Tips and Tools for Connecting: PEARLA

This simple tool provides some tips for improving your ability to connect using the PEARLA technique.

**Presence**

The Three Breaths Technique

1. Take a deep breath and say to yourself as you exhale, “I am present and focused.”
2. Take a second deep breath and say to yourself as you exhale, “I am letting go.”
3. Take a third deep breath and say to yourself as you exhale, “I wonder what’s next?”

*Adapted from Christina Baldwin, Calling the Circle: The First and Future Culture, 1998, Bantam Books.*

**Empathy**

When another person is behaving badly, shifting your mindset so you are open to what may be happening for them without making judgments is difficult. Engaging from a place of empathy is a good way to respond when strong emotions are present. It allows you to support the person and manage your own reaction to their emotions.

Here are some more tips to think about when you are faced with strong emotions…

- Use the Three Breaths Technique
- Use silence and remain supportive
- Focus and notice your own reactions—are you calm?
- Be empathetic—try to understand what is happening
- Ask questions with concern for their well-being
- Listen openly
- Acknowledge—let them know you see how upset they are
- Apologize if appropriate
- Take a time out
- Set limits on abusive or attacking behavior
- Arrange to talk together when everyone is less stressed
Tips and Tools for Connecting: PEARLA (continued)

Acknowledgement

There are many ways to acknowledge what is happening for someone. Effectively acknowledging what matters is a way to build trust, de-escalate the situation, and help the person feel understood.

Remember: Understand first; explain later

Acknowledging what matters to someone shows respect and invites collaboration.

Acknowledging why it matters to them demonstrates empathy and understanding.

Example:

- I know it is important for you to have input into this decision.
- I know it is important for you to have input into this decision so that it feels like a fair process.

Try the following reflection exercise to practice this technique.

Scenario:

Mary comes in late to work and starts giving people the stink eye; she is muttering to herself about the idiot on the freeway who cut her off and nearly caused an accident; she does not make eye contact with anyone and she is tossing her things around and giving off a very negative vibe making it difficult to approach her.

Q1: What could be going on for Mary? What would cause her to behave this way? Come up with several options.

Q2: What is your initial reaction to this type of situation? Are you concerned that if you say something you will make things worse?

Q3: Come up with three responses you could make that would acknowledge what Mary might be experiencing. A sample is provided for you. Practice saying the responses out loud to a friend—it takes a while to be comfortable with this.

Sample: It sounds like you had trouble with the traffic today. It is frustrating to run late.

Now you try ...
Tips and Tools for Connecting: PEARLA (continued)

Reflecting and Reframing

Reflecting and Reframing is a key engagement technique. The goal is to reflect back what may be important to the person who is making the statement and provide an alternative way to view the situation that captures what matters most to that person.

This takes a great deal of practice to do well and to do in the moment. Here are some practice statements to work with. Try to come up with two options for each statement.

Sample Statement 1: “Doesn’t anyone know what they’re doing around here?”

Reframe:
1. It sounds like there is information that you feel you are not getting- what information would be helpful to you right now? (Reframe from incompetence to lack of information)
2. It sounds like you are not able to rely on the staff- tell me what would make you more comfortable. (Reframe to reliability and support)

Sample Statement 2: “He is the most incompetent doctor I have ever seen!”

Reframe:
1. Having trust in the people you rely on is essential.
2. You sound upset. What would be help you feel assured that you have the support you need from the team?

Now you try:

Statement 3: Don’t you think she should be fired for what she did?

Statement 4: I don’t want to have any more conversations about this; they just need to follow through and do what I say.

Statement 5: No one ever listens to what I have to say anyway, so why should I speak up and say anything?

Reframing Resources:


Tips and Tools for Connecting: *PEARLA* (continued)

**Ask Clarifying Questions**

One way to de-escalate a situation, to get a better understanding, and to create connection is to ask Questions of Curiosity rather than give Advice. It is also a form of perspective taking. Questions of Curiosity are questions you don’t know the answer to that help the other person clarify what is going on for them. They are particularly useful if the person is upset.

Try to avoid “why” questions—they tend to feel judgmental. For example:

- Why are you behaving this way? (A “why” question)
- What has upset you? (A Question of Curiosity)

Here are some samples to compare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions of Curiosity</th>
<th>Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What has gotten you so upset?</td>
<td>You just need to calm down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does yelling get you what you need?</td>
<td>Stop yelling—no one is listening to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am wondering—do you notice a pattern in how often you seem to be frustrated lately?</td>
<td>Maybe you just need a break so you aren’t so frustrated all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you tried so far to address this?</td>
<td>Have you tried just telling her to stop?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think is the impact on the team of your current behavior? Do you want to know?</td>
<td>If you don’t stop, no one is going to want to work with you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| What is behind your question? It feels like there is more to it than what you are saying to me. | This is just a power play.  
OR—       
Don’t try to control everything that happens. |
| What does support (respect) look like to you?       | I do respect you.                          
OR—       
I am very supportive. |
| Of all the things you mention, what do you feel is the priority issue? | We can’t fix everything at once.  
OR—       
You are never going to make everyone happy. |
| What has changed since the last time you tried to have this conversation? | He clearly didn’t get it when you talked to him last time. |
| What do you think you have done to contribute to the situation? | You shouldn’t have been so direct with her.  
OR—       
Maybe you should have gone to her supervisor.  
OR—       
I wouldn’t have brought it up. It just made things worse for you. |
| Is there anything you wish you would have done differently? |                                            |