

Support individuals who are distressed

In this unit you will learn about why people that you support may experience distress. There are many reasons for this – every person is different. How people react to stress can be very different too. Whatever the reasons of their distress, it is important that you are able to offer support and comfort, and to reduce and relieve the distress wherever possible. You will learn how to help to support a person who is distressed using an individual and holistic approach to help to reduce and relieve their distress.

The person's condition can change, so it is also important that you know how to keep an eye on this.

In this unit you will learn about:

- 1. causes and effects of distress**
- 2. how to prepare to support individuals who are experiencing distress**
- 3. how to support individuals through periods of distress**
- 4. how to support individuals to reduce distress**
- 5. how to record and report on an individual's distress.**

1. Understand causes and effects of distress

1.1 Common causes of distress

The causes of distress are varied and differs from person to person. A situation that reduces one person to tears may be shrugged off by another. Be careful not to confuse the causes of the distress with the reasons for it. The causes can be a range of external factors; however, the reasons have a much deeper, psychological influence which affects the way different people respond in different circumstances.

Most people most of the time behave within the accepted norms of society. However, occasionally the emotions may become too powerful or the control which people have over their emotional feelings relaxes, resulting in a display of emotion which is recognised as distress. People can become distressed because of a wide range of causes and these can be the trigger for the underlying emotional response.

People commonly become distressed when:

- they are informed of the death or serious illness of someone close to them
- they receive other bad or worrying news
- there are problems with a relationship which is important to them
- there is an overload of work or family pressures
- they have serious issues which worry them, such as money, problems with work or their family
- they are reacting to the behaviour of others towards them
- they are responding to something that they have heard, seen or read in the media
- they are in an environment which they find frustrating or restricting
- they are in an environment which they find intensely irritating – for example, a noisy one
- they are deprived of information and are fearful
- they have full information about a situation and they remain fearful of it
- they are anxious about a forthcoming event
- they are unable to achieve the objectives which they have set themselves.

These are some of the more common triggers for distress. Clearly there are many others which you may come across depending on the setting in which you work.

Activity 1



Triggers for distress

There can be many triggers that can lead to a person becoming distressed. Think about the people that you support. Can you identify any triggers that can lead to a person becoming distressed?

1.2 Signs that may indicate an individual is distressed

When you have a close working knowledge of a person's behaviour over a period of time, it can be easy to see when they are becoming distressed. You will find that you become tuned in to their behaviour and can notice the small signs that mean a change in mood. However, you will not always know people so well. Also, you may not only be dealing with distress of people that you are supporting, you may also have to deal with it in a carer or work colleague.

There are some general clues that may show that a person is becoming distressed.

- Their voice may be raised or at a higher pitch than usual.
- Their facial expression may change – for example, scowling, crying or snarling.
- The pupils could be dilated and their eyes open wider.
- Their body language would show agitation; they may become aggressive, leaning forward with fists clenched.
- Their face and neck are likely to be reddened.
- They may sweat excessively.
- There may be changes in breathing pattern – they may breathe faster than normal.

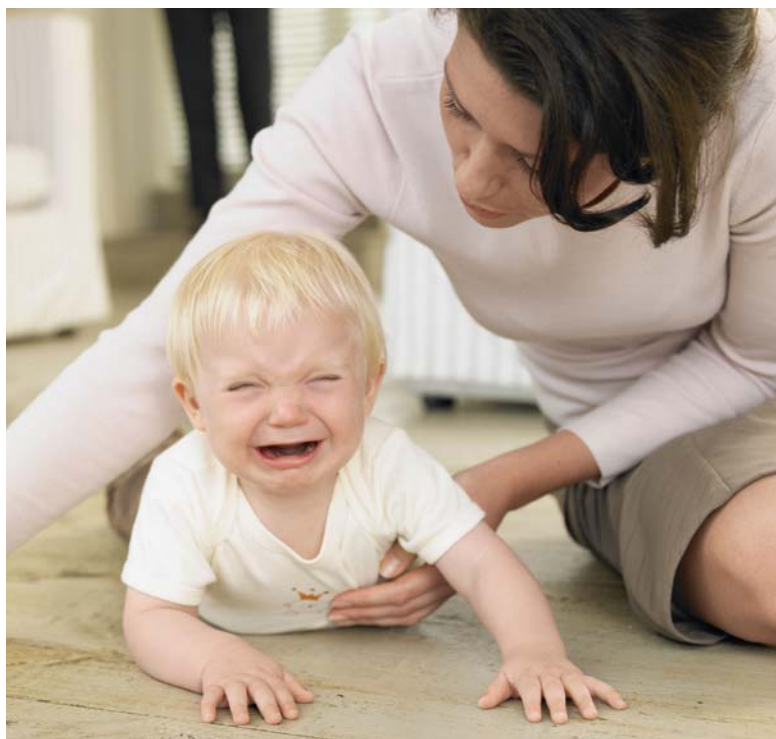
Changes in behaviour

You are likely to notice a change in a person's behaviour when someone is distressed. For example, someone who is normally chatty may become quiet and someone who is usually quiet may start to shout and talk very quickly. A person who is usually lively may sit still and not want to move, whereas someone who is usually relaxed may pace about waving their arms.

You need to keep an eye on changes in behaviour, even if they are less obvious than the examples given. Sometimes small changes can mean that someone is becoming distressed; you are far more likely to notice these small changes in people who you know well and have worked with over a period of time.

1.3 How distress may affect the way an individual communicates

There has always been much debate about whether our emotional responses are inborn or learned from the environment. It is most likely that they are a mixture of the two. Most psychologists agree that there is an inborn response. Psychologists have identified the crying response in young babies as the earliest human response. This response is extremely useful because it is the means by which the baby attracts its mother's attention to have its needs met. Crying therefore provides an effective appeal for help – and it is a response many people continue into adulthood.



A baby cries to alert their mother to have their needs met.

Babies appear to demonstrate three different emotional responses: fear, rage and love. Psychologists and psychiatrists dealing with people suffering from mental health problems or disturbed emotional behaviour are able to identify the three basic emotional responses of rage, fear and love, plus a fourth category of depression.

A person who is distressed may become very quiet and withdrawn, and not want to talk; they may turn away from you and not make eye contact. Their self-esteem may be very low. Body language may appear closed and even negative. Often, although they may need and want support, they may feel like they are a burden and this can create a real barrier to communication. You may find this difficult because the communication is one-sided and you may be frustrated because you feel that you are not getting anywhere, because you are not getting feedback.

However, sometimes people who are distressed may appear angry; they may do all the talking and control the conversation, and not be prepared to listen. This can be equally difficult because you may feel that you are not able to have your say and to help them.

A person may talk a different language which will make communication even more difficult, or they may have a learning disability.

1.4 How working with an individual who is distressed may impact on your well-being

It can be very upsetting to deal with someone who is distressed. People's experiences can be so moving and distressing that you may feel very grateful or perhaps even guilty for your own happier circumstances. On the other hand, if you are having difficulties yourself, you could find these may be brought to the surface when supporting a person who is distressed.

Feeling concerned, upset or even angry after a particularly emotional experience with a person is normal. You may feel that you have not done your job well and you could have done more. You may question your actions and abilities. After a period of time, you hopefully will have put the experience behind you, but occasionally this is not the case and you may find it interfering with your work, either with the person concerned or with others.

The distress of others, whether it is in the form of anger, sadness, worry or anxiety, can be very distressing for the person who is supporting the person. It can create worry and concern, and even lead to the care worker having physical and emotional effects of stress themselves. Stress upsets nearly every system in the body; it can lead to, for example:

- insomnia
- headaches
- lack of appetite
- high blood pressure
- infertility
- skin problems
- chest pain.

Feeling stressed yourself not only affects the quality of your work, it can also affect relationships with others such as family and friends; it can even lead to relationship breakdown.

Over a period of time, working with a person who is distressed may lead the care worker to feel negative about themselves. Their mental health may be affected, their own self-esteem may become low and they may even show signs of depression.

It is therefore vital that you recognise when another person's distress is having an effect on you. There are many sources of support that can help. The first person you should speak to is your supervisor.

Reflect



People who we work and live with sometimes suffer distress for many reasons; perhaps the person has lost their job or have had bad news. Have you been the person there to offer support? How did the situation make you feel? Did it affect you physically or emotionally in any way?

2. Be able to prepare to support individuals who are experiencing distress

2.1 Accessing information and advice about supporting an individual through a time of distress

Remember to involve the person themselves – they may have experienced these feelings before and know from experience what helps. Friends and relatives may also be able to offer advice; they may have helped the person through similar experiences in the past and found effective ways to reduce distress. Remember confidentiality though, and always ask permission from the person before you discuss issues with others. Ideally the person themselves should be an active part of the discussion.

The support plan may give guidance on how to support the person if they are experiencing distressing situations. If the person has transferred from another service – for example, from a residential setting into nursing or a hospital environment – then previous care staff may be able to give some valuable guidance.

Specialist professionals such as cancer care nurses or palliative care teams can offer advice and guidance on supporting people when they or a member of their family or friend have been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Also, other support groups can offer information and advice – for example, the British Heart Foundation. The person's general practitioner (GP) can give advice and may signpost to specialist services – for example, counselling – as can nurse practitioners. Local support services and national helplines can be a source of support, offering information and advice to help the person through the difficult time of distress.

Work colleagues may be able to give advice about how they have supported the person through times of distress; they may have found strategies that have helped. Working closely with the multidisciplinary team will enable you to take a holistic approach.

2.2 Signs of distress that would indicate the need for specialist intervention

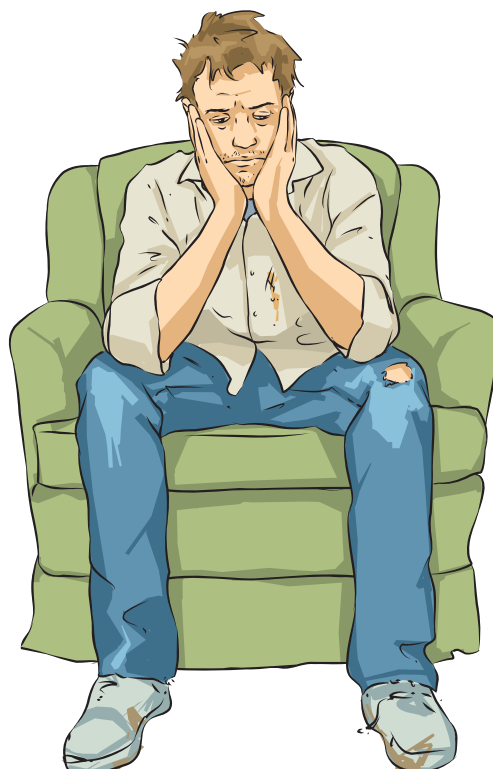
The level of help and support that you should offer is always best decided along with the person themselves. Wherever possible, this should be done through a process of discussion. Questions should be open, clear and designed to find out the level of support that is needed, such as, 'I can see that you are very upset; would it help to talk to me about it?' or 'I can see that you are very upset; would you like me to find you someone to talk to?'

Activity 2



Local services offering support

There are many different organisations that can offer advice about supporting a person who is distressed for many different reasons (for example, cancer care nurses). Find out what services are available in your area; make a note of the support that they can offer and their contact details. This may be a useful resource that could be used at work.



If the person becomes very withdrawn, you may be fearful that they are suicidal and will attempt to take their own life.

There may be times, though, in which it is not possible to discuss the level of support that the person needs. This can be because they are extremely agitated, angry or in a very distressed state and unable to hold a calm conversation, or it may be because they are threatening to harm themselves, you or others. They may be so distressed that they are damaging property, whether their own or that of others.

On the other hand, the person may become very withdrawn, not wanting to communicate or may behave in a way that is out of character.

In these situations, you will need to judge how best to act. It is possible that specialist intervention is needed. Getting to know the person well will help you to identify the situations that you can deal with and those that you need specialist support for. The person's support plan and daily care notes may give you an idea of their mood and behaviour. This will give an indication of possible trends, both improvement and deterioration.

2.3 How to access specialist intervention

The types of support and intervention will differ depending on the situation; one thing that is likely, though, is that you may need immediate help from your supervisor or a senior colleague. Check the procedure at work to find out how you call for emergency assistance. Some workplaces will have call systems in rooms and other areas

around the building. Other places of work may have radios or other call devices that you can use to summon immediate help. Make sure that you fully understand how the equipment works before you are placed in the situation. It may be that you are supporting a person in their own home, and you need to use a mobile phone to alert your supervisor or colleague that the person needs support and you need assistance to deal with the situation. You may not be in a position to judge what assistance is needed unless, for example, it is clearly an emergency situation – perhaps the person is violent and you or others are in danger. In this case you might need to summon the police services.

If a person's mental or emotional health gets worse quickly, this is known as a mental health crisis and it is important to get help quickly. There may be details on the person's support plan about what to do in an emergency and whom to call.

The person may need an emergency appointment with their GP or out-of-hours doctor, so it is useful to make sure that you are familiar with the contact details. They may visit the person and advise on the best action to take.

You could also contact your local Mental Health Crisis team (most areas have one). The mental health crisis team is made up of psychiatric nurses, social workers and support workers. These teams are a part of social services and their number can be found via your local council.

NHS Direct can also signpost you to support services; its number can be found in your local directory or via its website. Other specialist services such as bereavement counselling are available – for example, Cruse. This, as with many other organisations, is mostly run by trained volunteers and is contactable by telephone or email; however, it does not offer immediate emergency support.

2.4 Sources of support to manage your feelings when working with an individual who is distressed

It can be very upsetting when you are dealing with somebody who is distressed and displaying strong emotions. Some people's situations and experiences can be so moving that they can affect you. You may feel grateful that the situation has not happened to you, or you may worry in case a similar thing happens to you in the future and you may wonder how you would cope. Feeling concerned, angry and worried are normal and you may have these feelings for some time. You might find that your self-esteem and confidence have been affected.

Activity 3



Researching your local services

Research your local area for services that are available to support distressed people. Make a note of what support they offer and their contact details.

You could make this into a booklet or poster. Show it to your supervisor; it could be useful as a reference guide at work.

Talking through your experiences and feelings with a trusted colleague or supervisor can help. If we can understand some of the reasons why things have happened the way they did, then it can be easier to come to terms with. Make use of supervision opportunities at work where you can reflect on the situation. If you do not feel comfortable talking to your supervisor, speak to your manager if you can and they will find a member of the team who is trained to support you during supervision.

Occasionally, professional counselling is needed to help come to terms with something and accept what has happened. It may be that you do not wish to talk to someone in the work setting about your feelings and would prefer to talk to someone outside from the situation. You could talk to your GP, who can offer support or signpost you to someone who could. Also, there are several advice lines that you could access. For example, if the situation was related to somebody's alcohol misuse, then organisations such as AL-Anon could help.

Functional skills



English: Speaking and listening

Talk through your feelings about distressing situations at work with chosen members of your team whom you have confidence with. This will be an opportunity to have an informal discussion. Present your information clearly and allow others to give feedback. Respond to others' points with relevant comments.

Activity 4



Talking through your feelings

We can be faced with many distressing circumstances at work that can affect us even when the situation is over. We can be left with feelings ourselves that need to be addressed.

Whom would you be comfortable talking to about the situation (remembering about confidentiality)? What are the arrangements at work for supervision? Find out the procedure at work for helping to deal with your own feelings following such events.

3. Be able to support individuals through periods of distress

3.1 Communicating empathy and reassurance in ways that respect an individual's dignity, culture and beliefs

It is important to acknowledge the feelings that distressed people may be experiencing. If people are being taken seriously and are being listened to, this may have a calming effect. Reflective listening skills and the ability to keep the conversation going will be very important. A professional would make sure that the conversation is warm and sincere while also seeking to build an understanding of the situation. Thanking the person for clarifying issues may be one way in which you can reduce the frustration the person may feel. If you can communicate understanding of the person's point of view, this may go a long way towards calming a situation.

If communicating verbally, think about the tone of your voice; is it showing sincerity and warmth?

Always bear in mind, however, that people will react in different ways to support that is being given. Some people may find it reassuring and comforting and would prefer to have you with them for some time, while others may find the situation overbearing and prefer you to offer reassurance and empathy, then go, so that they can think things through in private. You also need to consider issues of culture, gender and age. For example, an elderly male may prefer to be emotionally supported by a more mature support worker and a female Muslim may prefer to be supported by a female support worker. However, you must never make assumptions about a person's preference. Getting to know the person is vital if you are to provide effective support.

3.2 Ways to alleviate immediate distress

If a person is becoming distressed, it is important to deal with the situation quickly and calmly. You need to be in control of your own feelings and act in a professional manner. If you know the reasons for the distress, then it may be easier to support the person and you may have supported them or others in a similar situation that you can reflect on. Appear relaxed and calm; you may not feel calm inside, but this can be a skill that you can learn. If you appear calm, then this can have a calming effect on others.

Doing it well



Using effective non-verbal communication skills

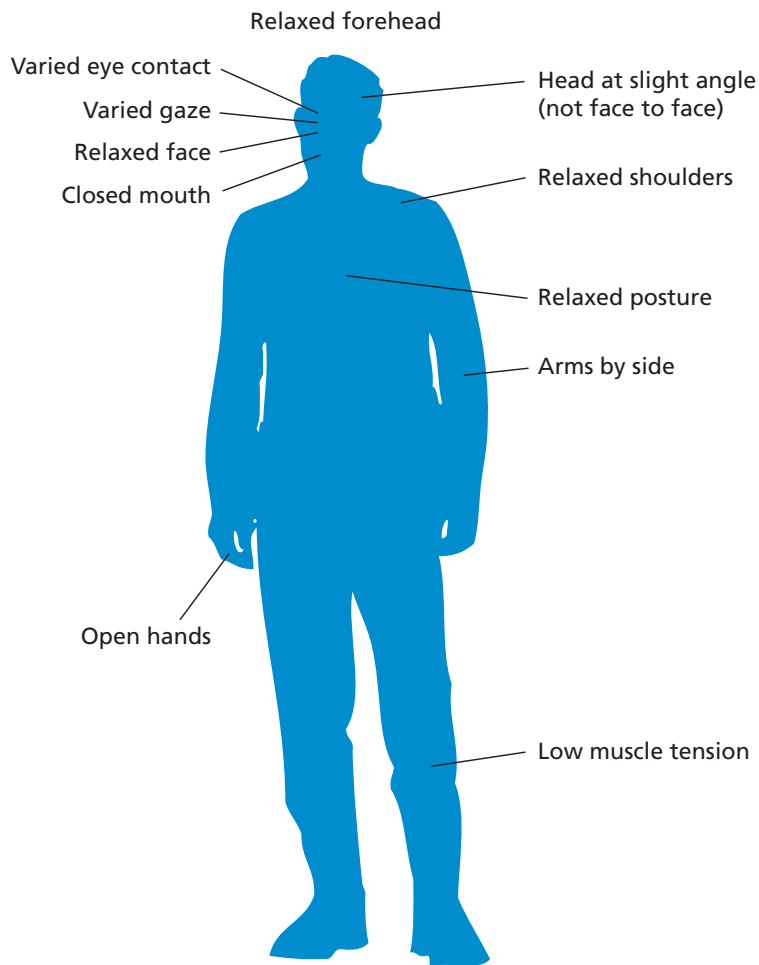
- Convey empathy by using appropriate eye contact.
- Show warmth and concern.
- Maintain an open body posture.
- Make appropriate use of touch.

Doing it well



Demonstrating calmness

- The volume of speech should be normal, not raised nor too quiet.
- Talk in a normal tone and at a normal volume to show that you do not feel threatened, angry or shocked.
- Demonstrate active listening and empathetic skills will show that you are interested and want to understand the person's viewpoint and circumstances. This will show respect for the person and show that you care.



Person creates interpersonal space

Doing it well



Alleviating a person's distress

Acting quickly when a person is distressed can prevent the situation from becoming much worse. How you react can make all the difference.

- Stay calm.
- Be assertive.
- Use active listening skills.
- Create the right emotions and atmosphere.
- Be aware of your own body language.
- Use supportive verbal communication.
- Call for assistance if you are concerned about the person or your ability to offer support.

Non-verbal signs of being calm.

Be assertive, this will help you to cope with difficult and challenging situations.

The assertive person can:

- understand the situation that the person is in – including the facts and other people's perceptions
- control personal emotions and stay calm
- use the right body language
- use the right words and statements.

If you actively listen and show the person respect, then it will create the right emotions and a supportive atmosphere and environment. The person is more likely to feel calm, in control and supported. They are also more likely have confidence in you and the care team in being able to support them through their difficult time. Always be aware, however, that you may need to call for assistance if you are worried about the person in any way or about your ability to offer support.

3.3 Adapting support in response to an individual's reactions

Depending on how the person responds to your immediate support when they are distressed will depend on the support that you need to offer. It may be enough for you just to be there and continue with your effective communication and empathetic skills. Alternatively, the person may feel much better and prefer to be left alone. They may feel that they want to be distracted from the situation and have a drink, do an activity or watch the television. You could ask a colleague to make a drink for the person while you are still there with them. Always be aware of potential dangers; for example, if leaving the person with a hot drink, they could become upset, spill it and burn themselves. It may be better for you to sit with them while they are drinking.

If you *do* leave them alone, make sure that you go back to check how they are on a regular basis in case they become distressed again, or ask a colleague to do so if you are not there.

It is possible, though, that the situation may not get better, but become more worrying, and the person may not be comforted by your empathetic support. They may start to become more upset, angry or even aggressive, in which case you will need to use your assertiveness skills and you may need to summon assistance from a senior colleague, professional or even the emergency services, depending on the area in which you work and the situation.

Getting to know the person well will help you to know what to do next. Be aware of what is in the plan of care, because this may give guidance on how you can support the people in different situations and reactions.

You will need to use your observation skills in order to adapt the support that you give in line with how the interaction is going, bearing in mind that the situation and mood can change, in which case you will need to be ready to act quickly and efficiently.

3.4 How to involve others in supporting an individual who is distressed

When offering support to a person who is distressed, it may become evident that someone else needs to be involved in order to support the person. It may be that they are worried about something or someone and they need to make contact with that person. Your support in this situation may be as simple as making a telephone call. For example, if a person was in hospital and they were worried about the security of their home, it would not be practical for you to go and check, but a call to their neighbour may provide reassurance.

Reflect



Think about an occasion when you have supported a person who was distressed. Following the immediate support that you gave, how did you adapt the support afterwards?

Was it enough to continue with empathetic communication support? Did they want to be left alone or did you need to summon assistance?

Reflect on your observation skills. How did you know what was needed?

Functional skills



English: Writing

Use the case study below to give you information to answer the set questions for this unit. Present your information in an organised way with sufficient detail to cover the requirements of the task. Ensure that your answers have accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar by proofreading your work carefully. Use complete sentences for all answers.

You may need to arrange transport or escort the person to meet an appropriate professional – for example, providing a taxi so that the person can meet their solicitor or other legal adviser.

Check the support plan – there may be guidance on who needs to be contacted if the person becomes distressed – for example, the mental health team or social worker. Contact details should be given with details of out-of-hours arrangements. The GP can also offer support and can signpost the person to a range of support services.

A person who is distressed because of bereavement may value your support in helping them to contact support networks via the Internet or email. You need to be aware, however, of how to support people while they are using the Internet, ensuring that they remain safe online and do not fall victim to harm and abuse. People should never disclose personal information online. Distressed people can be vulnerable and they will need your support to keep safe.

Information about the person's distress and outcomes needs to be clearly communicated between the care team, so that a consistent, appropriate and professional approach can be taken.

Case study

Reducing Sadie's distress

Sadie was admitted to hospital in an emergency with a suspected heart attack. She is 62 and she lives at home. When Sadie complained of chest pains to her doctor, she was quickly admitted to hospital because a heart attack was suspected. As time went on, Sadie became more and more agitated and distressed. She was clearly very worried about her home – she was not sure if the back door had been left unlocked and she was very concerned about her two cats which had not been fed

since early that morning. She had left her mobile phone at home.

1. What were Sadie's main worries?
2. Can you think of anything else that she may have been worried about?
3. How could you try to reduce Sadie's distress?
4. Is there anyone else that could help to reduce her distress?

4. Be able to support individuals to reduce distress

4.1 Encouraging an individual to express thoughts and feelings about troubling aspects of their life

Encouraging people to communicate thoughts and feelings about things that trouble them in their life can be very sensitive. You will need to use good effective communication skills such as active listening and show empathy. If you have undertaken any training in counselling skills, you will find this very useful. You must remember though that you are not a trained counsellor and you should not attempt to offer counselling unless you have been adequately trained and had the opportunity for supervised practice. However, do not underestimate the support you will be able to provide by using good communication skills and genuine empathy. You can encourage someone to express how they feel about what is causing them worry, anxiety or distress.

While it is good for people to talk about things that trouble them, sometimes strong feelings can emerge that you may not be trained to deal with.

Never probe a person to talk about more than they want to, because this can cause extreme distress if the situation is not handled properly.

What you could do, however, is encourage and support the person to undertake counselling therapy. Ask the counsellor advice on how best to support the person if they want to talk about sensitive issues.

4.2 Working with an individual and others to identify triggers for distress

Knowing what is triggering a person's distress can help to start the process of accepting and dealing with it. It is much easier to cope with something if you know what the problem is.

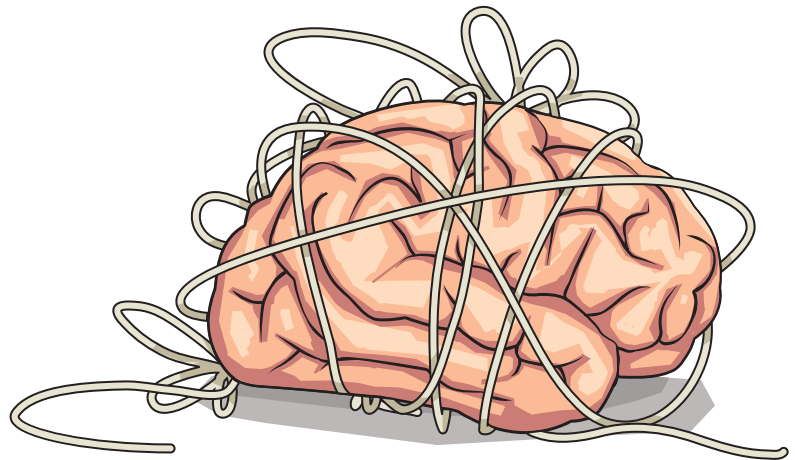
It may be quite obvious for you and the person to see what the reason for the distress is – for example, they have been told of the death or serious illness of someone close to them, or they hear other bad or worrying news. However, other triggers may not be quite so obvious. The person may have had problems with a relationship over a long period of time and may be worried about money, or the person may be stressed because of an overload of work or family commitments and pressures. Sometimes the reasons for the distress may not be absolutely clear to the person themselves; it can sometimes appear to be a build-up of several things that they find

difficult to unpick that may even be masked or hidden by excessive alcohol consumption or gambling.

It can sometimes take time for things to unfold and emerge, and the process cannot be rushed. The person may benefit from professional counselling sessions in order for them to get to the bottom of what is causing the distress; then you can support them to deal with it.

Give the person the opportunity to talk and express themselves, making sure that you are non-judgemental and supportive.

You will need to work closely with the person and use effective communication and observation skills to help the person to find the reasons and triggers for their distress. The care team as a whole, and maybe others such as advocates, social workers and the mental health team, will need to work together in order to support the person. Good observation and communication between the team is vital.



Sometimes your brain can feel messed up; unravelling your thoughts can help you get to the bottom of the problem.

4.3 Working with an individual and others to reduce triggers or alleviate causes of distress

Working closely and getting to know people well can often help you to discover the triggers that make people distressed. You may manage to find ways in which you can contribute to reduce causes of distress. For example, if the cause of the person's distress is worrying about paying the bills and losing their house because they cannot pay their mortgage, you may signpost them to professional help such as the National Debtline or the Citizens Advice Bureau. If the person is distressed because what they can do is limited – for example, they may have mental health problems with a physical disability and they may feel that they cannot deal with complicated issues such as organising care or feel that they cannot speak for themselves when

important decisions need to be made – then an advocate can support them and ensure that their views are heard.

Depending on the underlying forces, distress can sometimes be dealt with by physical means – that is, an immediate removal from the cause such as taking a break from work or from caring for a difficult, very ill, demanding relative.

Once the trigger or cause of distress is known, talk to the person and ask them how they feel that distress can be reduced or prevented. Involving the person will show that you respect and value them. People are different and cope with things in different ways, so it is vital to involve them in decision making. It might be as simple as giving the person plenty of time to prepare themselves mentally before an important meeting. The person may find that the support of friends and relatives can help to reduce causes of distress, sometimes just being there to offer support if needed.

You could suggest that the person keeps a diary of their feelings. This could help to identify what the triggers are and how the distress was effectively managed or not. The diary could include:

- what happened
- what the cause was
- how they reacted
- what made it better.

The person may be willing to share this with you and other members of the team, in order for you all to work together to try to find out what causes the distress and effective ways of managing the related feelings.

Case study

Identifying triggers of distress

Mrs Daley is 83 years old and lives in a residential home. She has had several appointments for various services – for example, the optician, dentist and more recently the local hospital where she is undergoing tests for bladder problems.

Carrie is Mrs Daley's key worker and has noticed that when she has an appointment, she becomes very agitated and worried beforehand. Mrs Daley has limited mobility and relies on the care workers to help her to wash and dress in the morning. It became evident that she becomes very worried in case she is not ready in

time; she worries in case the care staff forget and that the transport has not been booked or is late. Mrs Daley has an appointment at the local hospital in the morning to discuss the results of her bladder tests.

Carrie passes on her observations and thoughts to the care team.

1. What do you think are Mrs Daley's concerns about this appointment?
2. How might she react?
3. Now that the care team know the triggers to Mrs Daley's distress, how can they reduce them?



Have you ever kept a diary of your feelings?

4.4 Encouraging an individual to review their usual ways of coping with distress

Some distress cannot be removed, and we cannot expect the impossible – for example, the feelings related to the loss of a loved one, a serious illness or redundancies. We do not have the power to change some things, and we need to live with some things on a day-to-day basis. What we can do, however, is support people to try to learn to accept things that they cannot change and help them to live their life in a more positive way. Sometimes people can choose unhealthy methods of controlling stress – for example, using alcohol or cigarettes; this might make them feel better in the short term, but in the long term these measures can be very harmful to their health.

Support the person to reflect on what they enjoy or used to enjoy. It may be that they have lost sight about what they enjoy in life because life has become so hectic or it has become clouded with what is making them feel distressed.

Supporting someone to find the real person inside and finding out what they would enjoy can help you both to find more positive methods of dealing with their distress. Perhaps the person used to like swimming or other sports when they were younger, perhaps they could take it up again.

Not all stress-reducing activities cost money – going for a long walk and being with nature can be very relaxing, as can having a long bath.

It will be necessary to review the effectiveness of the new ways of coping with distress; perhaps they are not working. Maybe the swimming pool is busy and noisy and therefore they cannot have a relaxing swim when they want to. You will then need to work together to explore other stress-relieving activities. Having a range of possible activities will help.

- 
- *Go to the gym*
 - *Swim*
 - *Take a long walk*
 - *Do some yoga or relaxation exercises*
 - *Take up a hobby such as painting*
 - *Do some gardening*
 - *Watch a comedy on TV*
 - *Write in a diary*
 - *Listen to music*
 - *Have a long bath*
 - *Light scented candles*
 - *Go to see friends*
 - *Take time out*

Everyone has different ways of dealing with stress.

5. Be able to record and report on an individual's distress

5.1 Records relating to an individual's distress and the support provided

All incidents of distress and the support that has been provided must be reported to your supervisor or line manager and recorded. You must make sure that you follow the correct procedure. You are not in a position to make a decision on the next step to be taken or, if the incident is serious enough, to be followed up. Write up the incident as soon as possible, because although you might think that you will be able to remember everything, details can easily become blurred with time, especially if you go on to do something else after the event. Your workplace will have a special form that you need to complete. Your records should only contain the real facts and not what you think you saw or heard. Your report should be clear, easy to read and completed in black ink. No gaps should be left between your statements. Make sure that you sign, date and enter the time of the entry.

If there is any reason why writing a report is not possible, then you should record your evidence on an audio tape. It is not acceptable just to pass on information verbally, because there must be a record that can be referred to. Your evidence may be looked at by other people – for example, the mental health team or social workers.

If you do not feel confident writing a report, you could ask a colleague to help you; tell them exactly what happened, then write it in rough. They can read through it to see if it is clear and accurate. You can then transfer it onto the required record. The record must be stored in line with your workplace's procedures. Record keeping and communication is crucial in order to ensure that the person receives the proper care and support; records can also show trends of activities and can even prevent very serious situations from occurring – for example, attempt of suicide.

Functional skills



English: Writing

To write a report you must use a set format that records your information in an organised and coherent way. All writing must be accurate in grammar, spelling and punctuation, as it is likely that the report will be used by multidisciplinary teams to access information on somebody you support.

Activity 5



Good record keeping

Record keeping is vitally important in all aspects of care work and it must be done properly in line with legal and your workplace requirements. Your records may be looked at by other professionals and important decisions may be made depending on records that are seen. It is therefore extremely important that you complete them properly.

Have a look back at Unit HSC 028 and remind yourself about how records must be kept.

5.2 Reporting on periods of distress in line with agreed ways of working

Incidents of distress must always be reported, no matter how trivial that you may feel the situation is. All workplaces will have reporting and recording procedures in place and it is vital that you are familiar with the correct procedure. Even if you have worked for the organisation for some time, it is possible that the procedure has been updated and changed. It may be different depending on the people that you are supporting. The person may be considered to be 'high risk' – for example, their distress may be so severe that they may self-harm or even attempt suicide. In this case, it is likely that their behaviour needs to be monitored very regularly and closely, then recorded and reported upon.

Remember that as well as completing records, you need to pass on information verbally. You may have a specific handover time between shifts where information is verbally passed on. Alternatively, you may be supporting a person in their own home by providing live-in support where you spend a long period of time with the person, and you will need to pass on accurate and detailed information to the next care worker.

Wherever you work, make sure that you familiarise yourself with how you should report on situations of people's distress.

Activity 6



All workplaces may differ slightly on reporting procedures. Find out what the procedure is where you work. If you cannot find it, have a word with your supervisor or line manager.

Reflect



Reflect on your reporting skills. Do you report incidents in enough detail in order for others supporting people after you to continue the support that is required?

Getting ready for assessment

LO1

There are many causes of distress and the person will usually show some signs and symptoms of this. Your assessor will want you to be able to describe signs and symptoms that a person is becoming distressed. They may ask you to show your knowledge and understanding by writing an account. You could give examples from the workplace, but remember to maintain confidentiality and not mention names.

LO2

This outcome requires you to know about how to access information and advice about supporting people who are distressed. Sometimes specialist intervention is necessary; you will need to show that you know when and how to access this specialist intervention. Your assessor may suggest that you complete a research project about services that are available in your local area. Working with distressed people can have an effect on you; you will need to know where to access support for yourself the worker – you could include this in your project. Your assessor may also suggest that you obtain witness testimonies from your supervisor or line manager as evidence that you have accessed appropriate services for people who are distressed.

LO3

Your assessor will want to know that you can demonstrate effective communication skills, showing empathy and offering reassurance. You will also need to show that you take into consideration dignity and the person's personal preferences, culture and beliefs. It may not be possible or appropriate for your assessor to observe you in such sensitive situations, so they may suggest that you obtain a witness testimony from your

supervisor or line manager, outlining your ability to demonstrate empathetic skills.

LO4

This learning outcome requires you to know how to, and to be able to support people to, reduce distress by reviewing with them their usual ways of coping. Your assessor will want to see you review their methods of distress relief. This learning outcome must be assessed in a real work environment. Ideally, your assessor will observe you but if this is not possible (for example, if the situation is sensitive), then they may ask you to obtain a witness testimony from your supervisor or line manager. Your assessor may also ask you to write a reflective account about another time when you have reviewed with a person their usual ways of coping with distress. When you write your account, be sure to write what you did and why; this will show your assessor that you fully understand your own actions.

LO5

This learning outcome is about the importance of recording and reporting people's distress. Your assessor will need to see that you are competent in reporting and record-keeping activities relating to people's distress and that you can clearly record the support that has been given. They will also want to know that your records are completed in a timely manner. Do not photocopy records because they are confidential and they should not be in your portfolio. If your assessor is not around when you are completing records, you can show them the record when you next meet (if this is appropriate). They may suggest that you obtain a witness statement from a senior colleague or your line manager about your record keeping in relation to people's distress and the support that has been given.

Further reading and research

- www.al-anonuk.org.uk (Al-Anon UK)
- www.alzheimers.org.uk (Alzheimer's Society)
- www.direct.gov.uk/en/disabledpeople/healthandsupport/mentalhealth/dg_10023332 (DirectGov Mental Health Crisis Team)
- http://helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm (advice on stress management from Helpguide)
- www.nas.org.uk (National Autistic Society)
- www.nationaldebtline.co.uk (National Debtline)
- www.rethink.org (Rethink)
- www.scope.org.uk (Scope)
- www.thecbf.org.uk (the Challenging Behaviour Foundation)
- Age Concern (2005) *Supporting People with Dementia*, Dementia Voice
- Woodward, P., Hardy, S., Joyce, T. (2007) *Keeping it Together, a Guide for Support Staff Working with People Whose Behaviour is Challenging*, Pavilion Publishers

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