

# BIA Funded Human Services Training: Orientation



The University of Montana



**Center for Children, Families  
& Workforce Development**  
UM HEALTH & MEDICINE / SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK



**National  
Native Children's  
Trauma Center**



# Communication & Interviewing



## Learning objectives

- ▶ Improve understanding of:
  - ▶ communication style
  - ▶ how communication expectations impact interactions
  - ▶ meaning given to non-verbal & written forms of communication
  - ▶ how personal emotions and emotions of others impact communication
  - ▶ challenging communication settings and situations
  - ▶ foundational interviewing skills and techniques

# Communication: Cultural Factors

## ▶ Different norms

- ▶ Tribal vs. non-tribal, traditional vs. assimilated, one tribal community vs. another tribal community
- ▶ Examples

## ▶ Power differential

- ▶ History between federal agencies and tribal members



# Communication: Effects of Trauma



# Communicating with clients

## Common Challenges

- ▶ Children who are sad and withdrawn
- ▶ Teenagers who only give one word responses
- ▶ Angry & threatening adults or family members





# Communicating with co-workers/other professionals

## Common Situations/Challenges

- ▶ **Case coordination** - facial gestures that suggest comments are ridiculous
- ▶ **Team meetings** – voice tones that question our judgment or intelligence
- ▶ **Transferring Information** - E-mail messages that demean (I NEED THIS DONE!!!! Do you know what you're doing????)
- ▶ **Intimidating situations** – family or team meetings, testifying in court



# Effective communication

Requires the ability to:

1. Analyze the expectations and goals of the situation/setting;
2. Understand multiple forms of communication and importance of listening to verbal and non-verbal messages and challenges
3. Use techniques to improve understanding of words and meaning
4. Regulate emotions with difficult clients, co-workers, and in challenging settings



# Improved communication



Assists with the following:

- ▶ **Clients** – ability to gather important and relevant information, develop better case plans, understand emotions of maltreatment
- ▶ **Colleagues** – organizational relationships & climate; fewer conflicts & associated stressors
- ▶ **Other professionals** – collaborations and outcomes for clients, families, confidence in difficult settings (courts, hospitals)



# Communication styles



Team meeting question – “**What’s the best option for this kid?**”

- ▶ **Passive** – “no one listens to me so why say anything” (self-denying, others choose for you, emotionally dishonest)
- ▶ **Passive aggressive** - “Oh, I don’t care, you guys decide“ (but you do and get mad when decision is made)
- ▶ **Aggressive** – “I know the right way and the rest of you don’t.” (forceful, self enhancing)
- ▶ **Assertive** – “I have an idea but I’d love to hear others’ thoughts (negotiating, others feel valued/respected)

Activity



# Communication Low vs High Context



# Interview Process

1. Greeting/acknowledgement
2. Explain purpose of interview
3. Balance structure with a personal connection
4. Know your comfort asking difficult questions
5. Balance of closed and open ended questions (**handout**)



## **Interviewing**

### *Closed-ended and Open-Ended Questions*

*Closed-ended* questions are more focal and can usually be answered with a word or two, after which the client waits for the next question from the interviewer. Closed-ended questions often begin with “do you,” “are you,” or “have you.”

*Open-ended* questions provide opportunities to elaborate. Because they keep the client in the driver’s seat of the conversation, open questions are often preferred by interviewers. Open-ended questions often begin “what” or “how,” but they need not.

### ***Examples***

Closed-ended:	“Do you live alone?”
Open-ended:	“What is your living situation?”
Closed-ended	“Did that make you sad?”
Open-ended	“How did you feel about that?”
Closed-ended	“What did you do then?”
Open-ended	“What happened then?”

### ***Problems with closed-ended questions.***

Give clients less opportunity to expand on the theme at hand, since they often suggest a “yes” and “no” reply.

Repeating closed questions keep the focus on the interviewer and clients will likely be conditioned to answer questions with one word and wait for the next.

Danger that clients will feel like objects instead of experts of their own life stories.

Closed-ended questions – benefits (quick, important information)

Demographic information

- Where were you born?
- What is your monthly income?
- How many children do you have living with you?

### ***Closed-Ended Questioning (provide structure/calming)***

*Interviewer:* Do you have a place to sleep tonight, Joe?

*Client:* No, no! Do I look like I have a place to sleep?!

*Interviewer:* Is there anyone I can call to let know you’re okay?

*Client:* Nobody, I don’t want anyone to know.....

*Interviewer:* Do you have any money to buy dinner with while I look for a bed for you?

*Client:* No.....I’m broke man.

*Interviewer:* If you’re hungry, I can get you a voucher for a cafeteria meal.

*Client:* (Relaxes and sits back) Okay.....I could stand something hot. Could somebody go with me, though?

*Interviewer:* Can you sit here with me while I make a couple of calls to find a bed? Then I can go with you to the cafeteria.

*Client:* Yep.....



# Interviewing Techniques



- ▶ **Checking in** – “Please let me know at any time, if we go too fast or get into topics you’re not comfortable talking about?” “Is the pace we’re going at okay for you?”
- ▶ **Clarifying** - “Does what I’m saying make sense?”, “let me see if I have this right...”
- ▶ **Elaboration** - “Can you say more about that?”, “Are there other things you haven’t mentioned yet that would be important for me to know?”



# Interviewing Techniques



- ▶ **Silence** – too much questioning makes the interviewer the director, allow for silences
- ▶ **Strengths/validation** – “How have you managed so much at once?” is both a real question and an affirmation of client strength. “Will your remarkable courage hold up through this long court process?” performs a validating function.
- ▶ **Active listening** – pay attention to what’s being said verbally and non-verbally (facial expressions, raising eyebrows, voice tone)



# Interviewing Techniques



- ▶ **Avoid double questions** – “How are the kids doing in school?” “What’s going on at work?”
- ▶ **Prompts** - “Can you say more about that,” “Could you please expand on that?” “Please continue.....”
- ▶ **Refocusing** - “I’m wondering if we can get back to the topic of...”, “Getting back to the requirements of your probation, do you have to...?”, “Earlier we were talking about...”
- ▶ **Summarizing** – “Let me quickly review what we covered today and discuss next steps.”



# Angry Clients – De-escalation



- ▶ **Receive** – the other person’s comments without interruption, don’t get defensive.
- ▶ **Repeat** - the other person’s responses as objectively as possibly.
- ▶ **Request** - the other person’s proposed ways of dealing with the problem.
- ▶ **Review** - the options and decide the best approach

# Final suggestions

- ▶ Build and monitor communication style/skills
- ▶ Remain mindful of trauma histories, tribal norms
- ▶ Remain non-judgmental
- ▶ Extend empathy and support
- ▶ Maintain appropriate boundaries
- ▶ Ensure accountability, set expectations
- ▶ Convey hope, possibility, optimism

