

Skills for Camp Professionals Related to Anxiety

Skill # 1: Connect Before You Redirect

Counselors and other members of the human race often make suggestions or give advice or try to intervene in a situation *before we make a connection* with the camper or staff member we are trying to help. There are several ways to connect as follows:

- 1) Acknowledge what a camper/staff member is *feeling*.
- 2) Acknowledge the challenging or demanding *situation or experience* the camper/staff member is having.
- 3) Acknowledge the camper/staff member's effort or bravery or persistence.
- 4) Acknowledge the camper/staff member's positive intention.

Skillset # 2: Three Steps to Addressing a Setback

Again, we often attempt to make a child or staff member *feel better* instead of connecting with them and giving them ways to make themselves feel better. Try the 3-step process:

Step 1: Connect by **Acknowledging the Feeling**: "I can see how frustrated, upset, angry, disappointed, sad, hurt you are..."

Step 1a: Connect more deeply if you can by **Acknowledging the Situation**: "No wonder you're frustrated! You've never tried this before!" This is your first time away from home!

Step 2: Normalize the feeling or response: "Lot's of kids have felt that way!"
"Everybody struggles when it comes to..."

Step 2a: Normalize by **Sharing Your Own Experience**: "Even I've felt that way! Why, one time..." (Keep it short and relevant!)

Step 3: Redirect: "Let's see what we can do to help you this get on top of this!"
"It's not that you can't do this. You just can't do this *yet!*"

"You're totally new at this and maybe you're being a little unfair to yourself. You'll get this eventually!"

Skillset # 3: Addressing Anxiety

Step 1: Connect by **Acknowledging the Affect or Situation**

Step 2: Normalize if you can, especially if you can *share your own experience*.

Step 3: Reframe by saying, "This is your brain's way of getting you ready! We all get nervous when we are faced with something new or challenging! Your brain's job is to keep you from being surprised! It's getting you ready to be at your best! That's all that's happening right now!"

Step 4: Redirect by saying, "Let's think about all the ways you can beat this!"

"Let's think about how strong/capable you are." Help the child focus on past success.

Note: We have found that trying to get a person to forget their fears doesn't work. Focus instead on the reframing mentioned above.

Skill # 4: Switch from Empathy to Compassion

Step 1: Recognize and accept that an empathic response is normal and is embedded in our mammal brains!

Step 2: Assess: "What am I feeling in response to this scene?" Identify both your emotion and where in your body you are holding or experiencing that emotion.

Step 3: Remind yourself: "I am here and they are over there! Then identify what the person needs from you right now.

Compassion: Feeling for people. Loving-kindness. A consciously practiced ability.

"...have you been Ditterized?"

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