



Supporting repetitive or difficult conversations - hearing the feelings

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Working in mental health, I have the privilege to work alongside some knowledgeable and skilled staff as well as some people who access the service and who have taught me a great deal. The following is the result of one of the conversations I had with a psychotherapist. I was asking her about supporting feelings and how this is more complex where someone has communication needs, and where their vocabulary to express emotions might be limited. I thought that the guidance she gave me was useful and worth sharing.

Some of the people we are working with are vocal in terms of repetitive conversations and difficult statements. Some of these might be threats to others, comments about committing suicide, or negative comments and complaints.

There are 4 main feelings:

Happiness

Sadness

Anger

Fear

Other feelings tend to branch from one of those main four, for example, shame stems from fear, and frustration stems from anger, etc. Sometimes people don't have sophisticated vocabulary, or they lose the vocabulary they once had to describe the emotion.

Difficulty with naming the feeling

If someone has difficulty saying how they are feeling, you can ask them where they feel the emotion. Usually people feel:

Sadness in their chest

Fear in their stomach

Anger in their chest

Asking them to show you where they feel it then offering a suggestion can be helpful.

Hearing the feeling

With a repetitive conversation, actually acknowledging the feeling can mean the person feels heard; this can be reassuring and comforting. It can make the person feel less alone. The way we 'show' we hear the feelings are by statements such as:

**It sounds like you feel confused
That must make you feel frustrated**

When people don't feel heard they sometimes resort to behaviours which challenge, such as self-harm, harm to property or harm to others. All behaviour is communication. Even silence communicates something! We have some symbols on the website online shop which can help people talk about feelings.

