

## Curiosity, Compassion, and Persistence

There are three qualities essential in a person who wants to provide emotional first aid to others. Those qualities are compassion, curiosity or interest in others, and persistence. No matter how much training you've had, if you're lacking in these three qualities, you'll be largely unable to help your fellow man. No matter how little training you've had, if you possess these three qualities, you'll be able to help your fellow man effectively. Training in an outstanding technique like the Emotional First Aid procedures might mean you can help more quickly and more thoroughly, but the best techniques in the world won't replace even one of these qualities. We've all heard of people whose friends turn to them in times of trouble because they just know they'll feel much better if they talk to that person. Such people have a natural ability to be interested in others, non judgmental, and persistent enough to hear someone out.

This might sound over simplified if you haven't considered the matter before so we'll take up each of those qualities and go over why they're so vital. First of all, let's talk about compassion. In order to experience relief from upsets and traumatic incidents of the past, people must be able to talk to you very freely and openly—and feel safe while doing so. Otherwise they won't be able to express the emotions, attitudes, and feelings that are necessary to gain relief. Consequently they won't feel much better after talking to you.

In order for them to feel safe enough to trust you with their most deeply felt considerations, ideas, or misdeeds, they're going to have to know—absolutely know—that you won't feel critical of them no matter what they tell you. It doesn't matter how awful a thing they've done, or how ridiculous a thing they've done, they need to know you're not going to criticize them or feel critical of them. Then they'll speak freely and not try to protect or defend themselves by withholding their communication. That's where compassion enters into it. If people feel—whether you've openly expressed it or not—the least bit of criticalness on your part, they're going to start defending their actions. They'll try to convince you that their actions really weren't that bad or that they were justified by the circumstances. Any time spent defending their actions is time that won't benefit them.

### **Example**

*Alice had experienced the death of her husband and she'd been unable to recover fully from that death even though it happened years ago. Every*

*time she thought of that period of time, the upset surfaced again. Alice had gone through a whole gamut of emotions. She'd been angry, fearful, hostile, and grief stricken. Few emotions were missed along the way while she was experiencing a loss of that magnitude. She was able to express the grief but not the anger.*

Alice felt that society frowned on a person being angry at a dead spouse and her anger was very strong. She was sure that people would consider it wrong or shameful if they knew how she felt. After all, her husband couldn't help dying. But it didn't help Alice to analytically know that her husband didn't choose to leave her. The fact is that she was very, very angry.

A compassionate facilitator helped Alice finally express the rage and she now feels tremendous relief about the loss.

If the person to whom you're speaking is known by you to be very compassionate and understanding, you'll probably try expressing a bit of the anger and watch them closely for their reaction. When you can see they're not horrified, shocked, or critical, you'll feel free to express a bit more. Eventually, you'll blow off all the steam that's necessary and feel much better. Then you'll finally experience the relief that you need from that traumatic incident. The whole difference in whether or not you're able to work through that cycle and get rid of those angry feelings will be the level of compassion that you perceive to be there on the part of the person to whom you're speaking.

### ***Example***

*Bill was trying to recover from an addiction. There were times when he had stolen from someone to support his habit and committed a number of other harmful acts. These went against his upbringing and the ethical codes he subscribed to when he was sober, and he thought the crimes were too awful to relate. He was not doing well in his attempts at recovery. When a compassionate friend finally made it possible for him to tell these secrets, he began to make a successful recovery.*

Compassion involves reserving judgment. It's not your job in trying to help someone to judge that person. Every major religion and philosophy in the world makes that point. If you can become non-judgmental and very compassionate, you're halfway home when it comes to helping people.

Another factor which plays a large role in emotional first aid is the fact that every person on this planet has what could be called “defensive mechanisms.” Those are mechanisms that can be used to defend one and they are always adopted during moments of extreme stress. When you begin to show the least bit of criticalness or tendency toward being judgmental, people’s defense mechanisms will be stimulated and move in on them. They will begin to hide what they’ve done, or spend time justifying and defending themselves. At that point, all help ceases. There’s no benefit gained on their part from spending an hour defending a position. Absolutely none! They’ll never feel better. They’ll never change their mind about anything. They’ll never improve their behavior if they are wasting their time defending it.

There’s one last technique that can help when the urge to criticize is strong. Picture yourself being in the client’s shoes. Imagine having to tell another about your deepest, darkest secret, most ugly thought, most terrible deed, or most embarrassing moment and then imagine what or how you’d like that other person to react. I think you’d want some compassion in your turn. We all want compassion when we’re confessing something. When you picture what you’d like, what kind of person you would want to be speaking to if you were confessing, make an effort to be that person for the friend or client you’re helping.

You’ll find if you apply the two techniques I’ve mentioned, you can pop yourself out of a critical attitude and into a much more compassionate one quite rapidly.

An added bonus is that you’ll make tremendous gains out of becoming a more compassionate person. What follows is an interactive procedure that will help you take a very close look at your own experiences with compassionate listening. If you are doing this procedure on your own, write down your responses to each question in a journal. If you have a friend who would also like to become more compassionate, become partners in doing this procedure and ask each other the questions in turn and listen closely to each other’s answers.

### ***Procedure One***

First answer question one and also subquestions a, b, c, and d. Then answer questions two and three alternatively and repetitively until you feel some relief and have had a realization on the subject.

1. Have you ever been taught that it is necessary to use disapproval or criticalness to improve another's behavior?
  - a) Recall the moment you first agreed with that idea. (If no agreement, go to Procedure Two.)
  - b) When was it?
  - c) Where were you at the time?
  - d) What convinced you of the rightness of that idea?
2. Was there a time when that advice appeared to work? Describe it.
3. Was there a time when it did not work? Describe it.

### ***Procedure Two***

For each of the parts below, first answer question one and then answer questions a and b alternately and repetitively until you feel some relief and have had a realization on the subject.)

#### Part A

1. Recall a time when you had to tell someone about an embarrassing or shameful event.
  - a) How did they respond to your communication? Describe it.
  - b) How did you react to their response? Describe it.

#### Part B

1. Recall a time when someone told you about an embarrassing or shameful event.
  - a) How did you respond to his or her communication? Describe it.
  - b) How did he or she react to your response? Describe it.

#### Part C

1. Recall a time when you observed one person telling another about an embarrassing or shameful event.
  - a) What was the response to the communication? Describe it.
  - b) How did the person react to that response? Describe it.

## Part D

1. Recall a time when you did something embarrassing or shameful.

a) How did you react toward your body and mind? Describe it.

b) How did your body/mind respond to that treatment? Describe it.

Curiosity is the second trait that's a key factor in our ability to use emotional first aid successfully. Interest is probably a good name for it too. There are some people who feel that curiosity can be intrusive or upsetting. Curiosity is upsetting when it isn't coupled with compassion. If you're feeling that the other person is curious about you, and that they have a critical feeling toward you or toward what they might find out about you, you'll find their curiosity or interest very upsetting. If you sense that the person is compassionate, then the interest or curiosity isn't upsetting. It is, in fact, very reassuring and comforting.

All of us enjoy having someone show a genuine compassionate interest in us. It's a trait that makes it possible for us to open up and speak freely. If you feel that the other person is bored or lacking interest in you or what you're saying, you're not going to talk very much. If you can sense that the other person has a very strong interest and curiosity about what you are saying, and that they're compassionate, you'll find yourself being able to express those deep, dark secrets that have been hiding there way too long. If you want to help a friend or a loved one through an upsetting or traumatic event or simply a difficult situation, and if you can be compassionate enough that they want to talk and interested enough that they will continue to talk, you're 90 percent of the way there.

The last key factor is persistence. It sometimes takes a while to get to the bottom of a traumatic incident. If you don't have the persistence to get all the way through the incident, then you might as well not have started. We can't plunk someone down in the middle of a traumatic moment, let that person get all involved in it, and then not follow through long enough to complete the process. Our intent has to be to take our friends or loved ones all the way through. Emotional first aid is designed to make it possible to do that.

The better you become at the techniques of emotional first aid, the more quickly the people you work with will be able to experience a feeling of relief. But persistence is still a major part of the formula and it is a factor that the other person needs to sense in you. If a client feels that your interest may be short lived, he or she won't feel safe taking to you. There

has to be a certainty there on the part of the person you're helping that you are someone who follows through and that you're not going to leave him or her in the middle of a traumatic incident. Clients need to know that you're a persistent enough person that you will help them all the way through this. If they sense that about you, they'll be willing to open up areas that might be lengthy and very troublesome. In doing that, they'll make some wonderful gains.

The absolute three basics that all of the technology in this booklet is based on is founded on that one premise. If someone got no other training at all but learned to be a little more compassionate, show a little more interest, and a little more persistence, that person would have increased tremendously their ability to help someone. If you get nothing else out of this booklet then what we've just covered, that alone would stand you in good stead. It would make you better able to help your friends, your children, your acquaintances, and your clients.

When you're in the middle of talking about a traumatic event and things get rough—when the person is looking at some very upsetting things, dramatizing them heavily, and you're wondering if he's ever going to get through it—the key is to go back to these three basic points. Step up your feeling of compassion and increase your interest. Get very interested in just how difficult these things are for your friends or loved ones to look at and just what they have to go through. Then increase your feeling of persistence. It's a matter of making a decision within yourself that you are not going to let this person down, you are not going to stop until you get where you intended to take them. At the point in time, where you make those decisions, you'll find your friends or loved ones make sudden forward progress. They sense you won't quit and consequently get new strength to carry on.

These are concepts that experienced emotional first aid practitioners have used often in the middle of long, tough grueling sessions. They just take a moment to reflect on those three basic things and make certain that none of them have slipped. If so, they put them back in very strongly and sit back in amazement to watch the case unfold.