



## SESSION 1: Empathy.

### 1. How do I know?

- \* What does the expression 'in distress' mean?
- \* Ask students to identify the different ways we can work out if a person is in distress. What are our sources of information? Where do we look? (e.g. body language, verbal request, display of emotion, information from others).
- \* Are human distress signals universal? Would someone from another culture display distress in the same way as a person from a culture we are familiar with? There is a video exploring this here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PFqzYoKkCc> [available 02/15].
- \* Ask students to think of the things that get in the way of our noticing/responding to the distress of others (e.g. preoccupied with own life, lack of ability to read signals, prejudices and stereotypes, not wanting to interfere). There's a short video exploring one explanation here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSsPfbup0ac> [available 02/15].

### 2. Should I respond?

- \* What happens to our thinking and our emotions when we recognise that we should provide help to another person? When we realise that we ought to help another person, is it possible to ignore the

impulse to help? If we don't help when we think we should, what are the consequences for us?

- \* Who do we have a responsibility to respond to? What does this responsibility depend on? For example, do we have more of a duty to respond to family and friends? If a person is experiencing a medical difficulty we are not trained to deal with, do we still have a duty to intervene? What if intervening puts us at risk?

### 3. How can I respond?

- \* Ask students what is meant by the word 'empathy'.
- \* What advice does Brené Brown give us about how we should respond to those in distress? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw> [available 02/15].
- \* How could her advice help us to overcome the barriers to responding that were discussed in section 1?

### 4. Becoming more empathic.

- \* Ask students to take time between lessons to develop their empathy. Empathy is situated in a neural network and like all other neural networks, the more you exercise it, the stronger it gets. Ask students to notice more of what is happening for other people, and to imagine what the experiences others have are like, from the other person's perspective.

## SESSION 2: Listening.

### 1. Me listening

- \* Get the students into pairs and split them into As and Bs. Tell the Bs that you will ask them to go outside the classroom for a moment and when they come back, they are going to talk about their favourite ever holiday. Send them out and then ask the As to listen in the following way: they should listen impassively: make eye contact, but shouldn't

nod, speak or ask questions. Every time they notice that their mind wanders, they should raise their hand and put it back down again. Bring the Bs back in and ask them to start talking.

- \* Ask the students what the experience was like: what they were thinking, what they were feeling. Did any of the Bs work out what the As were doing?





- \* Show students the list of ‘listening blocks’, the things that we do which act as blocks to good listening. Ask students if they recognise any of them, either in themselves or in others. Explain the idea of ‘me listening’, where instead of hearing what is being said, we either become distracted, or we filter and interpret what the other person is saying. There’s a good example of it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSvbnB9PNVg> [available 02/15].

- \* Ask students to describe the impact of being poorly listened to, especially if we are in distress or need help in some way.

## 2. Good listening.

- \* Ask students to call to mind a person they know who is really good at listening. Ask them to identify different things the person does that make them a good listener.
- \* There are some ingredients of good listening on the slides: ask students to compare their ideas with them. (mirroring is where you reflect back what the person has said. You might use phrases like “so, I’m hearing you say...”, or “can I just check that I’m hearing what you are saying correctly?” It’s important to try to use the language of the person being listened to and to avoid interpreting).

## SESSION 3: Anxiety and depression.

### 1. Thinking about anxiety and depression.

- \* Ask students to discuss what they know about anxiety and depression.
- \* Ask students why they think it is important that they have an awareness of anxiety and depression. There are some statistics on the Mental Health Foundation website here: <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-statistics/> <sup>1</sup> [available 02/15].

- \* Put students into threes. Give them a topic to talk about (e.g. what I want to do when I leave school; my favourite thing; the best holiday I ever had; anything open-ended). Ask one student to talk and the other to question and listen. The job of the listener/questioner is to keep the speaker speaking. Ask the third student to look for and feed back on elements of good listening. Rotate the roles.

### 3. Good listening and distress.

- \* Ask students to think about whether or not a special type of listening is required for helping people who are in distress. What would that be?
- \* There are some good videos on the Samaritans YouTube channel of people who have used the service and people who talk about volunteering for the service. Ask students to identify what it is that Samaritans do when they listen that is especially helpful for people who are in distress.

### 4. Becoming a better listener.

- \* Ask students to identify two ways in which they could become better listeners. Ask them to plan for how they are going to make these changes: what will they change, when will they change it, whose help do they need?

### 2. Identifying anxiety and depression.

- \* Provide students with information on how they might identify anxiety and depression. There is a thought-provoking video from the World Health Organisation here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiCmiLQGYc> [available 02/15].





### 3. Responding to anxiety and depression.

- \* Ask students to think about how they can apply what they have learned about empathy and about listening to how they might respond to anxiety and depression.
- \* Ask students to investigate the evidence for the following ways of responding to depression: exercise; mindfulness meditation; sleep hygiene; talking therapy (especially Cognitive Behavioural Therapy). Perhaps ask them to come up with a care plan for a person who appears to be suffering from depression.

<sup>1</sup> It is worth introducing a note of caution here. The terms used on this website are very broad. For instance, it states that 10% of children suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder, but this is a very broad category. Fewer than 2% of 15 year olds suffer from depression, according to the survey this figure is drawn from. The

- \* Ask students to think carefully about how they would respond to another person who seemed to be showing some of the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Would they treat that person differently? What would be the most important factors to consider? Discuss as a group.

### 4. Being an emotional first aider.

- \* Ask students to imagine themselves in the role of emotional first aiders: that they should take at least one opportunity to offer appropriate emotional first aid to another person. Spend time thinking about how to go about it in a way that isn't intrusive or counter-productive.

website also states that 1 in 4 adults experience a mental health problem in any one year: again, this is a broad category which includes sleep problems, irritability and worry. Severe mental health problems such as depression, are still comparatively rare, affecting around 3% of the population.

## SESSION 4: Bereavement.

### 1. Thinking about loss.

- \* Ask students to complete a 'sliding scale' of loss in small groups. Ask them to envisage the types of losses they are likely to experience during a lifetime, and scale them according to their severity.
- \* Ask the small groups to discuss how they might respond to those losses. Talk about ways of dealing with loss that might be deemed constructive or destructive.
- \* Ask students to come up with some ideas for how we should NOT respond to another person's loss. Perhaps get them to write completely inappropriate 'in deepest sympathy' cards.
- \* Discuss and turn discussion over to what might be considered appropriate ways of responding to loss and grief.
- \* A piece of stimulus you could use during these exercises is Wilko Johnson's experience of being

diagnosed with terminal cancer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQjVMr9M7hk> [available 02/15].

### 2. Stages of grief.

- \* Introduce students to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's 5 stages of grief, explained here: <http://psychcentral.com/lib/the-5-stages-of-loss-and-grief/000617> [available 02/15].
- \* Ask the students if they can identify which of the stages Wilko Johnson is at.
- \* Play students Elizabeth Davidson's description of the loss of her daughter, found on this webpage: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/glasgow\\_and\\_west/5362710.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/glasgow_and_west/5362710.stm). There is a transcript included as an endnote. **THIS CLIP IS VERY MOVING AND SOME STUDENTS MAY FIND IT UPSETTING.**
- \* Again, ask students to consider what stages of grief we hear in what Elizabeth Davidson has to say about her daughter.



### 3. Responding to grief.

- \* Go back to the idea of how we ought to respond to grief, both our own and that of other people. Is there anything the students think should be added in the light of what they have heard from

Wilko Johnson, Elizabeth Davidson or their own experiences?

- \* Thinking back to the lessons on empathy and listening, is there anything that we can bring from them to thinking about how to respond to grief?

<sup>2</sup> Dear Sir,

How can I explain the impact the loss of my daughter Margaret has had on my life to someone who didn't know her? I would ask you therefore to bear with me for a moment to allow me to introduce her to you.

Margaret was physically beautiful, fiercely intelligent and a caring thoughtful girl who loved fun, good food and wine, and especially the company of family and friends.

How much time can I spend telling you about the two summers she spent working in dreadful conditions in Bulgarian orphanages; of the hours spent working for KEEN, which is an organisation in Oxford, helping disabled youngsters to have fun and reach their potential.

How do I feel knowing I will never see her smile again?

How do I feel knowing I will never see her arrive off the train, toss down her bag and wrap her arms around me and hear her say "How's my wee mum?"

How do I feel when I know a text message or phone call will never again be from her?

How do I feel knowing I will never hold her child in my arms?

My heart is broken, and nothing in this life will ever mend it. I feel a physical pain when I see her photograph or when a memory comes to mind, or when I see a little girl with bunches in her hair.

Can you imagine the pain of having to choose flowers, pick hymns for a church service and arrange a meal for people attending your daughter's funeral instead of her wedding? Can you imagine the distress of having to choose the dress she will wear in her coffin instead of the one she will wear on her wedding day?

I can't begin to tell you the sorrow of telling my son by phone that his dear sister Margaret was dead. All that talent, all that hard work, all wiped out in an instant.

Another strange thing has happened. I am conscious now of not being Elizabeth Davidson, but of being the woman who's daughter was killed. People have been very kind, but you sense their discomfort because they don't know what to say. We were able to see Margaret, and strangely these are the only moments of real peace I have known since she died. I wish I'd sat with her longer. But how long would have been long enough? I tried to go to my church recently but all I could see was her coffin and I wanted to run out.

On the 16th of July 2005, we as a family had one of the happiest days of our lives. After years of studying and hard work on her part and financial struggles on ours, Dr Margaret E Davidson BM BCHMA graduated from Oxford University. On her way up to receive her degree, she turned to me and smiled a smile of sheer joy, love and gratitude.

Less than a year later, I collected a very tasteful carrier bag containing a cardboard box labelled, 'The remains of the late Dr Margaret E Davidson'.

I know I was lucky to have a daughter like Margaret, but then I knew that when she was alive. And while I am devastated that she has been taken, after only 26 years, I would rather suffer this pain than never to have shared the love we shared in those 26 years.

I don't know if these words have conveyed to you my sense of loss. Maybe there are no such words. Perhaps I should just have saved your time and said I loved Margaret from her first breath, and I will love, mourn and miss her until my last.

Elizabeth R Davidson  
Mother





## SESSION 5: Reflections.

### 1. Those in distress and the virtues.

- \* For each of the virtues (Courage, Justice, Honesty, Compassion, Self-discipline, Gratitude, Humility) ask students to imagine what that virtue looks like when enacted, in terms of responding to those in distress (e.g. the compassion required to notice the suffering of others; self-discipline to be a good listener; humility to accept that we might need some help; gratitude for those who help us).
- \* Ask students to think of icons of helping those in distress and also to think of which virtues they employ to help others (e.g. Camila Batmanghelidjh, who is renowned for her courage and compassion in her work with Kids Company).

### 2. My journey with responding to those in distress.

- \* Ask students to look back over the previous 4 lessons on responding to those in distress. Ask them to re-visit the goals they set themselves for each of the lessons on empathy, listening and emotional first aid, and to evaluate how well they have done with beginning to achieve those goals.
- \* Ask students to think about which virtues they need to employ to keep responding to those in distress in the right way, and how the icons they identified in the previous section can inspire them to keep trying to become better at helping others.