Responding to Learners’ High Emotional Response During an Educational Encounter

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Jennifer Arnold, MD, MSc, FAAP

Disclosures

- The speaker(s) do not have any financial relationships to disclose.
Objectives

- Describe different high emotional responses in educational sessions
- Apply strategies to manage ‘difficult’ responses
- Use a debriefing tool to support faculty development

Let’s Put On Our Educator Hats
Ground rules

• Everyone has a valuable contribution
• Give others the chance to speak
• Respect other people’s point of view
• Confidentiality

• *Anything you would add to this list?*

Everyone here is intelligent, capable, does their best, and wants to improve

*Center for Medical Simulation*
Emotions in Healthcare

- Humans are emotional beings
- We work & learn in highly emotionally charged settings
- Emotions are an inseparable & in-built component of medical education & ongoing clinical practice
  - Positive emotions such as compassion/empathy enhance patient care
  - Negative emotions such as irritability, fatigue, depression can impede performance & lead to burnout
- Emotions influence what learners learn and how readily they can transfer learning to new situations

Schattner, A; Acad Med, 2017

Emotion and the Educator

- Support educational experiences that focus on a non-judgmental consideration of learners’ and patients’ emotional reactions
- Normalize problematic emotions that learners may experience and therefore tend to ignore, suppress or express in unconscious ways
  - Example: discussing emotions in small groups, learners can see that others experience similar emotions under similar experiences
- Guide learners to be able to recognize their emotions in high stress situations
- Help learners identify which emotions will best support their professional role to promote the wellbeing and health of their patients
- Role-model so learners can build upon, react against and be inspired by their emotional reactions and practice the differential expression of a range of emotions that they can then extend to actual patient care

Shapiro J, 2012
High Emotions During Educational Sessions

- Can threaten the educational experience by creating a psychologically unsafe learning environment and/or diverting conversation away from important learning objectives
- General approach to prepare for and manage these situations:
  1. Adequate preparation
  2. Establishing a clear purpose
  3. Importance of practice for educators
  4. Managing emotions
  5. Having empathy
  6. Active listening
  7. Timely feedback and follow-up

Does high emotion in learning encounters ‘look’ like?
Quiet
Reticent

DISINTERESTED
SAD
DEFENSIVE ANGRY

DOMINANT POOR VS GOOD INSIGHT
Factors of High Emotions in Educational Sessions

Valence & Arousal

- Valence: positive or negative emotion
- Arousal: how calming or exciting the emotional event is
- High arousal emotional events are better recalled and remembered
- Both positive and negative emotional events are remembered well, but may be higher tendency for negative
Our Experience with High Emotion During Educational Encounters

- Please take 2 minutes to reflect and write down a situation in which you as an educator, encountered a learner who demonstrated high emotion?
  - What was the emotion you saw?
  - How did you react in the moment?
  - What was the situation?
  - How did you manage the situation at that time?

Educator’s Toolbox
Proactive Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proactive</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological safety &amp; prebriefing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body language &amp; eye contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-threatening learning space whenever possible</td>
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Preparing for Educational Encounters

- Create a psychologically safe environment:
  - A belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes and interpersonal risk-taking is possible
- State the purpose of the session/debrief/feedback
- Start off with a stance of curiosity
- Review the basic assumption
  - Example: “Let’s spend X minutes discussion Y. Our goal is to improve how we work together and care for our patients. Everyone here is intelligent and wants to improve.”

Establishing a **Safe Container** for Learning in Simulation
The Role of the Presimulation Briefing

Jenny W. Rudolph, PhD; Daniel B. Raemer, PhD; Robert Simon, EdD


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**Use Body Language & Eye Contact**

- 60% of communication is nonverbal
- Body language that helps promote psychological safety can help diffuse emotional responses
  - Open & inviting posture, e.g. leaning forward
  - Deliberately breaking eye contact when speaking and maintaining more eye contact when listening can proactively de-escalate a high emotion situation
- Observe & look for signs of high emotion related to body language
Create an Ideal Learning Space

- Try to find and use comfortable and confidential
- Ideally, to promote psychological safety and decrease high emotion:
  - Space for sitting
  - Staying eye level
  - Circular positioning
  - Educator should avoid sitting at “head” of table

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**Maturity Growth Discover**

**Hallmark**
- Decision Making
- Managing Complexity
- Knowledge Base
- Content

**Novice**
- Rule Driven
- Little Capacity
- Basic
- Evidence, Methods, Tools

**Growth**
- Routine Experts
- Pattern Recognition
- Deliberate
- Good
- Learners, Emotion, Co-Facilitation

**Maturity**

ADAPTED FROM DREYFUSS 2004
Reactive Strategies

**Reactive**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Toolbox</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body language &amp; eye contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silence &amp; active listening</td>
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<tr>
<td>Directive questioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
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</table>

Leverage Body Language & Eye Contact

- Using body language and eye contact in the moment when encountering challenging situations due to high emotion can be helpful:
  - Leaning in and open body language can support empathy and understanding
  - Prolonged, direct eye contact can help get a learner to share if they otherwise have been quiet
  - Redirecting eye contact to others can help defuse an angry or defensive learner
Silence & Active Listening

- Allowing for silence can be powerful in moments of high tension and anxiety
- Active listening when learners are sharing emotional responses supports psychological safety and allows for defusing
  - Eg. “What I am hearing you say is... can you share more”

Directive Questioning

- Strategy when learners seem disengaged, distracted, or quiet
- Use of questions that are directed specifically at certain individuals with a group
- Can help uncover thoughts from team members who have not been as vocal
- In situations where high emotion is seen such as upset learner, it can take the learner off the “hot” seat by redirecting the focus of the conversation to others
Difficult debriefing situations: A toolbox for simulation educators

V. J. Grant, T. Robinson, H. Catena, W. Eppich, and A. Cheng

Department of Pediatrics and Emergency Medicine, Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada; KidSIM Simulation Program, Alberta Children's Hospital, Calgary, Canada; Departments of Pediatrics and Medical Education, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

ABSTRACT

Background: Simulation-based education (SBE) has emerged as an essential modality for health professions education. One of the central tenants of effective SBE is reflective practice, typically guided by a facilitated debriefing. The debriefing conversation has the possibility of becoming a difficult conversation based on learner and situation-related factors. Difficult debriefing situations may threaten the learning environment, thus requiring an appreciation and understanding of the various ways that learners may react adversely to simulation and debriefing.

Aim: This article provides a review of the various phenotypes of difficult debriefing situations and a toolbox of proactive and reactive strategies to help guide the simulation educator to manage these situations, with the ultimate goal of achieving learning objectives.
**Difficult Debriefing Tool**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Sample Phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name the Dynamic</td>
<td>Introducing a ‘hot topic’ by naming it</td>
<td>Focusing discussion, addressing hot topic</td>
<td>&quot;You seem to be [insert emotion]… what’s on your mind?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>Recognising that behaviors, feelings or thoughts are understandable</td>
<td>Reaffirming importance of learner perspective</td>
<td>&quot;It seems like the key issue here is [insert hot topic], and that is causing some [insert emotion]…&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalization</td>
<td>Relating behaviors, feelings or attitudes to a societal norm</td>
<td>Build trust, calm fear, defuse emotions</td>
<td>&quot;You’re totally right, I agree that [insert perspective here]…&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Application of a concept in a different context</td>
<td>Enable learner to see broader relevance</td>
<td>&quot;I agree… in this situation [insert perspective here] it can be [insert emotion here]…&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
<td>Restating something in your own words</td>
<td>Clarify and/or convey understanding</td>
<td>&quot;The feelings you’ve expressed are common in this situation…&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadening</td>
<td>Widening discussion to involve others</td>
<td>Engaging other learners to share perspectives</td>
<td>&quot;Your feelings are normal in this situation… in fact, I had a situation once when [insert relevant story here]…&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previewing</td>
<td>Introducing a new topic of discussion</td>
<td>Guide and focus topic of discussion</td>
<td>&quot;Have you ever had a situation when [insert concept here] was applicable to [insert related context here]…&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Silence should be purposefully used between strategies. Periods of silence allow for active listening, reading learner body language, and to help determine if learners are “ready to learn”*
High Emotion EXERCISE

• What high emotion did you see in that scenario?
• What strategies were utilized or not utilized by the educator to help support the learner and diffuse high emotion?
• What worked well? What would you do differently?
**Applying Strategies in Difficult Debriefings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynamic</th>
<th>Name the Dynamic (ND)</th>
<th>Valida; on (V)</th>
<th>Normaliza; on (N)</th>
<th>Generaliza; on (G)</th>
<th>Paraphrasing (P)</th>
<th>Broadening (B)</th>
<th>Previewing (PR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional (Upset/Sad)</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged/Disinterested</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant/Good Insight</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant/Poor Insight</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional (Angry/Aggressive)</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>PR</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>PR</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The suggested sequence of strategies may differ depending on the situation. Tailor the sequence, number, and selection of strategies to the situation.
High Emotion EXERCISE

• Let’s try again
• What strategies were utilized by the educator to help support the learner and diffuse high emotion?
• What worked well, what would you do differently?

Break Out Session - 15 min

• Opportunity to explore how we might respond to high emotions in our educational encounters
• Reflect and discuss in break out
• Share in larger group
Large Group Reflection

Follow Up

- Anytime we observe high emotional reactions during an educational encounter, it is wise to follow up
- Sometimes, high emotions cannot be resolved during the educational encounter
- Seek permission to follow-up with the learner
  - Discuss the method for follow-up (e.g. formal meeting, informal coffee chat) & timeframe
- Consider offering resources to support the learner
Practice: Each of us have our own curve

- **SKILL**
- **CONFIDENCE**

**EXPERIENCE**
Where the world comes for answers

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**
- Foundational Training
- Additional Training
- Scripts and Tools
- Mentorship & Expert Feedback
- Peer Coaching
- Varying Context

**DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE**
- Growth
- Maturity

Where the world comes for answers
EMBRACE YOUR DISCOMFORT

THE MOST DIFFICULT THING ABOUT DIFFICULT DEBRIEFINGS IS PERCEIVING THEM AS OPPORTUNITIES, RATHER THAN AS DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

@docchenger
Thank You