

Basic Psychosocial Support

KEY POINTS

- ➔ Basic psychosocial support is provided by ALL members of the healthcare team
 - ➔ This support enhances the overall well-being of patients and their families by strengthening their abilities and helping them to have the resources to achieve their goals
- ➔ These strategies can be easily taught to patients and family members
- ➔ It is important to ask permission of the person prior to engaging with any of these approaches
- ➔ Some people may already have techniques that are part of their spiritual or cultural practice: asking about these and encouraging the person to use these is important

GENERAL STRATEGIES

Exploring Resources: Internal and External

- ➔ Internal resources include personal resiliency and ability to cope, honesty, and awareness of one's limitations
- ➔ External resources include the patient's supportive networks of family, friends, community, and work colleagues

Providing Information (Breaking Bad News)

- ➔ This is discussed in more detail in the next section
- ➔ Helping patients gain an understanding of their diagnosis, prognosis, and other information about the illness

Normalizing

- ➔ Involves providing information to patients and families to show that what they are experiencing is common in their situation

- ➔ E.g. “Many people in your situation have similar fears and worries to those you have just shared with me”
- ➔ This serves to reassure people that their responses and feelings are “normal” for their situation

SUPPORTIVE COUNSELLING

- ➔ Using active listening and reflection to explore the internal and external resources of the patient and family
- ➔ In supportive counselling, the goal is not to “solve the patient’s problems” but to listen and respond to the experiences they are having

GROUNDING

Example Script:

- ➔ “Take a moment to bring awareness of how your body is making a connection to the ground/chair/bed”
- ➔ “Now, notice your feet and how they feel as they connect with the ground”
- ➔ “If you are standing, notice other parts of your body – your legs, arms, and head – and how in this moment they are all interconnected and connecting with the ground”
- ➔ “If you are sitting or lying down, notice the other parts of your body – your legs, arms, head, and how they feel as they make connection with the chair or bed”
- ➔ “As you bring awareness to these connections notice the sensations that may be present for you – heat, coolness, tingling, tightness, or numbness”
- ➔ “You can pause now and make adjustments to make yourself comfortable as you ground yourself in the present moment”

Example Script:

- ➔ Place one hand on your abdomen and one hand on your chest
- ➔ Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose, breathing all the way down to your belly (this allows more airflow into the lungs)
- ➔ Notice how your abdomen rises and your chest follows
- ➔ Exhale slowly out of your nose or mouth, whichever is most comfortable
- ➔ Take a moment to pause between each inhalation and exhalation
- ➔ Count to three as you breathe in, pause, and count to three as you breathe out
- ➔ Notice the nice, slow rhythm of your breath
- ➔ Notice any changes that may be happening in your body
- ➔ This exercise may last for only a few minutes or longer

Quick Tools

These exercises may be helpful in distressing situations where there is little time to prepare

Quick Tool #1

1. Breathe in deeply and clench your fists
2. Breathe out slowly and let yourself go as limp and loose as possible
3. Start yawning
4. Repeat these steps when needed

Quick Tool #2

1. Breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of four
2. Breathe out slowly through your mouth to the count of six
3. As you are exhaling, imagine that you are blowing bubbles, and hold your mouth in a circular shape

RELAXATION

Focus Word

- ➔ Pick a focus word: this can be a word, a short phrase, or a prayer that is firmly rooted in your belief system
- ➔ Sit or lie quietly in a comfortable position and close your eyes
- ➔ Relax your muscles, starting at your head and neck, your shoulders, moving to your chest, abdomen, and down your legs to your thighs, down to your calves, to your feet and all the way through to your toes. (This may take several minutes, or as long as the individual needs)
- ➔ Breathe slowly and naturally, and as you do, say your focus word, silently to yourself as you exhale
- ➔ If other thoughts come to your mind, don't worry. Gently return to your focus word
- ➔ Slowly open your eyes. Continue to stay where you are without moving for a minute or two before starting to moving around

Quick Tool #1

This quick, yet effective tool naturally calms the mind and helps induce the relaxation response

1. Sitting down, gently place one hand on the forehead and the other hand on the back of the neck
2. Breathe in and out slowly, noticing your breath

Quick Tool #2

1. While you are sitting, standing, or lying down, take a moment to notice your breathing and where you feel the breath is going in your body
2. As you breathe in, imagine that your breath is filling you wherever your attention to your body goes
3. As you breath out, notice any changes that may be happening in your body

IMAGERY AND VISUALIZATION

- ➔ Imagery and visualization are ways of daydreaming or creating an inner picture that you find peaceful at that moment using all your senses
- ➔ These approaches for reducing stress combine deep breathing and meditation
 - ➔ Close your eyes and imagine a peaceful scene, place, or experience you have had
 - ➔ "What do you see, what do you feel in this place?"
 - ➔ "What do you hear and smell?"
 - ➔ "Spend time breathing in and out deeply and slowly"
 - ➔ "In this place of calm relaxation, you may imagine pain, tension, or discomfort washing away, and your body becoming relaxed"