

RCI Virtual Empathy Takeaways

- Importance of empathy in helping fields
 - Develops a connection between you and others in the “room”
 - Allows program participants to know they are in a safe space with a caring professional
 - Helps program participants shift focus to themselves
- Challenges of demonstrating empathy in a virtual setting
 - Distance, not in the room together
 - Technology as a barrier between you and your participant
 - Cannot see or read body language
 - We become “just a head,” talking from a “box”
- Virtual empathy
 - Requires the caring professional to be cognizant of their:
 - Body Language
 - Facial expressions
 - Eyes open, back straight, relaxed, non-tense expression
 - Smile; be happy to be in this space with the person on the other end
 - Verbal Language
 - Creating an empathetic expression involves adding to your existing sentence or expression to make feelings even stronger when paired with body language
 - Use empathetic intensifiers such as really, very much, deeply, positively, strongly, fully
 - E.g. “Hi, my name is Lezlie and I am really excited to meet you!”
 - Tone
 - Do not speak fast, harsh, with sharp sentences
 - Speak slowly, with an uplifting, and confident voice
 - Remember to pair it with body and verbal language
 - You are “here” to help - they need to “hear” that
- The secret to virtual empathy – “The Story”
 - Know your story
 - Everyone has been through difficult times
 - Everyone has emotions
 - Everyone has had to overcome something significant in their lives (you would not be here if you had not)

“There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.”

— Rosalynn Carter

- Know your story (continued)
 - Knowing your story also means you have reflection on that story
 - You recognize and understand the journey you have been on and have some closure on that journey
 - Closure means you have some type of resolution; closure does not mean you got the happy ending
- Know their story
 - Not what is on the referral form
 - Not what you have heard from others
 - Not what the assessment says
 - Ask what their story is
 - Remember once the story has been spoken, it cannot be taken back - be prepared to respond empathetically and with care
 - Let them have the “stage” and be patient; do not fill the silence (this is where some of our undiscovered emotions live)
 - Use gentle prompts:
 - How did you begin taking care of you loved one?
 - What do you think of your caregiving experience so far?
- Being virtual means you also need to protect yourself
 - Emotion Contagion
 - Happy face vs. sad face
 - The influence of emotions of an individual on yourself
 - This can be seen both direct and indirectly
 - Remember emotions are similar to a virus and can be “caught”
 - We can “feel” those feelings of those really intense emotions
 - To prevent negative emotion contagion, make sure you are in the right space before the session by doing things such as:
 - Listening to soothing music
 - Stepping outside
 - Taking a walk
 - Meditating
 - Distinguishing Online Appearance vs. Reality
 - How individuals present in a virtual setting may not be an accurate portrayal of their reality

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- Distinguishing Online Appearance vs. Reality (continued)
 - Societal norms, cultural norms, and other factors can magnify importance of how participants may be perceived in a virtual setting by others, even if it is not an accurate portrayal of where they are right now
 - Participants may not elevate their voices and express their needs if the virtual environment lacks empathy and trust
 - Be prepared to encourage honesty with your program participant and acknowledge everyone goes through their journey differently

- Healthy Boundaries
 - Protects both you, as a caring professional, and your program participant
 - No matter how you deliver your program, “know and name” your healthy boundaries
 - Do not be scared to admit if you feel that healthy boundaries are being blurred

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