Taking Care of Self at Work and at Home

Michelle Pearson & David Ness

Student Counselling Centre
Outline

Our goal is to provide you with information, ideas and skills to help you before, during, and after challenging interactions with students.

- What is going on? Our current context.
- Responding to Crises and Emergencies
- Strategies
What do you think contributes to how students interact with you?

• External Factors
  o Academic responsibilities
  o Family expectations
  o Financial worries
  o Competition
  o Mental Health
  o Unexpected negative events
  o Course content
  o Evaluation methods
  o Time pressure
  o Workplace atmosphere

• Internal Factors
  o Emotional state
  o Ability to manage emotions
  o Physical health
  o Cognitive abilities
  o Work skills
  o Cultural self
  o Interpersonal skills
  o Overall personal development
  o Self-efficacy
  o Knowledge areas
Essence of What We Do: Initiating and/or Responding to Connection Bids

(Gottman)

• A connection bid is any single expression that is used to try to connect with someone.
• It can be verbal or nonverbal; clear or unclear.
• 3 ways to respond to connection bids:
  • “turn towards”
  • “turn away”
  • “turn against”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection Bid</th>
<th>Turning-Toward Response</th>
<th>Turning-Away Response</th>
<th>Turning-Against Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’m here to get accommodations for my finals next week.”</td>
<td>“Thanks for coming by. Unfortunately, we do have a 2 week prior notification policy but lets see if there is anything I can do.”</td>
<td>“I’m sorry but you can’t because of our policy”</td>
<td>“You should have come in sooner than this. We can’t do anything now. Being so disorganized isn’t going to help you. You should work on that”</td>
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Email to student:  
“You need to come in right away to meet with me.”  
“Okay, I’ll be there as soon as I can. Is later today or tomorrow okay?”  
No response from student.  
“Could I meet with Jessica instead. I find her more helpful than you.”

“I need to talk to someone right away. I can’t wait. Can’t you fit me in?”  
“You’re sounding worried and upset. I don’t know if we can set up a meeting today but maybe I can help now.”  
“I told you already. No. You can’t see some right away.”  
“Look….you’re no more important than the other students who want to be seen. Now calm down and wait over there.”
Initiating Connection Bids (Gottman)

• How a person starts an interaction can have a big impact on the tone and direction of the exchange.
  o “It’s not what you said but how you said it.”
• Use a “soft start-up” rather than a “harsh start-up”
• Soft start-ups are characterized by:
  o Saying something positive;
  o Expressing appreciation and gratitude;
  o Starting with an “I” statement;
  o No “stockpiling” of complaints:
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<th>Strategy</th>
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<td>Student hands in a draft of a document. You have some revision suggestions for the student.</td>
<td>“You really need to do a better job of organizing your writing. I didn’t know what you meant at times.”</td>
<td>Say something positive</td>
<td>“You’ve clearly put in a lot of work on this. I have a few revision suggestions but this is really well done.”</td>
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<td>A student who frequents your office comes in again to complain about more things.</td>
<td>“Yes….what is it this time? Is there ANYTHING I can actually help with?”</td>
<td>Express appreciation and gratitude</td>
<td>“I really appreciate how much this matters to you. Any ideas how we can change things?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>A student no-shows for an appointment that you fit in for them at the last minute.</td>
<td>You should have called to cancel your appointment when you knew you wouldn’t be coming. That’s the considerate thing to do.”</td>
<td>Starting with an “I” statement</td>
<td>“I was worried about what kept you from your appointment that we set up. Next time, please let us know if you can’t make it.”</td>
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<td>A staff member who you supervise has made yet another mistake and you’re beyond frustrated.</td>
<td>“So how come you didn’t get that work done I assigned a few days ago? It’s just like that project you’ve been working on for a month now. Where’s that at? And……you need to stop stretching your breaks too long and leaving work a few minutes early most days.”</td>
<td>No stockpiling of complaints</td>
<td>“I need to talk to you about that work I assigned a few days ago that I said I needed today. Where are you at with that?”</td>
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Some Connection Bids are **INTENSE**

- Some people will present in crisis – very strong bid for help.
  - What is the difference between a crisis and an emergency?

- People in a “crisis” state may not initially appear different from someone in an emergency state:
  - Hyperventilating
  - Crying
  - Shaking
  - Agitated demeanor
  - Difficulty speaking
  - Confusion
  - Bizarre speech
  - Focusing problems
  - Distracted
  - Hitting objects or self
Crisis Presentations

• A crisis is individually determined.
  o Most everyone has experienced some kind of crisis.
  o Characterized by feeling overwhelmed – difficulty in coping (coping resources are exceeded).
  o A wider range of emotions are felt – more than what the person is accustomed to – and this can lead to feelings of fear, anxiety and depression.
  o Common student cues for a crisis response?

• In contrast to an emergency, a crisis may not require immediate action beyond providing support, calming suggestions and guidance.
Emergency Presentations

- An emergency is clear to everyone
  - Much less frequent but many crisis situations can feel like an emergency.
  - Like with a crisis situation, students feel that they cannot cope and that they feel overwhelmed. In an emergency, the situation will often feel unbearably difficult. Can lead to:
    - Panic attacks;
    - Desire to harm self or suicidal thoughts
    - Desire to harm someone else
    - Loss of touch with reality – student may be experiencing a psychotic episode

- Requires an immediate response. Student may lose some freedom to self-determine options.
Responding to Crisis and Emergency Presentations

• In both situation, focus on maintaining your calm and caring for yourself. We call this self-regulating:
  o In the moment – take a few deep breaths and remind yourself that you have to start by connecting with the student and finding out what is concerning them.
  o Before or after an interaction:
    ▪ 45 second relaxation cycle
      ✓ Opening the Diaphragm
      ✓ The “Wet Noodle”
    ▪ Pleasure walk

• Try to not contribute to negative energy transfer between the two of you.
Responding to Crisis and Emergency Presentations

• If possible (emergency situation may not allow for this), explore what is concerning the student. Consider:
  o Having both you and the student sit if possible;
  o Indicating that you see that student is very upset (e.g., “You look like you’re having a really tough day, can I help in some way?”)
  o Maintaining an open body language position;
  o Exploring for understanding and asking questions to clarify;
  o Thanking the student for coming in and for sharing
  o Not moving too quickly to suggest campus resources – sometimes in our zeal to help, we jump on the first topic that we can help with.

  o Ask the student if they would like to learn about resources that can help and consider stating that you would like them to get the best help possible and that that may not be you.
Responding to Crisis and Emergency Presentations

• Your interaction with a student can turn into an emergency situation at any time.
  • Student may express an intention to self-harm, harm others or may express suicidal thoughts.
  • Student may not seem lucid and therefore not safe.
  • Must always be taken seriously.

• When in an emergency situation, do not leave student alone and consult as soon as possible with appropriate campus resource or off-campus resources.
Taking Care of Self: Self Regulating

• Boundary Setting
• Self-Compassion
• Forgiveness
• Positive Psychology
Boundary Setting

• What makes boundary setting difficult?
  o Haven’t developed this skill yet
  o Being unprepared to set boundaries
  o Can “feel” the need from the help-seeker
  o Have a strong “helping” value and characteristic
  o No other supports available for student
  o Feel that it is rude or selfish:

Define “selfish”
Selfish (Merriam-Webster Dictionary):

• Concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself: seeking or concentrating on one’s own advantage, pleasure, or well-being without regard for others;

• Arising from concern with one’s own welfare or advantage in disregard of others
Setting Boundaries

• Best to set boundaries as early as possible and then it is critical to maintain the boundary.
  – For example, inform students of how much time you have and then end on time.

• Need to think about what boundaries you want to have – consider consulting with others for guidance.

• Remember and apply an accurate definition of selfish behavior.

• Giving the power of your boundary setting to others will likely result in boundaries that are way too close to you.
Setting Boundaries

• Practice saying “no”
  – Six ways of saying “no” (Trevor Powell)

1. **The Direct “no”**: When someone asks you to do something you don’t want to do, just say “no”
2. **The Reflecting “no”**: This technique involves acknowledging the content and feeling of the request, then adding your assertive refusal at the end.
3. **The Reasoned “no”**: You give a very brief and genuine reason for why you’re saying “no”
4. **The Raincheck “no”**: This is not a definite “no.” It is a way of saying “no” to the request at the present moment but leaves room for saying “yes” in the future.
5. **The Enquiring “no”**: Also not a definite “no.” You open up the request to see if there is another way to meet the request.
6. **The Broken record “no”**: Just repeat the simple statement of refusal over and over again. No explanation, just repeat it.
Self-Compassion

• When stressed, we can sometimes make ourselves feel even worse by being self-critical and unrealistic in our expectations.

• Transforming negativity (K. Neff):
  - “It’s hard to feel (fill in with the emotion you’re feeling) right now.”
  - “Feeling (fill in with the same emotion) is part of the human experience.”
  - “What can I do to make myself happier in this moment?”

• For example:
  - “It’s hard to feel guilty right now.”
  - “Feeling guilty is part of the human experience.”
  - “What can I do to make myself happier in this moment?.........I can go for a walk with my dog.”

• Check out Self-Compassion.org if you would like to learn more about self-compassion.
Forgiveness

• View forgiveness as being for you and not for anyone else.
• Forgiveness of others is not always necessary and is not always possible – you can give yourself permission to not forgive too.
• Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation and it does not mean you’re condoning someone else’s actions.
• Some view forgiveness as the “peace and understanding that comes from blaming that which has hurt you less, taking the life experience less personally, and changing your grievance story.” (Learningtoforgive.com)
• K. Neff’s four steps to forgiveness
Four Steps to Forgiveness (K. Neff)

1. When thinking about what happened, see if you can identify any precipitating factors or events.

2. Now consider why the person didn’t stop themselves from hurting you anyway. Why do you think they were unable to have better self-control?

3. If you believe the person is just mean, think about what could have contributed to them being that way.

4. Lastly, reflect on whether or not it is now a little easier to let go of some of your anger and/or resentment.

**Can direct this to self as well**
Positive Psychology – Gratitude Activity

- Positive Psychology research suggests that people who engage in gratitude activities feel happier and have less stress.
- This activity asks you to, once a week, write down five things you’re grateful for in your life and why you’re grateful for them.
  - For example, don’t just write down “I’m grateful for my friend James.”
  - Say why you’re grateful too. “I’m grateful for my friend James because we’ve shared many experiences together and he knows me so well. He is always there for me when I need support.”
Additional Self-Care Strategies

- Take regular breaks at work
- Reach out for support from colleagues, friends and family
- Share responsibilities at work and make suggestions if you have them
- Consider how you take care of self at home:
  - In-person social connecting
  - Being physically active
  - Relaxation practices (e.g., progressive muscle relaxation, mindfulness meditation, deep breathing, etc.)
  - Good sleep practices (e.g., no “screen time” at least 1 hour before sleep)
  - Use App resources:
    - One Moment Meditation
    - Guided Meditation and Mindfulness – Headspace app.
    - Calm in the storm
    - Relax Melodies
Questions
Michelle Pearson
Student Counselling Centre
umanitoba.ca/student/counselling/
204-474-8592

David Ness
Director, Student Counselling Centre
umanitoba.ca/student/counselling/
204-474-8619
David_Ness@UManitoba.ca