DEESCALATING INTENSE EMOTION

Laura K. Rock, MD and Eva Gómez, MSN, RN, NPD-BC, CPN
Boston Children’s Hospital Academy for Teaching and Education Innovation and Scholarship
September 28, 2021
Laura Rock, MD lrock@bidmc.harvard.edu
Don't answer feelings with facts.
PUT EMOTION BEFORE COGNITION
Emotion = Data
### GIVE when you notice emotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Get it’s emotion</th>
<th>Drop your agenda, resist urge to “fix.” Just listen. Don’t take it personally. Connection, not information.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify</strong></td>
<td>Can I check in with you? It seems like you were not expecting this news. I’m noticing you’re quieter than usual today. You seem really frustrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what you hear or see (this may be an internal step)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Validate</strong></td>
<td>Anyone would be scared about this. It’s a big procedure. We would all feel frustrated with this kind of uncertainty. I hear you’re scared. I’m worried too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by acknowledging feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explore</strong></td>
<td>Tell me more. What scares you the most? I think it can be helpful to talk. Would you mind telling me what’s on your mind?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to better understand (if they want to share)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Laura Rock, MD  lrock@bidmc.harvard.edu
NONVERBAL MESSAGE: I’M HERE TO HELP

- Body stance
- Lean in (but don’t touch)
- Allow silence
- Tissues, water
- Patience
VERBAL RESPONSES TO DEESCALATE

- Use calm, gentle, clear voice, low volume
- Say your name, role, connection to team
- GIVE
- Reinforce you are there to help
- Summarize, give clear next steps
- In case of unreasonable behavior, set boundaries

You will have more control if you are calmer and more empathic.

Laura Rock, MD    lrock@bidmc.harvard.edu
KEY TIPS FOR MANAGING INTENSE EMOTION

• Don’t answer feelings with facts. Emotion before cognition.
• You will not be able to deescalate with data.
• Don’t take it personally.
• We are at the receiving end of people’s coping skills at the most stressful time in their life.
Emotion is an opportunity to build trust

Laura Rock, MD    lrock@bidmc.harvard.edu
MANAGING YOUR OWN EMOTIONS

- Vent to a friend (or write yourself a note)
- Breathe
- Try a mantra: “this isn’t about me”
- Be calm; react, but don’t let your emotions match theirs
- Consider a break, a stretch, a walk, water
- Get someone to join you or take over
- GIVE to yourself

Gallo A, HBR, 2017
WHEN WE ARE EXPOSED TO RUDENESS*
WE ARE:

- Less creative & flexible
- Less helpful
- Worse at problem-solving
- Worse at clinical decision making
- Worse at procedures

Laura Rock, MD  lrock@bidmc.harvard.edu

Riskin A et al. Pediatrics, 2017
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Get it’s emotion</strong></th>
<th>Get that you have emotions too, and they are important.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify</strong></td>
<td>I am feeling frustrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are you noticing? Name it.</td>
<td>I’m having a hard time with this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>narrate, don’t vent</td>
<td>I don’t think I can have a calm conversation right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Validate</strong></td>
<td>I’m human and I have emotions because I care about what I’m doing. It is not okay to be mistreated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by acknowledging feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explore</strong></td>
<td>What’s making me have this reaction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of course I’m struggling – I have worked 12 days in a row!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What can I do in this moment to decompress?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
KEY TIPS FOR MANAGING INTENSE EMOTION

• Don’t answer feelings with facts. Emotion before cognition.
• You will not be able to deescalate with data (alone).
• Don’t take it personally.
• We are at the receiving end of people’s coping skills at the most stressful time in their life.
• Do not respond to a disrespectful or abusive comment in the moment.
• If you feel unsafe, leave, and get help.
• Imagine if someone you love were this upset and disruptive? How would you want them to be helped?

Laura Rock, MD    lrock@bidmc.harvard.edu