

Reading Lines: Responses to Pain

Pass out these scenarios to read aloud some examples of how people might react to symptoms of illness and pain. (The parts are starred for each pair of volunteers.)

Notice the differences in how people respond, based on personal values, beliefs, and their culture. This can explain some of the differences in how we react and express ourselves in our illness and recovery.

Role play: Stoic Attitude

Elderly German man and his neighbor

***Man: I just got home from the hospital yesterday after having surgery. (He is in curled up position in chair grimacing and tense.) I don't feel like talking this morning.

Neighbor: You look like you have a lot of pain. I will bring you one of your pain pills.

Man: No, I am fine, I don't need any pain medication. I don't want to become dependent on medicine.

Neighbor: But you just had surgery. You need it.

Man: I do not need it. I am a strong man. You won't see me moaning or complaining. I will get through it.

Neighbor: It would be good to have better pain control because you could be more active, breathe deeper, and sleep better. It's not good for your health to be in pain.

Man: I understand, but I really don't want the medication. I believe the pain makes me stronger.

Neighbor: Okay, I respect your wishes, but let's talk more about it. If you are worried about addiction, or side effects, we can talk more about that.

Man: You can talk all you want, but I won't change my mind.

Neighbor: We'll talk after I get you some breakfast.

Leader might ask, "How would you feel if you the man in this situation? The neighbor? Which one of them is right? (They both are.)"

"Is this how you like to be treated? Why or why not?"

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Role play: Dramatic Attitude

Italian Jewish man and his caregiver:

***Man: (crying out loudly, gesturing and moaning when neighbor helped him put on his hand splint.) I feel terrible! I need another pain pill. I can't stand it!

Caregiver: OK, but what's wrong? Where is the pain?

Man: My hand hurts! My doctor said the splint would help, but it is not getting better soon enough!

Caregiver: Let's put on some music to help us relax. Would you like to use a warm pack on it like the doctor suggested?

Man: Yes, but I want the pain pill, too, so I don't have pain while I get dressed.

Caregiver: OK, I'll get you some water so you can take your pills.

Leader might ask, "How would you feel if you the man in this situation? The caregiver? Which one of them is right? (They both are.)"

"Is this how you like to be treated? Why or why not?"

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Role play: Depressed/Anxious attitude

Among woman and social worker:

***Woman: (crying and rocking in chair)

Social Worker: You look upset. What is the matter?

Woman: It hurts here (points to chest and pounds it lightly).

Social Worker: Do you have pain in your chest?

Woman: It hurts in my heart because I am sad and worried about my son, who is in trouble.

Social Worker: Let's talk about the problem he is having. Maybe I can help.

Woman: Yes. I will tell you about it. Maybe it will help me feel better.

Leader can ask, "Does the woman have pain even though she has no physical pain? Is it real?" (Yes, spiritual pain can be helped more by listening and caring rather than pain medications.)

"Is this how you like to be treated? Why or why not?"

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Role play: Patronizing attitude (treating her like a child)

Elderly woman and daughter:

***Daughter: Good morning, mother. Did you sleep well?

Mother: No, I had pain in my legs, so I didn't sleep much.

Daughter: Oh! I feel so sorry for you! I will help you put your pants on so you do not have to move your legs. You should use the wheelchair today.

Mother: Maybe so. I'll do what you say.

Daughter: Yes.

Leader can ask, "How does this attitude affect her recovery?" (She will probably become more and more dependent.)

"Is this how you like to be treated? Why or why not?"

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Role play: Attitude encouraging independence

***Daughter: Good morning, mother. Did you sleep well?

Mother: No, I had pain in my legs so I did not sleep much.

Daughter: Oh! Do you think we should have put the pain pills by the bed so you could have taken one during the night?

Mother: Yes, I think we should do that tonight.

Daughter: Then you would wake with less pain, so your morning would be more active and enjoyable. Would you like a pain pill now?

Mother: Yes, it will probably help me feel better so I can get up and dressed.

Daughter: It will start working in about 20 minutes. Is that when you want to get dressed?

Mother: Yes. That sounds good.

Leader can ask, "How does this attitude affect her recovery?" (She will probably become more and more independent.)

"Is this how you like to be treated? Why or why not?"

Since we all react differently to the experience of pain, the caregiver and patient relationship needs to adapt and change. When the beliefs of the caregiver and patient do not meet eye to eye, the relationship can end in frustration.

But if we respect and value each other's differences, we can avoid some of the conflict in the journey of recovery.

Knutson, M. B. (2005). Pain role playing learning activity. Retrieved August 11, 2008 from Health Vista website at <http://healthvista.freehosting.net/Learning%20Activities2/PAIN%20ROLE%20PLAYING%20Learning%20Activity.doc>