

# MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

## Facilitator's Guide



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The American Heart Association (AHA) thanks you for facilitating the Meaningful Engagement training for the EmPOWERED to Serve™ network, and the Opioid Response Network. The purpose of this module is to facilitate, or aid, a discussion with your community members about how to be better and more engaged listeners. Learning how to actively listen is an important skill in reaching out to a friend or family member who is battling a substance use problem.

## MODULE OVERVIEW

During this course, you will facilitate

- Introductions
- A “real play” pair activity, where participants describe something they want to change about themselves while their partner listens
- A video that teaches the skill of meaningful engagement
- A second pair activity in which participants practice what they have learned about meaningful engagement
- A debrief session

## EQUIPMENT

You'll need a space that has room to pair off participants for a large group activity. Be sure to also have the necessary equipment to show a video that you'll either stream online or access via the Meaningful Engagement USB drive. This training is about making people feel comfortable talking and listening to one another, so the more comfortable the room is for participants, the safer they may feel.

## ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

Anyone who wants to help their community members learn to more actively engage and interact with their family and friends can facilitate this training. You don't need to be an expert in this area. You just need to be willing to listen, encourage, and help participants learn and practice these skills. This is a video-based course, and the lessons in the course video will teach participants the skills of meaningful engagement.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This course uses *real play*, a useful way to teach people to have a potentially difficult conversation with someone who has a substance use problem.

In this activity, people will split into pairs. Each person will take turns being the Speaker and the Listener, for about 3 minutes in each role. The Speaker will talk about a behavior of theirs they would like to change. For instance, they might talk about spending more quality time with family or making healthier food choices. It should be something that is hard for them to change. While the Speaker talks, the Listener will engage in *active listening*. This means helping the Speaker feel heard and asking questions as needed for clarification.

By using real play, participants can

- Experience what it's like to be vulnerable when talking about a behavior that is tough to change
- Learn what is helpful when talking about changing that behavior
- Focus on a behavior that is hard for *them* to change so that they can better relate to others, including when talking with a family member about substance use

***Now that you have the background, let's get started.***

## **PART 1: INTRODUCTION**

- Welcome everyone as they walk into the room.
- Begin the session by thanking everyone for joining.
- Introduce yourself and let the participants introduce themselves and their reason for attending.
- Describe the purpose of the session: to help people become more comfortable and engaged while communicating with another person.



## **PART 2: REAL PLAY (ACTIVITY #1)**

### **DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITY**

Begin by reading the following script:

*We are all imperfectly perfect. We all have things we'd like to change about ourselves. They could be things like, "I'd like to participate in church activities more often, watch less TV, make healthier food choices, exercise, or spend more quality time with friends and family."*

*Let's start by breaking into pairs for an exercise. In these pairs, one person will play the role of the Speaker while the other plays the Listener. To begin, think about something that you'd like to change in your own life. Make sure it's something you're comfortable talking to your neighbor about. The Speaker in each pair will then talk while the Listener listens. The Listener interacts with the Speaker as you would with a friend. After 3 minutes, switch roles and have a second conversation.*



## **FACILITATOR'S QUESTIONS**

Ask participants the following questions:

- When you were in the Speaker role, did the Listener say something that made you feel more comfortable?
- When you were in the Speaker role, did the Listener do something nonverbal that made you feel more comfortable?
- Was there a time when you felt stumped or like there was a stop in your conversation, either when you were a Listener or a Speaker? What was going on then?
- What are some ways that a Listener could support you more or make it easier to talk to them about these issues?

## **WRAP UP ACTIVITY #1 AND TRANSITION TO VIDEO**

Read the following script:

*There is no right or wrong way to talk about difficult things. We are trying to learn from one another about how we can better talk to each other about sensitive topics. Now, we will watch the video and review some best practices for how to engage with others in these difficult conversations.*

Now, play the Meaningful Engagement video.

## **PART 3: PRACTICE BEING A GOOD LISTENER (ACTIVITY #2)**

### **DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITY**

Read the following script:

*Now, we're going to repeat the first exercise and use what we've learned during this session. Try to think of something else you'd like to change about yourself or improve in your life so that it doesn't feel like you're repeating yourself. This can include any health behavior, your relationships with other people, or working on something that's more internal for you. We'll break into the same pairs again, with participants in the Speaker and Listener roles. After 3 minutes, switch roles again and have a second conversation.*



## **FACILITATOR'S QUESTIONS**

Ask participants the following questions:

- What was different for you this time as a Speaker? What about as a Listener?
- Now, imagine that *you* are having a hard time not using substances.
  - If you talked to someone about it, how might the conversation be like the one you just had? How might you feel?
  - How would the conversation about substance use be different from those you just had?
- What makes this topic more difficult for people to talk about?

## **WRAP UP ACTIVITY #2 AND COURSE**

- Thank everyone for attending the session.
- Encourage them to follow up and practice what they have learned.
- Remind them that engaging with others takes time and patience.
- Offer resources for further training (if available).

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The Opioid Response Network (ORN) is a federally funded national initiative that provides education and training in the prevention, treatment, recovery and harm reduction of opioid and stimulant use disorders. ORN provides educational resources, training and consultation, acting as a kind of temporary agency, meeting the specific local needs of organizations, communities, healthcare systems, states and individuals—all at no cost.

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