

RENEW

Review

February 2019

RENEW counseling: Skilled staff; Nutrition-focused

Try the activity on your own or with others from your agency.

RENEW Review Activity: Self disclosure

What is self-disclosure?

Self-disclosure is when you share information about yourself during counseling. Sometimes we share because a participant asks us a personal question. Sometimes it happens because we feel like our experience is relevant to the conversation. Sometimes it is because we want to make a connection with the participant.

Is self-disclosure okay during counseling?

The answer is “It depends.” The thing to remember is when the participant asks you a personal question, the question is not about you; it’s about the participant. Some things to consider:

- Will sharing keep the counseling participant-centered or does it make it counselor-centered?
- Are you sharing because of your own feelings or because of what the participant needs?
- What are you comfortable sharing about your personal information or experiences?

Here are a few ideas:

- Self-disclosure is powerful, so use it sparingly and only in service to the participant.
- When providing advice use “Explore-offer-explore” which keeps counseling participant centered.
- When offering advice, we encourage offering neutral and evidence-based information. This means using the more generalized “Many parents find...” rather than “When my baby was little, I found...” Neutral means it is safe for the participant to disagree or not accept the advice. Offering personal experience is usually not neutral.
- Consider the power differential between certifier and participant. When the focus is on the certifier’s story, the power differential is magnified.
- When asked a personal question – minimize your experience and opinion then make an effort to hear more about their concern, experience, or opinion.
 - “I’d be glad to answer that, but first I’m curious where that question comes from.”
 - “My experience may be different than yours. I’d like to focus more on your thoughts about this.”
- If a personal question seems to be a challenge (e.g. “have you ever had ...?”), try acknowledging where the participant is and reflect their feelings.
 - “I hear that ____ is hard and so many people don’t understand. That must be frustrating.”
- If you find yourself telling the same personal story to many participants and in the same way each time, you are likely not tailoring your counseling to the needs of the individual participant.

Case Studies:

- A. Cardi is breastfeeding her 2-week-old baby and is experiencing some challenges. During the enrollment assessment Cardi asks, “Have you breastfed a baby? I bet you never had these kinds of problems, did you?”

How might you respond to Cardi?

- B. You are recertifying Rhianna’s 2-year-old. Rhianna has been telling you about how her toddler, Lana, is just too busy to want to sit down for meals. She feels like she needs to give Lana snacks she can carry with her rather than try to make her sit down. You remember what it was like when your child was 2 and have some ideas that worked well for you during that time.

How might you respond to Rhianna?

Practice- five-day focus

For the next five days, pay attention to how and when you self-disclose.

- a. What self-disclosure situations came up for you? How did you handle them?
- b. Reflect on whether those situations felt participant-centered or did they feel more counselor-centered?