



The PHI Coaching ApproachSM to Supervision:

Introductory Skills for Supervisors in Home and Residential Care

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PHI (www.PHInational.org) works to improve the lives of people who need home and residential care — and the lives of the workers who provide that care. Using our workplace and policy expertise, we help consumers, workers, employers and policymakers improve long-term care by creating quality direct-care jobs. Our goal is to ensure caring, stable relationships between consumers

and workers, so that both may live with dignity, respect, and independence.

Training and Organizational Development: Applying the PHI Coaching Approach

The PHI Coaching ApproachSM is a suite of services that all revolve around a core set of skills and a learner-centered approach to training. This approach has been developed over many years in cooperation with a network of direct-care staffing agencies and training programs, including Cooperative Home Care Associates of the South Bronx (www.chcany.org) and Home Care Associates of Philadelphia (www.homecareassociatespa.com), and with Independence Care System (www.icsny.org), a nonprofit managed long-term care program for people living with physical disabilities in New York City.

The PHI Training and Organizational Development team partners with a range of eldercare/disability services organizations throughout the country to grow and sustain their journey to become *relationship-centered* organizations. PHI is committed to helping providers across the spectrum of eldercare and disability services to apply and adapt the PHI Coaching Approach to fit their environments and needs.

For more information about The PHI Coaching Approach, the Training and Organizational Development team, our clients, and our publications and curricula, see www.PHInational.org/training, or contact us via e-mail at todservices@PHInational.org or by calling 718.928.2077.

Policy

Our expertise in integrating industry practice and public policy has made us a valued partner to providers, national foundations, consumer and workforce advocacy groups, and policymakers throughout the country.

Our team of national and state-based policy experts work with a range of stakeholders to strengthen the direct-care workforce and prepare our nation to care for a growing population of elders and people living with disabilities by promoting effective national and state policy solutions.

For more information about our policy initiatives see PolicyWorks, our policy website (www.PHInational.org/policy).

To order copies of this and other PHI training related publications, go to www.PHInational.org/training or contact us at 718.928.2077. You can also send your request via e-mail to todservices@PHInational.org.

PHI • 349 East 149th Street, 10th Floor • Bronx NY 10451
718.402.7766 • FAX: 718.585.6852



www.phi-qcqi.org

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The 2nd Edition was informed by feedback from provider sites that participated in PHI's Center for Coaching Supervision and Leadership, from 2006 to the present. We particularly want to thank the trainers from those sites, who have enthusiastically introduced PHI Coaching Supervision to thousands of supervisors. Thanks also to Renya Larson, PHI Training & Organizational Development Specialist, for drafting revisions to reflect the learning from the field.

Both versions were drafted by Jill Tabbutt-Henry, PHI Curriculum Manager, with editorial guidance and assistance from Karen Kahn, PHI Communications Director, and design by Paxton Communications.

For more information about PHI and this curriculum, please contact:

PHI
349 East 149th Street, 10th Floor
Bronx, NY 10451
Telephone: 718.402.7766
todservices@PHInational.org
www.PHInational.org

Introduction

The PHI Coaching ApproachSM is a suite of programs and services uniquely designed to help employers and their staff build the skills necessary to deliver highly personalized, relationship-centered care. These services are based on developing a core set of competencies that, in this curriculum, are applied to situations broadly defined as supervisory. We call this particular application of these skills PHI Coaching Supervision.

This curriculum is designed to introduce coaching skills to supervisors in home and residential care settings. These supervisors may include nurse managers or supervisors, charge nurses, department heads, home care managers, and service coordinators, among others. All skills are taught in the context of the realities of work settings. With its focus on communication and problem solving, the curriculum may also be useful to other staff who are not necessarily supervisors but have a formal or informal leadership role.

Designed to teach skills to build positive relationships, the seminar provides a foundation upon which supervisors and others can strengthen their ability to mentor new workers and help employees develop personally and professionally.

Why PHI Coaching Supervision?

Supervisors face challenging work situations every day. Their jobs require independent thinking and decision making along with the ability to juggle competing priorities and to respond to the urgent needs of both consumers¹ and the workers who support them. These are demanding, often stressful, and sometimes overwhelming positions.

Supervisors' jobs would, of course, be less stressful if workers were consistently reliable and responsible and possessed the ability to resolve problems effectively and independently. But this is not always the case. Supervisors in home and residential care settings spend a great deal of time attending to problems with frontline staff, including repeated lateness, call-outs, behavioral issues, and high turnover. Although it is tempting to blame their workers for poor performance, supervisors must remember that such jobs are also stressful and that workers do not always have the resources to address the sometimes conflicting demands of work and family.

¹ The term "consumer" is used throughout the curriculum to refer to home care clients and residents of long-term care facilities. Instructors should use the term most appropriate for participants in their seminars—for example, "resident" or "client."

Introduction

In response to questions about job satisfaction, many direct-care workers² indicate that what keeps them motivated are their relationships with consumers. What pulls them away from their work are the complex demands of their home lives and not feeling valued or respected on the job.

The most influential factor in whether workers feel valued and respected at work is their relationship with their supervisors. When supervisors value supervisees as people—for example, by creating and maintaining positive relationships and modeling effective communication skills—workers feel increasingly capable and successful and are better able to solve problems independently. As a result, they are more likely to remain in their jobs when facing personal or work-related challenges.

Unfortunately, the relationship-building and communication skills that supervisors need to effectively manage their workers have often not been formally included in supervisory training programs—if supervisors have had formal training at all. Most supervisors have learned a traditional, mostly punitive, approach to supervision that does not provide tools to successfully support and retain frontline workers.

This curriculum introduces supervisors to an innovative and highly effective approach to supervising and mentoring direct-care staff working in eldercare and disability services environments. This approach to supervision centers on building relationships with supervisees, constructively presenting and addressing problems, and helping workers develop problem-solving skills. When implemented successfully, PHI Coaching Supervision results in increased worker satisfaction and retention as well as improved quality of care.

Curriculum Goal and Target Audience

The goal of this curriculum is to introduce seminar participants to a new model of supervision and to teach fundamental communication skills that lay the foundation for improving relationships with workers and developing their problem-solving skills. All skills are taught within the context of eldercare/disability services settings, making the seminar lively and practical for participants.

The target audience for this introductory workshop is supervisors and others in leadership roles, including nurse supervisors, department managers, home care and community-based services managers, charge nurses, and service coordinators.

The four primary skills introduced in the curriculum are:

- **Active Listening:** Using skills such as body language, paraphrasing, and asking clarifying questions to listen attentively and ensure understanding.
- **Self-Management:** Setting aside emotional reactions and other listening blocks that can get in the way of hearing a worker's perspective.

² The term "direct-care workers" is used throughout the curriculum because such workers have varying titles in different settings. For example, certified nurse assistants or nurse aides provide services in residential care settings, whereas home health aides or personal care assistants work in home care settings. Instructors should use the term most appropriate for participants in their seminars.

- **Self-Awareness:** Being conscious of assumptions and biases that lead to prejudging workers and others.
- **Presenting the Problem:** Using objective language to identify problems or concerns and hold workers accountable.

Most of these skills will not be entirely new to supervisors; instructors can draw on participants' existing knowledge and skills to enhance the learning experience. In large part, the seminar is an opportunity to strengthen key supervisory skills in a supportive atmosphere so that participants can use them consistently and effectively on the job. For those who are new to supervision, the curriculum's emphasis on learning through practice is particularly helpful.

Instructors

Ideally, a team of at least two instructors—experienced adult educators, social workers with group experience, or agency administrators with teaching experience—should present this curriculum. Instructors need to be skilled in interactive, participatory education techniques, and at least one needs to be comfortable with performing and conducting role plays (see “Course Approach and Teaching Methods,” p. I.6).

Before adopting this curriculum, it is important to assess the skills of the instructors as well as the particular needs and readiness of the seminar participants. Instructors with different experiences (nursing vs. social work, for example) will bring different strengths and perspectives to the training. Since the seminar relies heavily on sharing personal experience, the material will be shaped in part by those who teach it.

Instructors should be comfortable facilitating open and free-flowing dialogue and able to model honest, open communication throughout the seminar. Self-awareness is critical to becoming a skilled coach supervisor, and some of the activities will raise personal or emotional issues. Instructors must be prepared to help participants work through their feelings while managing their own, modeling self-management, another skill taught during the seminar.

Although this curriculum provides all materials and instructions to teach the seminar, it is highly recommended that instructors participate in a train-the-trainer program prior to conducting the course.³ Such training prepares instructors to use participatory activities to enhance self-awareness, reflection, and problem-solving and to guide participants through emotionally charged discussions.

³ For information on train-the-trainer programs for PHI Coaching Supervision, contact todservices@PHInational.org or visit www.PHInational.org/training.

Curriculum Structure

The seven modules in this curriculum provide an introduction to PHI Coaching Supervision and opportunities to develop four basic skills, as follows:

Module 1: Introduction to PHI Coaching Supervision

- PHI Coaching Supervision in Home and Residential Care Settings
- What a Supervisor Does

Module 2: Traditional Supervision and the PHI Coaching Approach

- The Traditional Approach to Supervision
- The PHI Coaching Approach to Supervision

Module 3: Coaching Skill #1—Active Listening

- Listening Exercise—Body Language
- Paraphrasing for Fact and Feeling
- Communication Game—Back to Back

Module 4: Coaching Skill #2—Self-Management

- Pulling Back
- Pull-Back and Paraphrase Role Plays
- Blocks to Listening

Module 5: Coaching Skill #3—Self-Awareness

- Role Play: Calling Out
- Personal Styles Inventory

Module 6: Coaching Skill #4—Presenting the Problem

- Accountability without Blame or Judgment
- Practice in Presenting the Problem
- Asking Open-Ended Questions

Module 7: Making PHI Coaching Supervision Work

- Putting It All Together
- Coaching Skills Practice
- Requirements for Successful Coaching

Each module begins with a summary page describing:

- Goals of the module
- Teaching methods and time required for each activity within the module
- Supplies and handouts needed
- Advance preparations to help the seminar run smoothly.

Detailed guides for the activities follow the module summary page. Each activity guide includes:

Learning outcomes. Participants should have adopted or be able to demonstrate these concrete, measurable behaviors by the end of the activity. The focus of each activity, they provide a basis for instructors to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Key content. This section contains the basic ideas and important points to be covered during the activity. *This information is not to be read to participants* but rather should be worked into discussions as the activity unfolds. If necessary, the instructors can summarize these points at the end of the activity, but again, they should not be simply read aloud.

Activity steps. These guides help instructors move logically through each activity. A time estimate is provided for each activity and its parts. However, instructors should be mindful of the needs and interests of participants and adapt both the steps and the time to meet those needs.

Teaching tips. Based on experiences with field-testing this curriculum, these are suggestions for optimizing particular activity steps.

Teaching options. These alternatives can replace suggested activities to accommodate time or other constraints.

Ideally, the entire curriculum will be taught from start to finish, as each module builds upon information learned in earlier ones, constantly reinforcing participants' new knowledge and skills. With each successive module, the role plays also become more challenging and complex. The most favorable results will occur from teaching the curriculum step by step rather than expecting participants to leap quickly into complicated case scenarios and role plays.

Keeping in mind the overall structure of the curriculum, instructors should feel free to experiment, make changes, and take risks outside the recommended activities. The modular format makes the program easily adaptable to fit the needs of many groups or organizations. Each group of participants will possess different needs and dynamics, and instructors should adapt the curriculum to best suit their individual groups. In particular, it is important to be aware of a group's energy and to adjust activities accordingly; in some cases, teaching tips and options suggest possible alternatives.

Timing

The modules are designed for a two-day seminar (see "Two-Day Agenda," p. I.10), but instructors may want to consider presenting them in alternate ways. This agenda is very dense, and participants are often tired after a full day. Other options include spreading the curriculum over three or four days. Although teaching the material on consecutive days is best for reinforcing learning, spreading out the modules over several weeks or integrating them into a full-semester course is also possible.

Supplementary activity guides—for closing Day 1, for opening Day 2, and for the evaluation and final closing—are provided in the Appendix. Instructors may integrate these activities as appropriate, depending on where they decide to end one session and begin the next.

Introduction

Introduction, continued

If time is an issue, instructors should adapt the modules. These difficult choices must be made with great care because of the sequential nature of the activities. Enough time must be allotted for each lesson so that learners can assimilate new concepts and practice new skills. Rather than simply reducing the time spent on each skill, instructors may want to begin with a focus on the first two skills and teach the other two at a later date.

Course Approach and Teaching Methods

Course Approach: Focus on Relationships

At the core of PHI Coaching Supervision is a supervisor's ability to develop and maintain a relationship with each worker he or she supervises. *It is through this relationship that problems or concerns are addressed.* Throughout the curriculum, the emphasis is on nurturing the supervisor–worker relationship and on modeling in the classroom the importance of interpersonal connections. Given the focus on interpersonal relationships, the curriculum is designed to create an educational environment in which participants feel safe to share personal experiences, ideas, and viewpoints.

In teaching a curriculum in which relationships are viewed as central, how people teach is as important as what they teach. Instructors must model the skills they are teaching by showing respect for participants, valuing participants' experiences and perspectives, and communicating clearly.

Teaching Methods: Focus on Participation

This curriculum is based on an adult learner-centered approach to education.⁴ At the core of a learner-centered educational program is problem-based learning, teaching strategies that actively engage learners in “figuring things out.” Rather than giving information to passive learners through lectures and demonstrations, instructors facilitate learning by building on what participants already know, engaging them in self-reflection and critical thinking and making problem situations come alive through role plays and other activities. Communication and problem-solving skills cannot be taught by merely lecturing about them; it is crucial that participants practice these skills over and over in a variety of real and simulated situations.

To encourage participatory learning, this curriculum uses a number of teaching methods, some focused on increasing self-awareness and others on building skills through practice. The primary modes of instruction include the following:

Case scenarios: Coaching skills are better learned in a reality-based context rather than as abstract concepts. Case scenarios are real-life examples used to illustrate a point or to challenge participants to devise effective solutions. These exercises present brief explanations of problem situations—usually ones that supervisors commonly experience—and ask participants to propose appropriate responses. Case scenarios and accompanying role plays (see below) become increasingly complex over the course of the curriculum, challenging participants to stretch their coaching abilities.

⁴ See *Adult Learner-Centered Training: An introduction for educators in home and residential care* (PHI, 2008). PHI also offers train-the-trainer workshops on creating learner-centered, participatory training programs.

Role plays: Role plays make case scenarios come alive as participants act out situations they are likely to encounter on the job. In this curriculum, two types of role plays are used: demonstration role plays and practice role plays. Demonstration role plays, by showing common supervisory situations and various types of responses, provide excellent material for analysis and discussion. These role plays may be previously scripted.

During practice role plays, participants draw on prior knowledge and experience while also developing coaching skills. Participants try out different responses to a given situation and then are given feedback about which responses were most effective. Role plays are also used to reinforce new skills—for example, by asking participants to pull back from an immediate emotional response when confronted by an angry worker.

Role-playing encourages participants to take risks in a safe environment, where they can learn from mistakes. Although not all participants will be comfortable performing in front of others, risk taking is an essential part of learning. One way to lower the risk level, especially early on in the seminar, is to conduct role plays in small groups rather than in front of the whole group.

Small-group work: Small-group work helps ensure that all participants remain actively engaged in learning. It also facilitates cooperation and community building among participants. For small-group work, the instructor separates people into groups of four to six who sit together at a table or arrange their chairs in a small circle. Periodically changing the composition of the groups is recommended. Participants benefit from working with people with differing personalities, strengths, and weaknesses.

Small groups will work most effectively if given a clear task and a defined time limit. Instructors can help keep participants on task by walking around the room and checking in briefly with each group. The added benefit of small groups is that they teach about teamwork by embedding it in the learning process.

Interactive presentations: Rather than using a traditional lecture format, we recommend involving participants in interactive presentations, in which the instructor draws on participants' knowledge. This kind of participatory dialogue is much more engaging than a traditional lecture, wherein the lecturer provides all the information. The interactive presentation builds confidence and keeps participants interested, breaking down barriers between the teacher “expert” and the learner. One challenge is ensuring that the discussion stays focused on the topic at hand; instructors must continually guide participants back to the subject material and weave in participants' comments to deepen learning.

In an interactive presentation, the instructor starts by asking participants what they already know about the topic, then draws out participants by asking them to contribute their own experiences and explain what the experiences taught them about the topic under discussion. Participants are also encouraged to ask questions, and instructors provide concrete examples of how the material being taught is relevant to particular situations supervisors encounter.

General Teaching Tips

Planning and Preparation

- Given the level of interaction and practice in this seminar, the ideal number of participants is twelve, with two instructors; activity steps and time are based on these numbers. Teaching options are offered in those activities that might require more time, additional instructors, or a different approach, if there are more than twelve participants.
- To keep participants engaged, interactive presentations should be limited to 15 minutes or less. Facial expressions, varied voice tones, and movement by instructors will keep activities dynamic.
- In the afternoon, groups often become lethargic. A brief, energizing activity in which people move their bodies a bit can shake off sleepiness and keep participants focused on learning. For example, participants can stand and shake out their arms and legs or stand in a circle and bounce a ball across the circle to one another. The idea is just to get the blood moving again, so energizers can be brief (2 minutes or less).
- Before teaching each module, instructors should review the activities and consider the arrangement of chairs that will work best for each. For example, activities involving role plays require a stage area that is easily viewed by the group. Check-ins and closings have a more intimate quality with chairs arranged in a circle. Participants can help rearrange chairs between activities.
- This curriculum is written with detailed instructions useful for new trainers. Experienced instructors will be able to draw from their own “toolbox” to vary some activities.
- Instructors unfamiliar with coaching may want to look at some additional resources. A reference list is included at the end of the manual.

Teaching Materials, Supplies, and Equipment

This curriculum requires a flip chart pad and easel, colored markers, masking tape, pens or pencils, paper for participants, nametags, and three-ring binders for participants. Instructors who want to use overhead projection—either transparencies or LCD computer—as a visual aid during presentations can easily adapt the recommended flip charts and handouts for overhead use.

In general, for all visual materials, it is important to:

- **Write large:** Printed words on flip chart pages should be large and clear. Using colored markers for different concepts can help to delineate and highlight specific points. Likewise, with typed overheads, it is important that words be legible and easily seen from the back of the room. The Arial font at a minimum size of 14 points is recommended.
- **Provide handouts:** Each module’s advance preparation steps indicate which handouts to copy for participants. Some handouts are designed to review concepts, while others are worksheets to be completed during activities. These will become important reference sheets for participants when they apply their new skills in the workplace.

Two versions of a handout are sometimes included: one for residential care settings, where direct-care workers are supervised on site, the other for home care settings, where direct-care workers have little, if any, on-site supervision. Instructors will only need the version appropriate for their setting and participants.

If new handouts are created, instructors should keep pages simple (lots of white space) and use large fonts.

- **Build a resource guide:** One desired outcome is to create a resource guide that participants can refer to after the seminar is completed. Every participant should be given a three-ring binder in which to keep handouts distributed for each activity. Passing out materials as they are used ensures that the information taught in each activity is fresh and provides participants with a sense of accomplishment as each activity or module is completed.

Teaching Techniques

- Throughout the seminar, it is important that instructors consciously model the material presented, using the four basic coaching skills in interactions with the participants.
- If two instructors are coteaching, it is often effective for one to facilitate discussion while the other writes key points on a flip chart page or overhead.
- Instructors should draw out the quieter people in the group so that everyone speaks during a discussion. More talkative participants should not be allowed to dominate discussions.
- There are several opportunities in the seminar for participants to share stories from personal experience. Because this is a rare pleasure for many, such conversations can take on a life of their own. The instructor should keep stories focused on the main point of the activity and watch the time so that all participants get a chance to share.
- Participants' sharing may elicit questions or issues that cannot be tackled during the activity's allotted time. In such situations, the instructor may want to track these issues in a visual way by creating a "parking lot"—an ongoing list on a flip chart page. As time and interest allow over the course of the seminar, these issues can be addressed.
- The role plays are critical to the effectiveness of this curriculum but may be new to many participants. Some may feel reluctant to participate. Instructors should explain that the role plays involve practice, not performance, and that participants will not be judged negatively for their efforts. Participants will learn the most from the role plays if they take their roles seriously and do their best.
- Role plays may also be new to instructors. Instructors who feel nervous about them will pass on their nervousness to participants. Therefore, it is essential that instructors practice the role plays prior to the seminar until they are comfortable with them and can support participants in taking risks to participate. The DVD that accompanies this curriculum may also be used for demonstration role plays, as appropriate for the particular group.
- Participants sometimes pose questions for which instructors don't have answers. If this happens, instructors should acknowledge that the question is new to them and that they may be able to locate an answer before the next session. A willingness to research the question will demonstrate instructors' investment in participants and in the seminar.

The PHI Coaching Approach to Supervision: Sample Agenda for Two-Day Seminar

Day One: 6 Training Hours (e.g., 9:00-4:00)

9:00–10:00

Module 1: Introduction to PHI Coaching Supervision

- 1.1 Introductions 10 minutes
- 1.2 PHI Coaching Supervision in Home and Residential Care Settings 10 minutes
- 1.3 What a Supervisor Does 40 minutes

10:00–10:15 Break 15 minutes

10:15–11:05

Module 2: Traditional Supervision and the PHI Coaching Approach

- 2.1 The Traditional Approach to Supervision 20 minutes
- 2.1 The PHI Coaching Approach to Supervision 30 minutes

11:05–12:20

Module 3, part one: Coaching Skills #1: Active Listening

- 3.1 Listening Exercise 35 minutes
- 3.2-A Paraphrasing for Fact and Feeling 40 minutes

12:20–1:05 Lunch Break 45 minutes

1:05–1:45

Module 3, part two: Coaching Skills #1: Active Listening

- 3.3 Communication Game: Back to Back 20 minutes
- 3.2-B Paraphrase Practice 20 minutes

1:45–2:30

Module 4, part one: Coaching Skills#2: Self-Management

- 4.1 Pulling Back 45 minutes

2:30–2:45 Break 15 minutes

2:45–3:45

- 4.2 Pull Back and Paraphrase Role Plays 60 minutes

3:45–4:00

Closing 15 minutes

Day Two: 6.5 Training Hours (e.g. 9:00-4:30)**9:00–9:30****Day 2 Opening**

Sharing thoughts and feelings and reviewing homework 30 minutes

9:30–10:25**Module 4, part two: Coaching Skills#2: Self-Management**

4.3 Blocks To Listening. 55 minutes

10:25–10:40 *Break* 15 minutes**10:40–11:00****Module 5, part one: Coaching Skill #3-Self-Awareness**

5.1 Role Play: Calling Out. 20 minutes

11:00–12:10**Module 6, part one: Coaching Skills #4: Presenting the Problem**

6.1 Accountability, Without Blame or Judgment 15 minutes

6.2 Practice in Presenting the Problem 55 minutes

12:10–12:55 *Lunch Break* 45 minutes**12:55–1:35****Module 6, part two: Coaching Skill #4-Presenting the Problem**

6.3 Asking Open-Ended Questions 40 minutes

1:35–2:35**Module 5, part two: Coaching Skill #3-Self-Awareness**

5.2 Personal Styles Inventory 60 minutes

2:35–2:50 *Break* 15 minutes**2:50–4:00****Module 7: Making PHI Coaching Supervision Work**

7.1 Putting It All Together: Skill Review 5 minutes

7.2 Coaching Skill Practice: Case Scenarios. 55 minutes

7.3 Requirements for Coaching 10 minutes

4:00–4:30**Evaluation, Next Steps, and Final Closing** 30 minutes

4

Module 4

Coaching Skill #2—Self Management

Goals

- To help participants become more conscious of their emotional reactions to particular situations or people.
- To explore how emotional reactions can get in the way of real listening and to identify strategies for setting aside those reactions in order to listen more openly, improve communication, and solve problems.
- To describe and demonstrate how the skills of active listening and self-management—paraphrasing, asking open-ended clarifying questions, and pulling back—are applied in coaching supervision.
- To reinforce participants’ active listening and self-management skills by role-playing typical supervisory situations.

Time

2 hours, 40 minutes

Training Activities	Methods	Time
4.1 Pulling Back	Interactive presentation, demonstration role plays, brainstorm, discussion, small-group work	45 minutes
4.2 Pull-Back and Paraphrase Role Plays	Practice role plays	60 minutes
4.3 Blocks to Listening	Interactive presentation, individual and small-group work, discussion	55 minutes

Supplies

- Flip chart, easel, and markers

Handouts

- Handout 15: “Choosing to Pull Back” (2 pages)
- Handout 16: “Pulling Back: Overview”
- Handout 17: “Pulling Back: When Feelings Get in the Way of Listening”
- Handout 18: “Supervisory Role Plays for Pull Back and Paraphrase”
(2 versions, residential and home care)
- Handout 19: “Blocks to Listening” (4 pages)

Advance Preparation

Review the seminar materials for each activity.

Activity 4.1

Prepare demonstration role plays for steps 4 and 6 that depict pull-back options A and B (see Handout 15, “Choosing to Pull Back”). The first role play should feature a situation in which a direct-care worker responds inappropriately and his or her supervisor reacts emotionally, thereby aggravating the situation. A sample scenario is provided in the Teaching Tip on p. 4.4, but instructors should tailor the role play to situations that are known problems for participants. Use the same situation for the second role play, but the instructor should respond by pulling back (see Teaching Tip, p. 4.4).

Make copies of the Handouts 15, 16, and 17: “Choosing to Pull Back” (2 pages), “Pulling Back: Overview,” and “Pulling Back: When Feelings Get in the Way of Listening” for all participants.

Activity 4.2

Make copies of Handout 18, “Supervisory Role Plays for Pull Back and Paraphrase” for all participants (choose residential or home care focus, as appropriate).

Activity 4.3

Make copies of the Handout 19, “Blocks to Listening” (4 pages) for all participants.

Think of examples of your own listening blocks to share as you review Handout 19.

Activity 4.1: Pulling Back

45 minutes

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

Identify situations that commonly cause them emotional stress, and recognize their internal reactions to these situations;

Describe how emotional responses often get in the way of their ability to listen attentively;

Identify two options for responding to stressful situations: reacting emotionally or pulling back from those emotions;

Explain that pulling back from their emotional responses often leads to more effective communication; and

Identify strategies for pulling back from their emotional responses.

Key Content

- People's emotional responses to what others communicate, verbally or nonverbally, often get in the way of their ability to listen with full attention.
- While people rarely are able to control others' words or behavior, each person can control his or her own emotional responses to a situation. Shifting personal internal responses makes it possible to listen more attentively. The resulting communication is more effective and more positive.
- The first step in shifting emotional responses to someone's words, tone of voice, or behavior is to become consciously aware of those responses.
- When a person is listening attentively, he or she can make a conscious choice to pull back from negative judgments and stereotypes, to remain curious about the other person, and to stay open to possibly changing his or her opinion about the speaker. Pulling back is the ability to gain emotional control in stressful settings and generally leads to more effective communication and more positive supervisory outcomes. Practical pull-back strategies can help both in the moment and in the long run.
- Pulling back from an emotional response does not mean being soft or allowing dishonest workers to get away with something. In fact, observing one's reactions makes it much less likely that a supervisor will be misled or manipulated. If a supervisor is listening attentively, paraphrasing, and asking clarifying questions whenever something seems confusing or odd, he or she will eventually uncover the truth.

Activity Steps

Interactive presentation (5 minutes)

1. Recall that, as demonstrated in the body language and paraphrasing exercises, people listen well when they bring their full attention to a conversation. But a listener's emotional responses to what a speaker is saying or how he or she is saying it often get in the way of listening with full attention. This module addresses such emotional responses and provides strategies for dealing with them. Identifying and controlling emotions are difficult skills to learn, and everyone will have a chance to practice.
2. Explain that in a supervisory situation, when listening to a worker talk about a problem, the supervisor often focuses on the worker as the problem—that is, on how the worker's behavior got him or her into the situation. In this session, participants will shift their focus from the worker to *their own internal reactions*, because that is something people can change. If a person changes his or her internal response in a difficult situation, that person can affect what happens in the interaction.
3. Pass out Handouts 15 and 16, “Choosing to Pull Back” (2 pages) and “Pulling Back: Overview.” Referring to Handout 15, briefly describe options A and B and the different outcomes that result from each strategy (see page 2 of handout). Next, referring to Handout 16, explain the meaning of “pull back,” discussing its particular importance in health care and asking for workplace examples of the need to pull back to gain emotional control. Review the three steps at the bottom of the handout for pulling back.

Demonstration role plays and discussion (10 minutes)

4. Explain that the instructors will now conduct a role play to demonstrate option A. (See instructions in Advance Preparation.)

► Teaching Tip

Sample scenario: A charge nurse has paged a certified nurse assistant (CNA) to answer a call bell. The CNA storms up to the nurses' station, where the nurse is completing charts. The CNA says, “What the hell were you doing, paging me? Don't you think I have enough to do? I was up to my elbows in shit! You don't seem to be doing anything—what's wrong with your legs?”

In the option A role play, the nurse will explode at the CNA, shouting, “How dare you talk to me that way? Your behavior is completely unacceptable! It's your job to answer call bells, and my job to see that you do so. Go do your job while you still have one!” etc.

5. Allow participants to react to the outrageousness of the worker's behavior. Indicate that even in situations like this, where the behavior is clearly inappropriate, it is possible to use pull-back skills to shape a positive outcome. Ask participants:

What did you observe about the supervisor's response to the worker?

What was the outcome?

How could the supervisor have responded differently, in order to obtain a better, more productive outcome?

- Repeat the role play with the worker showing the same behavior and the supervisor demonstrating option B, using some of the suggestions from participants.

► **Teaching Tips**

The situation and the worker's behavior in option B are the same as in option A. This time, however, the charge nurse stays focused on defusing the situation and getting the task at hand completed—i.e., responding to the call bell.

Examples of the nurse's response could be to take a deep breath, ask the CNA to sit down, paraphrase the CNA's response, and then say quietly, "I understand that you are busy, and so am I. Your task here is to respond to the call bell. Please do that as soon as you can, and, later on, we will discuss better ways to respond to a page when you're busy." The nurse should exaggerate her pull-back response, so participants clearly see the behavior.

- Ask participants:

What did you observe this time about the supervisor's response to the worker?

What was the outcome?

What strategies did the supervisor use to pull back from his or her emotions and get a more productive outcome?

How might these two interactions affect the relationship between the worker and the supervisor?

► **Teaching Tip**

Emphasize that choosing option B does not mean being soft. Paraphrasing and asking clarifying questions can cut through attempts to manipulate or mislead. This generally results in more fully finding out what is going on, as well as getting the necessary work done in the best way possible.

Brainstorm and discussion (10 minutes)

- Explain that everyone uses one or more strategies to pull back in stressful situations. The goal of this activity is for participants to become aware of those strategies and strengthen them. Acknowledge the difficulty of staying calm and thinking clearly in stressful situations. To emphasize this point, instructors should give examples of pull-back strategies that work for them both *in* stressful situations and *when preparing* for potentially stressful situations.

- Brainstorm with the group different strategies for pulling back. Ask:

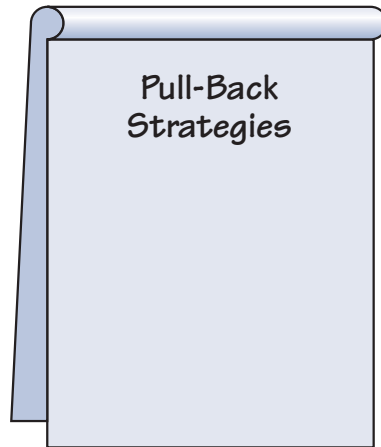
What do you do in emotionally stressful situations to keep yourselves together?

– Continued next page

Module 4: Coaching Skill #2—Self Management

Activity 4.1, continued

Write the strategies on a flip chart page entitled “Pull-Back Strategies.”



► Teaching Tips

The list could include: take deep breaths, silently say a prayer, silently count to five, and silently say a personal affirmation such as “I have the strength to deal with whatever is happening here.”

Some strategies may not be appropriate responses to stressful situations (for example, walking away). Redirect or reframe such responses before writing them on the flip chart page.

Remind participants to think about supervisory situations: *“How would you feel if your supervisor walked away in a stressful situation?”*

10. Explain to the group that there are two categories of pull-back strategies. The first are strategies that people use immediately or in the moment when they are having an emotional response. The second category’s strategies are ones people use when they know they are about to encounter a potentially stressful situation, such as a difficult meeting or phone conversation, but there is time to prepare.

11. Quickly review the list from step 9, and ask participants to identify which strategies are immediate or in the moment and which ones are preparatory. Label each strategy with an “I” or “P.”

► Teaching Tip

Examples of preparatory strategies include: vent or talk to a coworker about the situation, listen to soothing music, or imagine yourself staying calm and collected during the situation. Some strategies may belong on both lists.

Small-group work (20 minutes)

12. Distribute Handout 17, “Pulling Back: When Feelings Get in the Way of Listening,” and read through it together. Explain that these are personal or workplace situations that may require a pull back. Use examples from your own life to help participants understand the concept and to model self-reflection and self-disclosure.

13. Have participants take a few minutes individually to check off those items on the list that resonate with them and add others they know are stressful for them.

14. Divide participants into small groups, and have them choose one person to take notes to report back to the group. Ask them to do two things in their small group:

Briefly share the items they checked on the list: *What triggers your emotions?*

As a group, help each individual identify pull-back strategies to use to avoid getting emotionally hooked. Each person should identify one *in-the-moment* and one *preparing strategy*.

15. Bring everyone back to the large group, and ask the reporters to briefly note which items were stressful for group members and which pull-back strategies were identified to counter those situations.

► **Teaching Tip**

Reporters will not have time to tell all the group members' individual stories. Help reporters stick to summarizing the stories and focusing on known pull-back strategies

—Teaching Notes—

—Teaching Notes—

Activity 4.2: Pull-Back and Paraphrase Role Plays

60 minutes

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

Demonstrate the skills they have been learning—paraphrasing, asking open-ended questions, and pulling back—in simulated supervisory interactions;

Describe the challenge of mastering these skills as well as the benefits that result from using these skills in supervision; and

Explain why it is important to listen to the worker's perspective and gather as much information about a situation as possible prior to jumping into problem solving.

Key Content

- Learning new skills requires practice. Practicing in the relatively safe setting of the seminar environment will help participants solidify their understanding of skills they'll soon be using in their jobs.
- The key task for this part of coaching supervision is to use the skills of active listening and self-management—including paraphrasing, asking open-ended clarifying questions, and pulling back—to find out more about the worker and what lies behind the situation being presented. When supervisors rush into problem solving, they may propose solutions based on false assumptions. Such solutions are rarely effective.
- By pulling back and listening, rather than immediately proposing solutions, supervisors provide opportunities for workers to examine the situation and propose their own solutions.

Activity Steps

Practice role plays (60 minutes)

1. Introduce this activity by presenting the following points:

In this activity participants will be given a chance to practice the skills they have been learning through role plays. Role plays allow people to practice new skills in a safe environment—one in which there is support for learning and improving.

The skills that participants have been learning are difficult; no one is expected to easily put them into practice. It's important to be patient during the role plays, as everyone is simply trying to learn and improve their skills.

Luckily, in role plays, mistakes are useful, because they provide helpful information to learn from. In order to learn, it is important to be able to give and receive constructive criticism, as well as point out what is done well.

Module 4: Coaching Skill #2—Self Management

2. Divide participants into two groups, each led by an instructor.

► **Teaching Tips**

Keep the two halves well separated so as to decrease participants' anxiety and reduce distracting noise. Ideally groups will meet in separate rooms.

Role plays can make participants nervous. This is the first time that all participants will be engaged in practice role plays. In order to decrease stage fright and save time, keep the atmosphere casual and conduct the role plays around a table or in a circle of chairs. Repeat at the outset that this is practice and not performance.

3. Distribute Handout 18, "Supervisory Role Plays for Pull-Back and Paraphrase," to your group. Explain that everyone will get a turn to play the supervisor while the instructor will play a worker each time. Allow participants in your group time to read the scenarios.

4. Ask for a volunteer to start the role plays by choosing a scenario to enact. End each role play after the supervisor has successfully elicited clarifying information from the worker. *Do not go on to problem solving.* Explain that in coaching supervision, using communication skills to defuse a charged situation and gather more information is extremely important; all else depends on it, so this step must not be skipped over or hurried through.

► **Teaching Tips**

Spend about five minutes on each role play, and five minutes on the follow-up discussion.

Remind your group members of the skills to be used—appropriate body language, paraphrasing, asking clarifying questions, and pulling back.

Before beginning each role play, ask the supervisor to state which pull-back strategies he or she plans to use.

Encourage participants to choose new scenarios for their own role play but allow people to repeat a scenario. If that happens, play the role of the worker a bit differently each time.

Keep the tone light and allow for laughter, but don't allow any role play to become a comedy. Keep the group focused on the task.

Participants will be tempted during the role plays to move into problem solving. If participants start trying to brainstorm solutions to problems, gently interrupt and redirect them to asking clarifying questions or paraphrasing. Remind them that their task right now is to elicit more information only.

Some participants may feel awkward, anxious, or shy about performing in front of others. Acknowledge that this may be a new way of learning for some people and that it may feel awkward at first. Explain that role plays are highly effective tools for practicing and integrating new skills that involve interactions with others; role plays also simulate situations that people in their professional positions will encounter. Remind everyone that all participants are here to support one another in their learning, not to judge or ridicule. Use discretion, but in general it is not a good idea to allow anyone to opt out of participating in a role play.

5. Debrief after each role play by asking the following questions:

What were this supervisor's pull-back strategies?

Were they effective?

Why?

If the group is unable to identify the strategies, ask the volunteer who did the role play to identify the strategies he or she used. Ask:

What else did the supervisor do or say that seemed effective?

Did the supervisor use paraphrasing and open-ended clarifying questions? How?

Did you notice anything in particular about the supervisor's body language?

What could be improved?

6. Continue until every participant has played the supervisor in a role play. Ask participants:

What did you notice about the quality and flow of the interactions overall?

Look for participants to say that using the active listening and self-management skills helped, rather than hindered, the interaction, and that using the skills did not seem awkward.

Note: If following the two-day format, use the end-of-day closing activity here (see Supplementary Activity Guides, "Day 1 Closing"). Encourage participants to do the brief homework asked of them.

—Teaching Notes—

Activity 4.3: Blocks to Listening

55 minutes

Note: If this is the start of Day 2, begin with “Day 2 Opening Activity,” included in the Supplementary Activity Guides.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

Describe common blocks to listening;

Identify the three personal blocks that most often keep them from listening as effectively as they can; and

Be more aware of these blocks in themselves as they arise in listening situations.

Key Content

- “Pseudo listening” is when people act like they are listening but actually are not. In many situations, such as when making light conversation at a party, this doesn’t matter much. However, pseudo listening can be problematic when good communication is needed, such as in supervisory interactions.
- Blocks to listening are distractions, usually unconscious, that keep people from listening with their full attention.
- Everyone experiences blocks to listening at some time. Becoming aware of their particular blocks helps people put them aside and bring full attention to listening.

Activity Steps

Interactive presentation (25 minutes)

1. Introduce the session by discussing the following points:

People tend to think that listening well is easy. It is true that everyone has the ability to listen well, but various distractions get in the way.

There are many blocks to good listening, and everyone experiences at least some of them. Usually people experience them without being conscious of them.

This activity focuses on the most common blocks. Each participant will identify which particular blocks he or she experiences most frequently.

When people identify their particular blocks to listening, they become aware of them and bring them to consciousness. Becoming aware of one’s blocks is the first step in changing one’s behavior.

– Continued next page

Module 4: Coaching Skill #2—Self Management

Activity 4.3, continued

The goal is to set aside these distracting blocks and make a conscious choice to listen.

► Teaching Tip

If you have opened with a review of the homework exercise about listening, this next activity will be especially relevant. Use the stories participants shared about difficulties with the homework assignment to illustrate the concept of listening blocks.

2. Distribute Handout 19, “Blocks to Listening,” and ask a volunteer to read aloud the first three paragraphs. Explain the meaning of “pseudo,” if necessary. Explain that pseudo listening is very common and often doesn’t cause any problems. Ask how pseudo listening could be problematic in a supervisory interaction.

3. Read the description of the first listening block, “rehearsing.” Share a personal example of your experience with this listening block. Ask one or two participants to add personal examples of this listening block.

► Teaching Tip

The more open and willing you are to disclose your struggles with listening blocks, the easier it will be for participants to acknowledge these blocks in themselves.

For example: “I tend to rehearse a lot. Once, at a training, I was annoyed by a participant who came in late several mornings. I finally took her aside to tell her that she could not continue in the program if she could not arrive on time. While she was trying to explain how important the training was to her and why she had been having difficulty arriving on time, I was rehearsing my speech. I never actually heard what was causing her tardiness, so I couldn’t work with her to resolve the problem.”

4. Continue to go through the handout, using the same format with each listening block: Read it aloud, talk about whether this block is one you (or your co-instructor) experience often, share a personal experience, and ask for personal examples from a few participants.

► Teaching Tip

This concept is often new to participants, and they may have difficulty identifying their blocks. In addition, some in the group may be reticent to share examples of their listening blocks because they see them as personal flaws and may not want to reveal them in the large group. Be sure to emphasize that listening blocks are universal and very often unconscious.

Individual work (5 minutes)

5. After going through all ten listening blocks, ask participants to write down their three most common listening blocks on the last page of the handout.

Small-group work (15 minutes)

6. Explain that participants will now share their listening blocks in small groups, with each person giving examples of his or her blocks. The goal is to increase awareness of blocks that prevent people from listening fully and to devise strategies to avoid being caught in their particular listening blocks.

7. Divide participants into small groups. Ask one person in each group to act as recorder and jot down strategies as group members talk and another volunteer to report to the larger group. To guide the discussion, participants can refer to the questions at the bottom of the last page of the handout:

Think about how these blocks come up for you, especially in the context of supervision.

What will help you be aware that you are using these blocks?

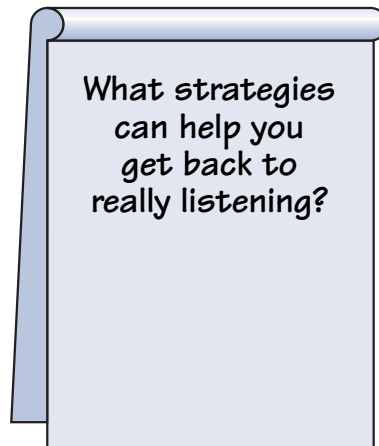
What strategies might you use to return to actively listening when you recognize that your listening is blocked but you want to really listen?

► **Teaching Tip**

Circulate around the room during the small-group discussions to ensure that conversations stay on track and everyone gets a chance to share.

Discussion (10 minutes)

8. Ask the reporter from each group to share the group's strategies for becoming more aware of and overcoming members' blocks to listening. Write participants ideas on a flip chart page entitled "What strategies can help you get back to really listening?"



► **Teaching Tip**

If the following ideas are not suggested by the group, be sure to include them on the list:

Mental check-ins: Do a mental check-in every minute or so while listening.

Practice with a partner: Practice listening to someone who knows you well, and ask him or her to point out every time your attention seems to stray.

Pause to find the cause: If you notice that listening to someone is becoming more difficult, ask the person to pause for a moment. Ask yourself what blocks seem to be present.

Some groups may not come up with any workable strategies to return to active listening. Acknowledge how difficult it is in the moment to be aware of processes within oneself that are usually unconscious. Reassure participants that it is possible to become more aware. Point to the three strategies listed above as possible remedies, and ask if anyone has other ideas to add.

—Teaching Notes—

Module 4: Coaching Skill #2—Self Management

9. Remind the group that simply becoming aware of one's blocks is the most important step in choosing to set them aside and listen. Tell the group that the next module is designed to help them further extend their self-awareness.

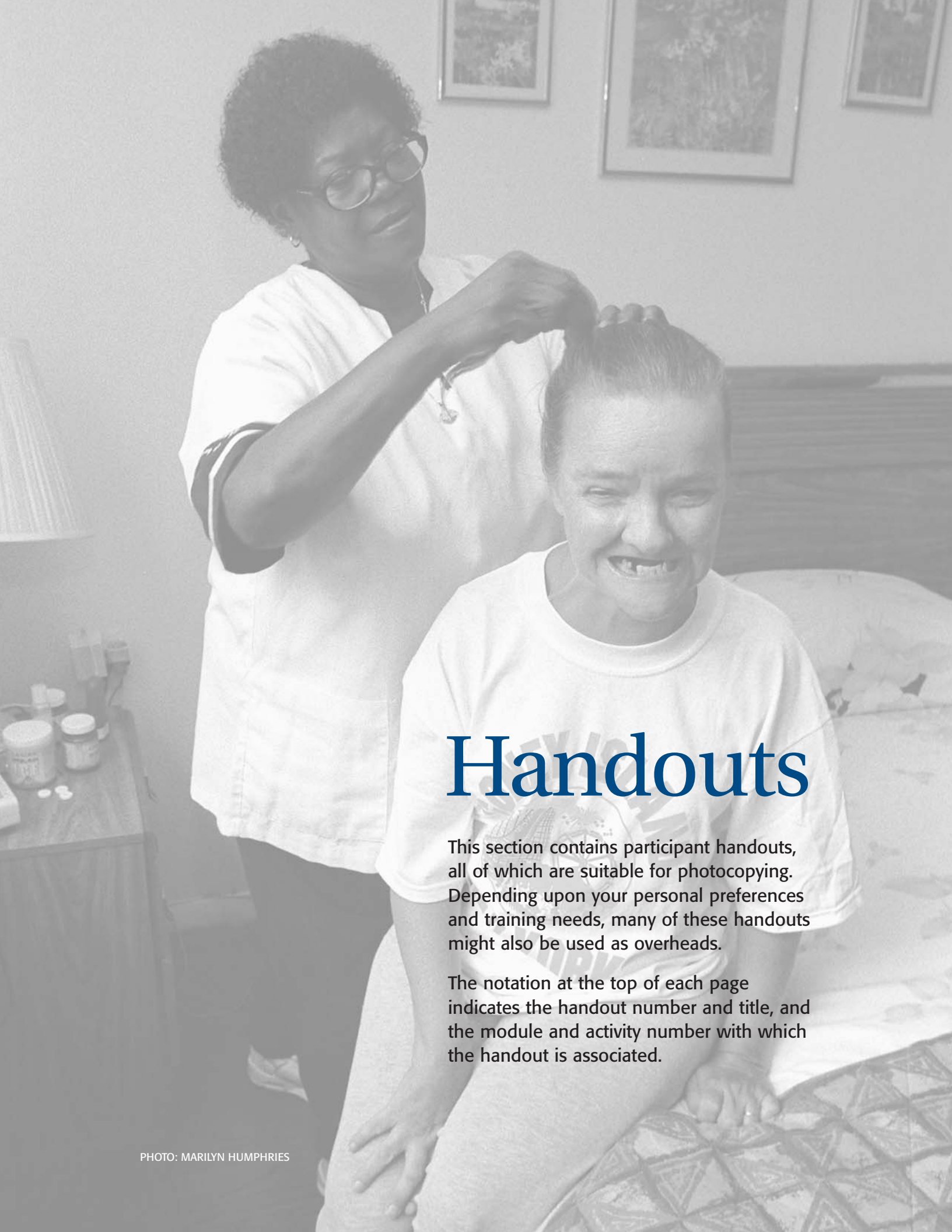
► **Teaching Option**

If time is limited, instructors can cover the 10 blocks to listening by assigning them to small groups as follows:

Small-group work and discussion (15 min.)

1. After discussing "rehearsing," divide participants into three small groups, and assign three different listening blocks to each group. Ask each group to think of an example of how each listening block can occur in the supervisory relationship.
2. After 5 minutes, ask each group to describe their three listening blocks and share their examples. Ask other participants for additional examples of that particular listening block.
3. After everyone has finished reporting, ask participants if they recognize a particular block as one they might often use and to identify a strategy for getting past that block. Ask for further strategies as time allows.

—Teaching Notes—



Handouts

This section contains participant handouts, all of which are suitable for photocopying. Depending upon your personal preferences and training needs, many of these handouts might also be used as overheads.

The notation at the top of each page indicates the handout number and title, and the module and activity number with which the handout is associated.

4

Handouts: Module 4

Handout 15: Choosing to Pull Back

Handout 16: Pulling Back—Overview

Handout 17: Pulling Back—When Feelings Get in the Way of Listening

Handout 18: Supervisory Role Plays for Pull Back and Paraphrase

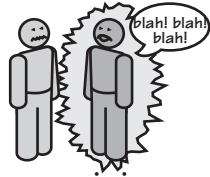
Handout 19: Blocks to Listening

Choosing to Pull Back

Sometimes you are faced with situations and people who evoke an emotional response—be it anger, hurt, frustration, hopelessness, or sadness. When you are in an emotional state, listening becomes difficult and communication becomes “charged.” You always have a *choice* in how you respond.

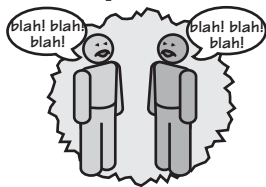
When a person evokes your emotions, you have a choice.

Option A
Respond based on your emotions



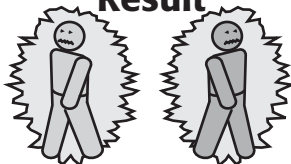
- Defend your opinions.
- Prepare your response.

Exchange becomes emotionally based for both

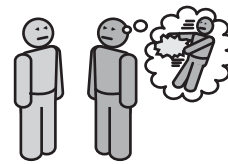


- Each looks for evidence to support opinions.
- Each discounts evidence to the contrary.

Result



Option B
Pull back from your emotions



- Suspend your opinions, and put them on hold.
- Listen actively, without blocks or judgment.

Engage in a “non-charged” dialogue



- Look with curiosity for new information or insights.
- Stay open to changing your opinion.

Result



Option A generally leads to:	Option B generally leads to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Difficulty thinking clearly■ Inability to listen■ Difficulty in being open to believing or trusting the other person■ Being judgmental■ Feeling justified or self-righteous■ Blaming the other person■ Holding onto anger, resentment, mistrust■ Self-fulfilling prophecy—in the future, the person will most likely act in the negative way we expect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Clear thinking■ More appropriate communication■ More empathy for those who think, see, and believe differently■ Nonjudgmental responses■ Having <i>more</i> information, and therefore a better understanding of the whole situation■ Defusing anger■ Building trust■ Problem-solving that involves both parties, resulting in mutual ownership of the solution■ Self-fulfilling prophecy—in the future, the person will most likely act in the positive way we expect.

Pulling Back – Overview

Pulling Back: The ability to gain emotional control in stressful situations.

- A supervisor’s ability to handle a situation well will be determined by his or her ability to stay calm and think clearly.
- To “pull back” is to be able to pause, get emotions under control, and clearly observe and assess the problem situation.
- After pulling back for a moment, a supervisor can make sure he or she understands what’s going on and ask for additional information, if necessary.
- Good communication and problem solving can only come from clear and objective thinking.

Steps for Pulling Back

1. Notice your emotional reactions and judgments.
2. "Freeze-frame" your reaction—put it aside.
3. Put your attention back on the other person.

Pulling Back—When Feelings Get in the Way of Listening

What behaviors, people, or situations trigger your emotions?

- I hear the same complaint over and over again.
- Someone refuses to take responsibility for a problem.
- I feel personally blamed or attacked and, therefore defensive.
- I get the sense that I am failing or have somehow messed up.
- The issue is too close to the bone for me.
- I'm blamed for something that isn't my fault.
- I think the other person is lying.
- I know I'm right.
- I think one person is right and another is wrong.
- My idea is brilliant and the other person won't accept it.
- I think this will go on forever and I don't have the time for it.
- Someone's behavior reminds me of my mother/spouse/ex...
- I'm tired, stressed, or just not in the mood.
- Others. _____

What do you usually do (what is your usual pull-back strategy) to calm yourself down? Identify one method to use *in the moment* and one to use to *help you prepare* for stressful situations. _____

Supervisory Role Plays for Pull Back and Paraphrase

The goal of these role plays is to practice pulling back and using paraphrasing to listen and gather information. Your challenge is to stay calm and gather information about what the real issue is, rather than becoming caught up in what a “difficult” person the worker is.

Read over the scenarios, and choose one to role-play with your group. Choose a scenario that resembles a situation you might encounter in your work environment. Here you will play the supervisor, and the instructor will play the worker.

1. The nurse supervisor says she asked the worker to come in because she is concerned that she has been getting to her assigned floor 5 to 15 minutes late all week. The worker says nothing is wrong and asks why is anyone complaining about a stupid 5 minutes.
2. The worker storms into the nursing office, demanding to know why she was pulled off her assignment. She claims the supervisor heard only the family member’s complaint and not her side of the story.
3. The worker comes to see the supervisor about needing to work part-time instead of full-time. She starts to cry and says she’s so stressed she can’t hold everything together but doesn’t know how she’s going to feed her kids if she cuts back.
4. The supervisor is explaining to the worker why she wrote her up, that a “no call / no show” always results in an automatic write-up. The worker says she knows other workers who have done worse things and never got written up. She says she knows the supervisor hates her and has always had it in for her.
5. The worker is a chronic complainer. She speaks in whiny tones about how exhausted she is, how she never gets a break, how nothing is going right in her life.

— continued, next page

6. You walk down the hall and see three call bells on. You stop a CNA and ask her why no one has attended to the call bells. She says, “Do I look like I have nothing to do? Why don’t you ask “do-nothing” Beatrice? Those are her residents, not mine.”
7. The worker says she has to quit. She looks upset but says she doesn’t want to talk about it; she just wants to know what paperwork she has to do.
8. The worker has a daughter who is homeless with a young child. The worker asks the supervisor for advice about how to help her daughter. When the supervisor says she feels badly for her and wishes she could help, the worker asks the supervisor to call shelters and rooming houses to find out their policies and decide which is the best place.

Supervisory Role Plays for Pull Back and Paraphrase

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Read over the scenarios, and choose one to role-play with your group. Choose a scenario that resembles a situation you might encounter in your work environment. Here you will play the supervisor, and the instructor will play the worker.

1. The supervisor says she asked the worker to come in because she is concerned that she has been arriving at her case 5 to 15 minutes late all week. The worker says nothing is wrong and asks why is anyone complaining about a stupid 5 minutes.
2. The worker storms into the supervisor’s office, demanding to know why she was pulled off her case. She claims the supervisor heard only the family member’s complaint and not her side of the story.
3. The worker comes to see the supervisor to ask for more hours. She starts to cry and says she can’t feed her kids on what she’s making.
4. The supervisor is explaining to the worker why she wrote her up, that a “no call / no show” always results in an automatic write-up. The worker says she knows other workers who have done worse things and never got written up. She says she knows the supervisor hates her and has always had it in for her.
5. The worker is a chronic complainer. She speaks in whiny tones about how exhausted she is, how she never gets a break, how nothing is going right in her life.

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6. You're doing a supervisory home visit, and the client seems particularly agitated and is complaining about her house being a mess. You go into the kitchen to ask the worker what has been going on and she says, "So you want me to be her maid, too? She doesn't want me to do anything on her care plan, and now you're asking me what the problem is? Are you the one who's going to give her a bed bath, big-time nurse?"
7. The worker says she has to quit. She looks upset but says she doesn't want to talk about it; she just wants to know what paperwork she has to do.
8. The worker has a daughter who is homeless with a young child. The worker asks the supervisor for advice about how to help her daughter. When the supervisor says she feels badly for her and wishes she could help, the worker asks the supervisor to call shelters and rooming houses to find out their policies and decide which is the best place.

Blocks to Listening

Listening is the most fundamental and important communication skill. A lot of the time, people look or act like they are listening, but they aren't really listening—they are pseudo listening.

Everyone does pseudo listening at times. Problems arise when good listening is important or when people do pseudo listening most of the time.

You can become more aware of your own pseudo listening if you notice the listening blocks you use. Being aware of listening blocks makes it possible not to use them or to use them less often.

Ten Common Listening Blocks*

1. **Rehearsing**—You can't really listen because you're practicing what you're going to say next. You may look like you're listening, but your mind is going a mile a minute because you've got a story to tell or a point to make.

Examples:

2. **Mind Reading**—Rather than paying attention to what another person is actually saying, you're trying to figure out what he or she is really thinking or feeling. Mind readers make assumptions about what people mean and how people react to them, usually based on the peoples' body language and other nonverbal cues.

Examples:

— continued, next page

*This material adapted from Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, *Messages: The Communication Skills Book* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 1995).

Ten Common Listening Blocks—continued

3. **Comparing**—You have a hard time listening because you're trying to see who is smarter, more caring, more competent—you or the person speaking. You can't let in much because you're trying to see if you measure up.

Examples:

4. **Filtering**—You listen to some things and not to others. You pay attention enough to hear only what you feel you need to hear, then your mind wanders. Or you may filter to avoid hearing things that are negative, critical, or unpleasant. It's as if some words were never said.

Examples:

5. **Judging**—You dismiss others based on who they are or what they say. You aren't really listening but are having a knee-jerk reaction.

Examples:

6. **Dreaming**—You are half listening, and suddenly the person's words trigger a chain of private thoughts. Your mind wanders, and you no longer hear what the person is saying. You can be prone to dreaming when you feel bored or anxious.

Examples:

—continued, next page

Ten Common Listening Blocks—continued

7. **Identifying**—A person’s words remind you of something in your own experience, so now you’re not listening to his or her words, you’re thinking about what happened to you. Often you’re just waiting for the person to finish so you can tell your own story.

Examples:

8. **Advising**—Before people get to what’s really troubling them, you jump in with suggestions to solve the problem. Before they are finished talking, you are thinking about what to do.

Examples:

9. **Sparring**—You are quick to disagree—often listening only for points to argue with. This tends to happen when you have strong opinions on a subject. One type of sparring is the put-down, using sarcastic remarks to trivialize or dismiss another person’s point of view. Another is discounting—running yourself down when you receive a compliment.

Examples:

10. **Placating**—You are nice, pleasant, and supportive but are not really listening. You will generally agree with what’s being said, without really taking it in. In this mode, you may also be patronizing. This listening block is often used with children and older people.

Examples:

Identify your most common listening blocks.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Think about how these blocks come up for you, especially in the context of supervision.

What will help you be aware that you are using these blocks?

What strategies might you use to return to actively listening when you recognize that your listening is blocked but you want to really listen?