will already have done household visits while others may not have started yet. In either case it is important for participants to be clear about their role as counsellors when they visit households in need.

Activity

1. Individually, ask participants to think of all the reasons why they have agreed to be neighbourhood agents and school convenors for the Circles of Support Project. Ask them to say what these reasons are and write them down on the flipchart. Underline all those reasons that relate to offering care and support.
2. Hand out a card with the following questions, to each participant. In pairs, ask participants to discuss these questions and to report back to the whole group.

Talking Card 1 - The role of a counsellor

- What is a counsellor?
- Who can be a counsellor?
- What kind of things does a counsellor do?
- Could I be a counsellor? Why?

3. Explain that neighbourhood agents and school convenors are increasingly faced with children who are experiencing hardship in their lives. They will find themselves in situations where they will have to do some basic counselling. They may feel unsure, uncomfortable or even afraid about playing the role of counsellor.
4. In the whole group, ask participants to say what they fear the most about playing the role of counsellor in the Circles of Support Project.
5. In pairs, ask participants to look at Worksheet 1. Explain to participants that when people have a negative attitude about something it may be because they are afraid of something. This worksheet gives some examples of negative attitudes that neighbourhood agents and school convenors may have that make it difficult for them to counsel children and adults in need.

FACING OUR FEARS ABOUT COUNSELLING OTHERS

Read the following examples of negative attitudes towards counselling. Look beyond what the neighbourhood agent or school convenor is saying (their attitude). Think about what fear lies behind what they say.

A neighbourhood agent says: *'I won't know what to say to children who are facing so much hardship.'*

What he fears is...

A school convenor says: *'Teachers have a big job just teaching children. Now they are being asked to counsel children too!'*

What she fears is...

A neighbourhood agent says: *'How can I be a mother to all these children around me that need help?'*

What she fears is...

A school convenor says: *'We are expected to be social workers, but we haven't been trained to do that.'*

What he fears is...

A neighbourhood agent says: *'I've got so many problems of my own to worry about. How will I cope with everyone else's problems?'*

What she fears is...

Activity

1. In small groups, ask participants to discuss:
 - what neighbourhood agents and school convenors may be expected to do when they visit households in need
 - what they will realistically be able to do.
2. Ask one person from each group to report back on the discussion. Write down main points on a flipchart.

Activity

1. In the whole group, ask participants to think about the role of a neighbourhood agent or a school convenor as a counsellor. Read the following statements and ask participants to put up their hands to show which they think is true or false.

My role as a counsellor is to:

- tell people what the solutions are to their problems? True / False
- avoid talking about problems? True / False
- listen to problems in a caring and respectful way? True / False
- help people find their own solutions to problems? True / False
- judge a person or a situation? True / False
- help people feel more in control of their lives? True / False
- express my opinion without being asked for it? True / False
- offer care and support in the best way I can? True / False

Activity

1. In pairs, ask participants to do a short role play.
2. Give each pair a flash card that tells them what to say in this situation. Ask the rest of the group to watch the role plays and to find an example of the following positive responses:

An example of a role play where the neighbourhood agent or school convenor:

- tries to help the person find their own solutions.
- tries to encourage people to think about what is best in their situation.
- tries not to be judgmental but shows care and offers support.
- tries to encourage people to draw on their own personal or community resources.

Role play 1

Sick woman:

I'm not strong enough to look after my children.

Neighbourhood agent:

*Would it be better for you to send the children to a relative?
Maybe it would be better to find someone to help you look after them here?*

Role play 2

Drunk woman slumped over a table.

School convenor:

Can you see that the children are suffering because you are drinking so much. What do you think you can do to control your drinking?

Role play 3

Neighbourhood agent:

If you have any problems before I come back, is there a relative, a friend or a neighbour you can ask for help?

Teenage boy:

There is someone who lives close by who can help me. I will ask him if I need help.

Role play 4

Young girl looking exhausted, preparing food over an open fire.

School convenor:

You look tired, let me help you for a while. Are you going to school each day? Is there anything else that you would like to talk about?

Main teaching points

The role of neighbourhood agents and school convenors as counsellors

DON'T:

- Don't try to solve all the problems
- Don't tell people what they should or shouldn't do
- Don't be judgemental or critical
- Don't make people dependent on you.

DO:

- Do try to help people work towards finding their own solutions
- Do encourage people to think about what would be best in their situation
- Do show that you care and offer support
- Do encourage people not to rely on you but to draw on their own personal or community resources.



STEP 2

Practise some basic counselling skills

Who is involved: neighbourhood agents and school convenors

What you need: flip chart
coloured pencils

Worksheet – ***Put yourself in another person's shoes***

TIME
60
mins

In this step, participants practice using some basic counselling skills. They will need these skills when they visit households where there are adults and children in need.

Activity

1. In the whole group, ask participants what kinds of signs we can look and listen for to try to understand another person. Write up the ideas on flipchart.
2. Read aloud to participants what someone who often listens to people's problems says about listening:

Listening is hard work. When I listen I have to hear the way things are said — the tone, the voice, the expressions and the gestures used. I hear with my ears, but I listen with my eyes and mind and heart and skin and guts as well.

3. Ask participants to remember the different parts of the body we listen with. On a flip chart draw an outline of the body and ask participants to use coloured pencils to colour in the different parts of the body we can listen with.
4. Read the following sentences and ask participants to finish the sentences.

If we listen with our **minds** we may think...

If we listen with our **eyes** we may see...

If we listen with our **hearts** we may feel...

If we listen with our **skin** we may feel...

If we listen with our **guts** we may feel...

Activity

1. Ask participants to work in pairs. Give each pair a copy the Worksheet ***Put yourself in another person's shoes***.

WORKSHEET

PUT YOURSELF IN ANOTHER PERSON'S SHOES

Look at the following pictures and guess what each person is:

- feeling
- thinking.



This child feels:

This child thinks:



This man feels:

This man thinks:



This teacher feels:

This teacher thinks:

Activity

1. Read the following description aloud for participants:

You are a neighbourhood agent in a Circles of Support group. You have received a report from the school about a nine year old girl who is experiencing great hardship. This is what she tells you.

I stay with my father, grandfather and little sister. My father is very sick, he can't walk.

I have to do many chores before school. I have to wash my younger sister in the morning. After washing her in the morning, I take her to a neighbour who looks after her. Then I walk to school.

After school, I buy bread and later I fetch my sister. When I get home, I make tea for my father and then I cook for the family.



2. Ask participants to work in small groups and to answer the questions below:
 - What will you **see** when you listen to this child?
 - What will you **feel** when you listen to this child?
 - What will you **think** when you listen to this child?

Model answers:

What will you see when you listen to this child?

I will see:

- A child who looks tired, dirty, unkept.
- A child who looks sad or depressed.
- A child who looks hopeless.
- A child who does not laugh or play.

What will you feel when you listen to this child?

I will feel:

- I can imagine how hard it must be for this child.
- I want to protect this child.
- I want to do something to help this family.

What will you think when you listen to this child?

I will think:

- This child has had to take on adult responsibilities.
- This child has lost her childhood.
- This child needs someone to help relieve the burden she carries.

Main teaching points

Basic counselling skills

- Learning to listen with different parts of our bodies is an important basic counselling skill.
- When we listen we have to hear the way things are said – the tone, the voice, the expressions and the gestures.
- We need to listen with our eyes and mind and heart and skin and guts as well.



STEP 3

Learn how to deal with difficult situations

Who is involved: neighbourhood agents and school convenors

What you need: Flash cards 1, 2 and 3
blank flash cards

Worksheet – **Think Listen Act (TLA)**

TIME
60
mins

In this step, participants think about three examples of likely difficult situations they may face when they visit households in need. They will also have the opportunity of discussing positive ways of handling these situations.

Activity

1. Divide participants into small groups. Hand out a different flashcard to each group. Ask someone in the group to read aloud the difficult situations that the group must imagine.

Flash card 1

A neighbourhood agent arrives at a household and finds a caregiver drunk. It is impossible to have a conversation with the caregiver. He acts aggressively towards the neighbourhood agent.

Flash card 2

A school convenor arrives at a household to find out why a child has dropped out of school. The parent is hostile towards the school convenor and tells him that she does not need any help. She tells him to leave.

Flash card 3

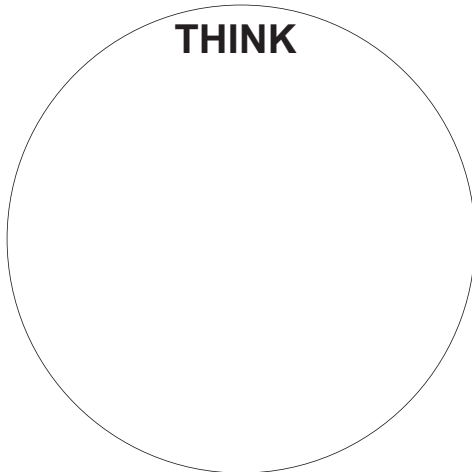
A neighbourhood agent visits a household where a young girl lives alone with her uncle and grandfather. A neighbour has told the neighbourhood agent that the girl told her she is afraid to be alone with her uncle. The girl looks depressed and doesn't talk to anyone. The neighbourhood agent is worried that the girl is being physically or sexually abused by her caregivers.

2. Hand out a copy of the Worksheet **Think Listen Act (TLA)** to each small group.

THINK LISTEN ACT (TLA)

When you are faced with a difficult situation, try not to get confused, angry or distracted. These feelings can stop you from focusing on the situation and thinking about positive ways to cope.

Look at the following flow chart. There are three circles for the three steps that can guide you in a difficult situation.



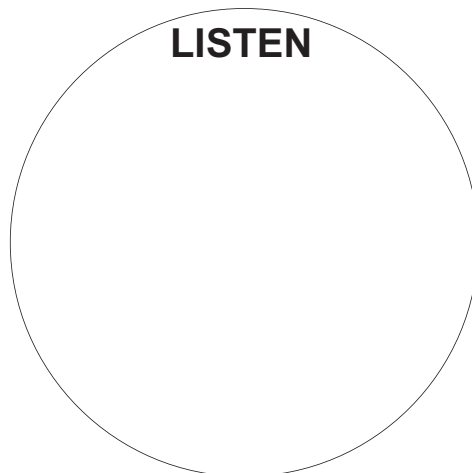
Circle 1: Think.

Go back to Step 1. The role of the neighbourhood agent and school convenor (page 84).

Ask yourself: ***What is my role?***

Then look at the flash card and discuss this question.

Write down your answers in the circle.



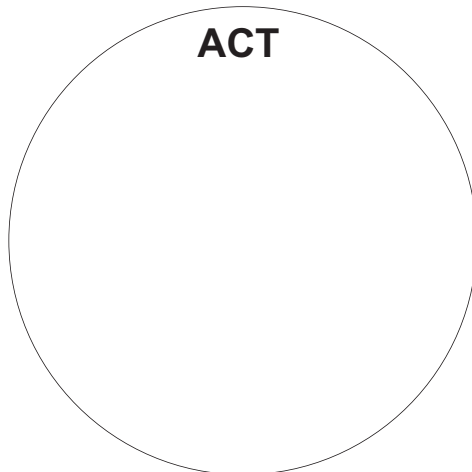
Circle 2: Listen.

Go back to Step 2 (page 88).

Listening with your whole being and putting yourself in someone else's shoes.

Ask yourself: ***What is this person thinking and feeling in this situation?***

How can this information help me?



Circle 3: Act.

What possible action can I take in this situation? Discuss this as a group.

There are some suggestions below:

- Leave
- Argue with the person
- Offer to stay and talk
- Go back to the COS group for help
- Contact an organisation that can help
- Leave a contact number if they change their mind
- Help with any work that is going on
- Take a child away from a household

3. Ask each group to present their TLA plan to one another. Allow participants to comment on these plans.

Main teaching points

Dealing with difficult situations - Think Listen Act

- Neighbourhood agents and school convenors are likely to face some difficult situations when they visit households in need.

- If you expect that a situation is going to be difficult, take someone with you.

Discuss beforehand what you may face and what you can do before the visit.

- It is important to have a TLA plan to guide you in difficult situations.

- Sometimes it may be difficult to know exactly what to do. Ask someone in your COS group who may have more experience than you, for advice.

- Know where to refer children, for example those who you suspect have been abused, for help.

- Know which services to contact when a situation is too difficult for you to handle on your own.

