

Handling Difficult Situations/Conversations when using Making Every Contact Count Approach

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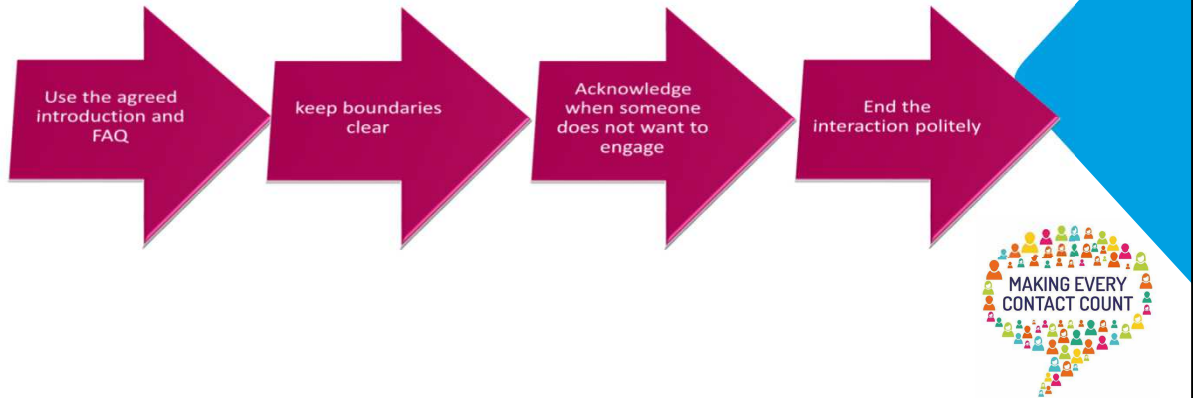
Learner Guide

This learner guide on handling difficult situations/conversations when supporting the COVID-19 vaccine programme will take you through the simple steps of what may create certain reactions and how to respond.

It will provide an overview of:

- The 4 principles of using the Making Every Contact Count approach for behaviour change
- Understanding of boundaries and feelings that may create difficult situations/conversations
- Paying attention to feelings and behaviours, your own as well as the receiver so you understand how to react or why they are reacting in certain ways
- Attention to yourself and how you are delivering the message/communicating verbally and non verbally but also in looking after yourself so you do not take a hard day home with you or allow it to impact on the rest of your conversations
- Discusses the importance of remaining 'adult' in conversation by briefly exploring transactional analysis and how by our life experiences we move through different reactions/emotions from childhood through to adulthood
- Key list of Do's and Don'ts

4 key principles when engaging using MECC



Making Every Contact Count (MECC) is aimed at the implementation of the first stage of behaviour change.

How you move through these steps is determined by the member, their skills and confidence, and also the response from the service user. Each step is designed to help you flow through the normal use of MECC but is also there as a guide if confronted with more difficult situations and conversations to help you to end the conversation on a positive note.

As part of the communication process you need to be able to Interpret verbal and non-verbal signals which are given and act on them.

If you are confronted with the situation where the individual does not want to engage in the COVID-19 vaccine conversation, wish the client well and explain this is fine but they can contact the local authority if they decide they do want more information.

- ▶ Emotional reactions to another person's distress are normal: pleasure, sadness, anxiety, shock, confusion, overwhelming.
- ▶ Depending on our own resilience on a day we might react differently but we have to manage this carefully.

Difficult conversations are rare but might include:

- Timing/Bad Timing for the door knock
- An angry client, abusive language or aggressive behaviour.
- A client that is upset, lonely and may cry
- A client with a lot of issues and difficulties or a terminal illness
- A client with mental health issues, depression or potentially suicidal thoughts
- A client who has suffered bereavement, potentially due to the COVID virus
- A client with money problems or other anxiety and worries



The aim is to engage in short conversations to promote vaccine confidence, it is not to delve more deeply than we need, or to start conversations which may become unmanageable. This does not mean you cannot be friendly however it is important to manage your time.

If you feel they have needs that are beyond the normal remit or need specialist support you should gather information, signpost back to their GP and then discuss the difficult situation with your Manager or Team Lead for the day. This allows you to look after your wellbeing and not take the days more difficult situations home with you.

Emotional Behaviours and “big” feelings:

- Busyness – speak more quickly, fill up all the space
- Enter into ‘Fixer’/‘doing’ mode. Control/organise/structure a mess
- Withdraw/detach/ignore
- Chastise, judge
- These are all normal human responses to feeling uncomfortable

Healthy Responses

- Be aware of our own responses
- Hear another’s distress without entering into that distress.
- ‘Be present’ without reacting to the need to ‘do’ while the person has opportunity to express their distress.

Source: [Communication skills 6: difficult and challenging conversations | Nursing Times](#)



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It is normal to have emotional reactions to another person’s distress e.g. pleasure, sadness, anxiety, shock, confusion, overwhelm. Depending on our own resilience on a day we might react differently.

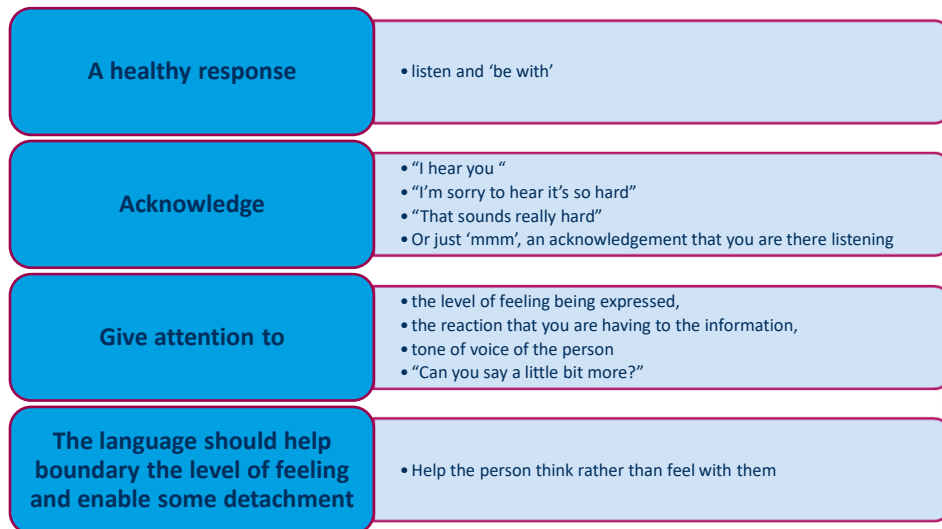
It is important to notice the level of emotion both of the person and ourselves and to give some acknowledgement of these.

What behaviours do we notice in response to a ‘big’ feeling?

- Busyness – speak more quickly, fill up all the space
- Enter into ‘Fixer’/‘doing’ mode. Control/organise/structure a mess
- Withdraw/detach/ignore
- Chastise, judge

These are all normal human responses to feeling uncomfortable.

A healthy response is to be aware of our own responses and ideally to be able to hear another’s distress without entering into that distress. The model is simply ‘be present’ without reacting to the need to ‘do’ while the person has opportunity to express their distress.



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1. A healthy response is to be aware of our own responses and ideally to be able to hear and see how the other person is feeling without being pulled into any upset they may show or verbalise.
2. Acknowledge the feeling to let the other person know that they are being heard.
3. Give attention to what you are hearing and seeing so you know how to respond. Clues will be in how the person portrays themselves verbally and non verbally.

Does the person appear stressed, are their thoughts organised, clear or confused, are they speaking quickly, do they appear withdrawn, passive or are they engaged and happy to have a 2 way conversation with you?

If the person appears stressed leave them space to respond and to talk, don't interrupt, let them be heard.

Remember you do not need to be an expert, specialist or a counsellor. The person you are talking with may be feeling the stress of COVID and do not wish to engage. Simply allow them time to speak and then if the response feels stressed you do not need to continue the conversation. Thank them for their time politely, explain that you can leave them the information so if they wish to find more out at a later stage they can and then politely leave.

Attention to Yourself

Notice your own feelings

If you are anxious your own ability to think clearly is diminished and your energy may be fast or busy

In this case try and slow things down. It's ok to pause the conversation briefly. You might say

- "Could you just hold on a minute please?"

Sources: [Source: How to Navigate Difficult Conversations – Mindful](#)
[Four Mindful Skills to Handle Difficult Conversations - Mindful Schools](#)



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It is okay to acknowledge your own feelings and wellbeing. If you are feeling anxious take the time to stop and breathe in your thoughts. This will allow you time to focus and to not be pulled into the other person's space and feelings.

It is okay to ask for one moment to respond to gather yourself.

Remaining “adult” in conversations

Emotions may trigger learned child or parent reactions instead of adult ones, it's important to remain an adult in the way you handle a conversation with someone struggling with an emotional reaction:

- Base on thinking not feeling
- Rationalise their evidence, reflect and summarise what you know/are hearing
- Ask open questions and reason
- Use I statements (I think, realise, see, believe)
- Be objective
- Assertion of your thoughts, not confrontation
- Focus on the underlying issue rather than the reaction

Source: [Transactional Analysis - A Model for Effective Communications \(executivecoachingconcepts.com\)](https://www.executivecoachingconcepts.com)



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We have many learned responses and reactions from our experiences of childhood through to adulthood, known as Parent, Adult, Child (PAC). People can interact from one of three PAC “ego-states”. This is known as transactional analysis.

Each one of the ego states is a system of communication with its own language and function. The Parent's is a language of *values*, the Adult's is a language of *logic and rationality*, and the Child's is a language of *emotions*.

Communication can continue between two people as long as transactions are complementary: crossed transactions are important because they disrupt communication.

The reaction you may potentially get from others is not to do with you personally but with how they are feeling at that moment too, or what they are experiencing with COVID. They could be going through change/loss/grief and this may translate as a child's emotional reaction. When this happens they need:

- Predictability
- Consistency
- Reassurance

You being there may make them feel this predictability, consistency and reassurance has been disturbed and they may vent that angst on you. They feel that you have come to lecture them or enforce an action on them, the parent: child or Adult: child relationship.

To handle these conversations:

- Base your response on thinking not feeling
- Rationalise their evidence, reflect and summarise what you know/are hearing
- Ask open questions and reason
- Use I statements (I think, realise, see, believe)
- Be objective
- Focus on the underlying issue rather than the reaction
- Take a breath, pause, re-gather your thoughts and then restart
- If the communication interaction is not matching and the person does not wish to engage it is okay to end the conversation politely

Remember peoples feelings and reactions stem from many variables which is why experts train and develop specific skills sets to provide support for different circumstances. **You are not an expert or expected to be one in this role**

Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Empathise or Hear what is being said
- ✓ Take a deep breath, relax, and remain calm, neutral and respectful
- ✓ Gather the information they choose to share
- ✓ Pause and think before responding
- ✓ Look after yourself afterwards

Don't:

- ☐ Advise
- ☐ Investigate
- ☐ Share own experiences
- ☐ Say you will do something that you can't or isn't within remit
- ☐ Join their world
- ☐ Tell the person that you know how they feel
- ☐ Ignore how you feel

Do not let a bad experience with one person affect your whole day/shift or your family life Keep a sense of perspective and a professional attitude

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What you can do and what you should not do if in a difficult conversation. It is important to recognise that it is human to have feelings and emotions.

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- ✓ Take a deep breath, relax, and remain calm, neutral and respectful
- ✓ Gather the information they choose to share
- ✓ Pause and think before responding
- ✓ Look after yourself afterwards

Don't:

- ☐ Advise
- ☐ Investigate
- ☐ Share own experiences
- ☐ Say you will do something that you can't or isn't within remit
- ☐ Join their world - Do not lose your temper; raise your voice; get angry, sarcastic or provocative; or attempt to humiliate the aggressor
- ☐ Do not tell the person that you know how they feel, but do try to see the situation from their perspective
- ☐ Ignore how you feel

The skill is to remain calm. It's important to recognise that it's rarely personal. Ask yourself what you contributed to this particular negative reaction. Was it a poor intro or a weak tone of voice? Use good questions (if allowed) to establish why the COVID-19 vaccine isn't of interest. Yes, you should be able to move on and don't let it get you down. Equally, you shouldn't display an arrogant or uncaring approach. Your attitude should be positive at all times. Keep a sense of perspective and a professional attitude.

Remember: If the communication interaction is not matching and the person does not wish to engage it is okay to end the conversation politely and leave any information with them that they are willing to accept.

Do not let a bad experience with one person affect your whole day/shift or your family life.

Summary

- Interactions can be emotionally charged, involving fear and worry, and distress leading to hostile or aggressive behaviour – it is not created by you
- Observing and listening skills can identify, at an early stage, situations that may escalate
- Allow the situation to pass, let the person talk, listen, show empathy, then talk
- Take a pause, a breath to refocus
- Should never be afraid to ask for help when dealing with difficult situations
- End a call politely if the person is not engaging with you



Interactions can be emotionally charged, involving fear and worry, and distress leading to hostile or aggressive behaviour – it is not created by you

Observing and listening skills can identify, at an early stage, situations that may escalate. Allow the situation to pass, let the person talk, listen, show empathy, then talk.

To help you feel ready take a pause, a breath to refocus.

You should never be afraid to ask for help when dealing with difficult situations or to end a call politely if the person is not engaging with you.