

## The Necessity of Interpersonal Relationships to Thrive in the Digital Age:

*A Call to Action for the Counseling Profession*

### Current Topics in Counseling Conference

Department of Professional Counseling  
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Hulse, D., & McDermott, P. J. (2019) *#CanWeTalk*. Amazon.com

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## Why Interpersonal Relationships are so Important to a Life Well Lived

- ▶ Evidence abounds supporting the value of interpersonal relationships for promoting a life well lived.
  - Interpersonal relationships influence one's physical health and quality of life.
  - Interpersonal relationships minimize feelings of disconnection that can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness.
  - Clay Routledge writes in the *New York Times*, "Close relationships with other people are our greatest existential resource."



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## The Path to Building and Maintaining Satisfying Interpersonal Relationships

- ▶ Interpersonal relationships happen as a result of individuals being able to listen to and interact with others in ways that promote conversation and connections.
- ▶ This means that in order for people to establish interpersonal relationships they need a command of verbal and non-verbal skills.
- ▶ Active listening and responding skills provide people the competencies they need to:
  - Make connections with others and build rapport
  - Understand another's viewpoint
  - Convey empathy
  - Negotiate interpersonal conflicts in our society over ethical failures, gender discrimination, and cultural bias
  - Achieve emotional intelligence skills



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## The Challenge to Realizing Interpersonal Relationships

- ▶ While the signs everywhere point to a need to build and sustain interpersonal relationships, there are barriers to meeting this need:
  - Active listening and responding skills are underappreciated in our digital age.
    - This lack of appreciation is due in part to technology's popularity and easy access, which supersedes attention to face-to-face, non-verbal and verbal communication.
- ▶ Active listening and responding skills are slowly slipping from the repertoire of people at all ages, in everyday situations.
- ▶ These skills are often disregarded as real competencies that one can learn, practice, and master, and revisit over one's lifetime.
- ▶ Assumptions discourage the study and practice of these skills:
  - "One is born with these skills"
  - "You can't teach these skills"
  - "I already have these skills"




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## Pathway to Interpersonal Relationships

- ▶ *IF* Interpersonal Relationships are the goal...
- ▶ *THEN* one needs to know how to first engage in positive interpersonal exchanges that lead to interpersonal connections...
- ▶ *All* of these actions require a command of verbal and non-verbal active listening and responding skills...




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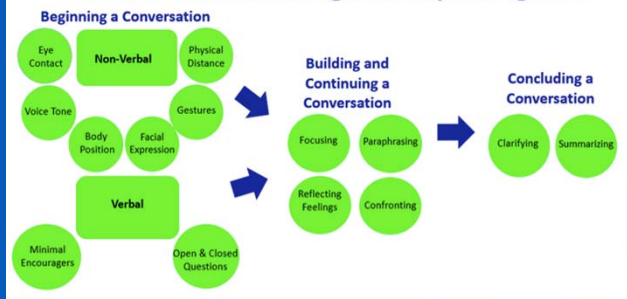
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## Essential Active Listening and Responding Skills




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## Applying Active Listening & Responding Skills to Facilitating Meetings & Teams

*Being able to demonstrate empathy which is a building block for building trust and key element for effective leadership:*

- ▶ People often find meetings and team gatherings to be boring, and unproductive, primarily because they lack a voice.
- ▶ Key to successful task groups is understanding the concepts of *process and content* and how to activate them in group settings.
- ▶ Building member to member interaction is worth the upfront time and effort.
- ▶ Relationships are at the heart of effective meetings and task groups. With the use of active listening and responding skills paired with specific leadership competencies, meetings can become places of good work, accomplishment, and rewarding interpersonal relationships.



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## Why Active Listening and Responding Skills Matter

- ▶ Active listening and responding skills help build interpersonal relationships which:
  - Positively impact one's physical health.
  - Build purpose in life.
  - Prevent isolation and loneliness.
- ▶ Quotes to remember:
  - Cacioppo: "Humans can survive in society with technology, but later may come to regret missed chances to build and maintain satisfying interpersonal relationships."
  - Roulledge: "Close relationships with other people are our greatest existential resource."



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## What Counselors can Do to Help Change the World

- ▶ Educate people everywhere, at all ages, on why active listening and responding skills are the gateway to civil and satisfying interactions that lead to building and sustaining interpersonal relationships.
- ▶ Get involved in schools, business and health care settings, law enforcement, and community activities to train people in the basic active listening and responding skills.



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## Call to Action

From John Heider's (1997) *The Tao of Leadership*, "The Ripple Effect"

"Your behavior influences others through a ripple effect  
A ripple effect works because everyone influences everyone else.  
Powerful people are powerful influences.  
If your life works, you influence your family  
If your family works, your family influences the community  
If your community works, your community influences the nation  
If your nation works, your nation influences the world  
If your world works, the ripple effect spreads throughout the cosmos  
Remember that your influence begins with you and ripples outward."



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