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Coping Strategies Against Information Disorder

Module 4 Enabling Dialogue

Modules

1. Awareness

2. Critical thinking

3. Conflict solving

4. Enabling dialogue

5. Ethics

6. Reflective skills

7. Digital skills

Objectives

- ✓ To create understanding why dialogue is important, both in general and in the context of dealing with misinformation

- ✓ To explain the important fundamentals of dialogue

- ✓ To build skills in creating an effective dialogue

- ✓ To clear up difficulties in intercultural communication

Counteracting belief in information disorder

Counteracting belief in information disorder could prove challenging is some cases, because **beliefs** are by definition stable ideas that **do not get changed easily**. This can differ per person and per belief, depending on the strength of the belief.

For example, some people are just misinformed and are openminded towards other perspectives. Some others, however, can have more radical, closeminded beliefs. This can happen when a person is part of an echo chamber for example.

In both cases, but especially the latter, it is **crucial to engage in dialogue**.

Echo chamber

an environment in which a person encounters only beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own, so that their existing views are reinforced, and alternative ideas are not considered.

The importance of dialogue

In order to "change someone's mind" about certain beliefs or ideas, they have to **come into contact with other perspectives, facts, insights and attitudes**. Talking with them is a very good way to offer these perspectives.

In the case of belief in information disorder, one can adress feelings, ideas and facts on a personal level through conversations, in order to hopefully counteract their attitudes based on falsehoods.

However, not all dialogue has the same effect...

image: Flaticon.com |

A safe environment

Dialogue can differ extensively: some conversations are **combative** in nature, while others are **respectful**. As you could expect, combative conversations do not amount to anything usually.
Due to the **agressive** nature of the dialogue it will end up in **emotional, close-minded** arguments.

Give respect

Get respect

In order for someone's mind to change on a subject, it is crucial to stay **respectful** and foster an **open dialogue**. In order to have an effective respectful dialogue, the environment in which it takes place should be **safe**. This creates opportunities to **challenge their own beliefs** and **engage with different perspectives** without judgement.

In order to create such a safe environment, there are four core elements:

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Fundamentals for effective dialogue

1. Relationships should be based on trust so that adolescents and young adults feel comfortable expressing their doubts

2. The dialogue should be egalitarian

3. Provide guidance in the dialogue

4. Reject agression

1. A relationship of trust (1/4)

Trust

trust in communication refers to the generalised **expectancy** that a message received is **true** and **reliable** and that the communicator demonstrates **competence** and **honesty** by conveying accurate objective, and complete information.

In order to have effective dialogue about hard subjects (e.g. information disorder), a relationship of trust should be achieved.

Without trust there is no possibillity for a con-versation to be effective, because the person does not expect you or your words to be reliable or honest. Therefore, they will not engage in the dialogue.

When there is a relationship of trust, the person is more motivated to cooperate in the conversation and be more comfortable to expressing themselves.

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How to achieve trust (2/4)

Trust is not easily achieved, but mostly **built up over time**. Trust is built up by **open and prompt communication** amongst each other. In this communication, you will collect evidence of **trustworthiness and credibility**. Showing **goodwill and intimacy** often creates such a bond.

Whenever such a bond is not yet in place because the youth worker/teacher has not had much time with the adolescent, but an effective dialogue should be had anyway, there is an important skill that could be useful: **Affective professionalism.**

Affective professionalism means that as a professional, you do not primarily work based on authority and cognitive action but rather on **establishing a connection and showing empathy/engagement** in what concerns the young person. Love for young people, empathising with them, genuinely getting to know them, taking an interest in them, and paying attention to their positive aspects are crucial.

An effective tool of affective professionalism (3/4)

One important and useful tool that can help with the affective professionalism skill is **self-disclosure**. Depending on the situation, it helps to share a bit about your own beliefs, values, ideals, disappointments, frustrations and anger.

The gradual revelation of feelings and personal experiences promotes both a **sense of trust** and the knowledge you have of someone else.

This happens verbally, non-verbally and contextually. So, for example, by literally saying something, by facial expressions, body posture and even by the brand and color of clothes you wear.

Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure is mostly found to be beneficial, but **should be reconsidered per context**. Every person is complex and different and can react differently to similar situations. However, there are some general guidelines for applying self-disclosure:

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Guidelines for self-disclosure (4/4)

- **Do self-disclosure infrequently**. The power of self-disclosure comes precisely because it is not habitual.

- **Do it thoughtfully and deliberately**. Try to find out what the client is actually asking before answering a question that requires self-disclosure. One can then better discuss the client's underlying need.

- **Choose words carefully**: how empathetic or emotionally charged the telling is. The degree of intimacy should match the patient's need. Overly personal self-disclosure is relatively unfavorable, but some degree of intimacy is needed.

- **Be responsive before, during and after self-disclosure**. So be sure to get feedback back, through questions or observation, on how the client is taking it up so you can further tune in.

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2. An egalitarian dialogue (1/2)

An egalitarian dialogue is one where all participants are **equal**. Potential power imbalances between the participants (e.g. teacher and student) should not play a role. Instead, the communication should stimulate others to express their beliefs, attitudes and opinions in order to reach a mutual understanding.

A level playing field creates openness (2/2)

An egalitarian dialogue is focused on sharing ideas on an equal level.

This equality puts the focus on the validity of the arguments and what is said in the conversation, instead of forcing a particular way of thinking on someone.

In this way, the form of egalitarian dialogue creates a level playing field, creating a environment of safety and openness.

When a first liner want to have a conversation with an adolescent who shows signs of belief in information disorder, it is crucial that the first liner does not condemn this belief.
Hear them out, try to understand where they are coming from, and put up your own arguments without belittling theirs.
This way, they will be more open towards your argumentation.

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3. Providing guidance

The role of the first liner is not only to provide a safe space for dialogue, but also to participate in the dialogue in order to try to counteract the belief in information disorder. In order to do this, there are some crucial point to keep in mind:

- **Stay focused**. While it is important to let the adolescent say what they need to say the point of the conversation should not be lost: you are there to understand and possibly counteract belief in information disorder.

- **Provide sensible and respectful suggestions of issues to consider**, including moral and ethical points. Keep in mind to **not be condemning or judgemental** that the dialogue **should remain egalitarian**, however this does not mean that one can not **respectfully disagree** and show alternative perspectives.

- **Encourage and positively reinforce constructive engagement** in the conversation.

4. Reject agression (1/4)

As said before, **agression in dialogue leads to close-mindedness and emotion**, and without an open mind the conversation is doomed to fail from the start.

It can happen that **the dialogue can invoke agressiveness** in the adolescent, **even though the dialogue is held respectfully**. In this case, try to **deescalate** the situation how you see fit. If it persists, the dialogue should be continued another time.
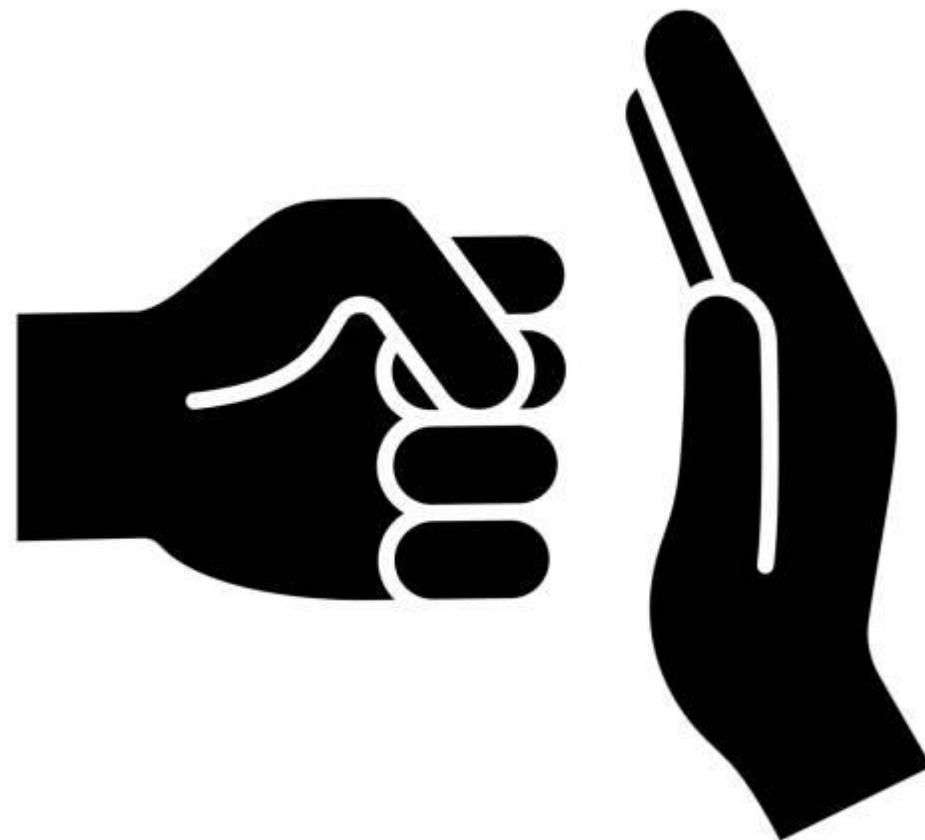
How to reject aggression (2/4)

In order to prevent aggression and keep a safe and openminded conversation, you should model civil and respectful behaviour through your own actions.

When the facilitator speaks with respect and care, the adolescent is more likely to emulate this behaviour.

In order to maintain this behaviour, **active listening** is a key skill to use:

Active listening (3/4)
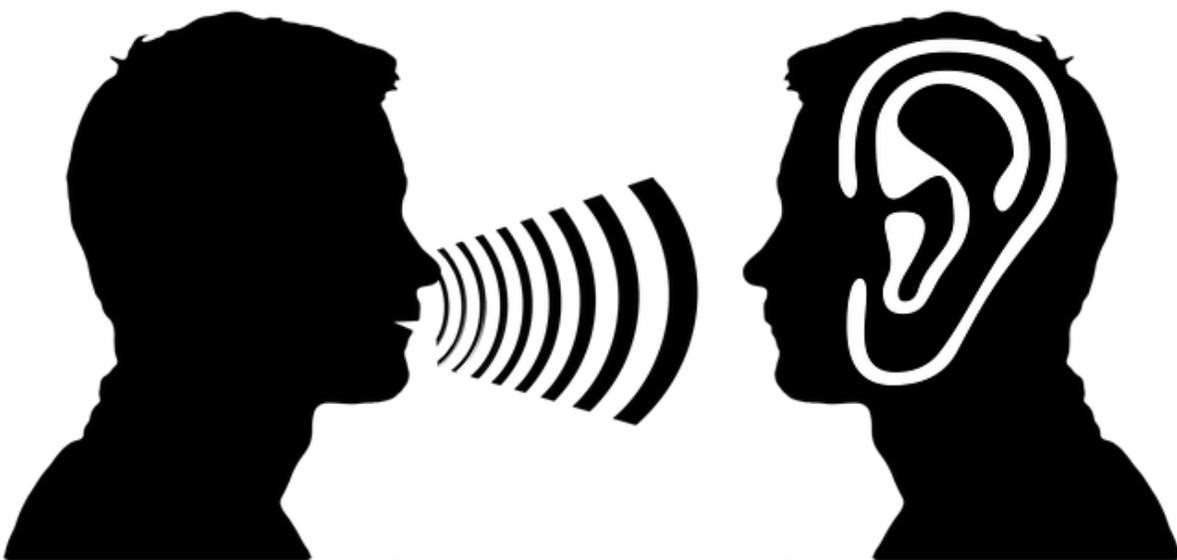
Active listening: demonstrating to the other person that you are truely hearing them. This contributes to avoiding conflict in the dialogue.

Active listening can be done in many ways. It can be remembered by the mnemonic device **"LISTEN"**:

- **Look** interested, get interested.
- **Involve** yourself by responding.
- **Stay** on target.
- **Test** your understanding.
- **Evaluate** what you hear.
- **Neutralise** your feelings.

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Examples of active listening (4/4)

- **Think about your body language** and posture and how they look like to them;
- **Do not interrupt**;
- **Use silence effectively**, in order to wait for them to say what they need to say;
- **Summarise** or **paraphrase the emotion and content** of what you interpret they are saying. You are not agreeing with the person, but just reiterating what they told;
- **Affirm them when you agree** with what they are saying.

Other skills of dialogue (1/3)

- **Critical thinking** helps to identify assumptions and biases, and to analyse information, to reflect upon its sources and to be able to make informed and rational judgements. Ask the adolescent to explain why they have reached their conclusions and support their points of view, in order to understand their journey. More on this can be found in *Module 2: Critical thinking*.

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Other skills of dialogue (2/3)

- **Questioning** is invaluable in dialogue: it helps to enrich our understanding. Good questions, however, do not only give us more information, but enable you to create a deeper understanding of one's experiences and understand how and why they see the world as they do. Good questions are response questions (questions that are reactions on information from the dialogue); they help to deepen the understanding.

Other skills of dialogue (3/3)

- **Reflection** mostly happens after the dialogue has taken place, because it takes space and time in order to reflect on what has taken place. However, it is critical to reflect, in order to understand better what you have learned and how this could be improved in the future.

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Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication (1/4)

It is important to recognise that, while communication is imperative to mankind, ways of communication are not entirely interchangeable across different cultures.

Culture is an incredibly broad phenomenon, which can be found in everything in their environment: in institutions, in objects we use on a daily basis, in the way people behave, in ideas and in values.

Because of this, culture influences people's perceptions, thought patterns, judgements and actions.

In social interactions, the influence of culture can be seen in greeting rituals, clothing, mimicry, body language and use of language. A clear example of this is that some cultures are more direct in communicating, while others are more indirect and use tone and silences to insinuate the message.

Examples of misinterpretations in intercultural communication (2/4)

- The meaning of silence varies across cultures. In some, it may signify respect, for instance in China. Conversely, in Australia, silence is sometimes perceived as either shyness or a sign of disinterest.

- An English businessman has written a letter to a Japanese businessman, which has to be translated. He used the sentence *"I wonder if you would prepare an agenda for our meeting"*. The use of *"wonder"* in this sentence is to politely ask to do something. However, in Japanese *"wonder"* can be translated as *"doubt".* This would create the sentence *"we doubt that you would prepare an agenda for our meeting".* The well-intentioned sentence is transformed into one which could be considered rude.

Source information

Examples of misinterpretations in intercultural communication (3/4)

- The appropriate distance for conversing with a stranger differs from one culture to another, and when someone disregards these unspoken norms, it often makes us feel uneasy.

- Gestures and eye contact can convey powerful, yet differing messages across cultures. For example: Arabs, Latin Americans, and Southern Europeans maintain direct eye contact with their conversational partners, while Asians and Northern Europeans tend to employ a peripheral gaze or avoid eye contact altogether. If the eye contact is too prolonged, this may even be interpreted as sexual interest.

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Source information

How to avoid intercultural misinterpretations (4/4)

There is no clear-cut way to dismiss intercultural misinterpretations alltogether. The way people act and think is molded by their culture and it is hard to change this.

However, in order to try and avoid them as much as possible, there are two important steps to take:

- **Increase your knowledge** of other cultures and their habits in communication in order to understand them better.

- **Talk about it**. When you adress the fact that there could be problems with interpretation, you create the opportunity for them, as well as for yourself, to talk about it. For example: Ask if you understood them correctly, or repeat the message as you understood it.

References and further reading (1/2)

- **The guidelines of the COSTAID-project on costaid.eu, on which these slides are based.**

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Congratulations!
You have completed this part