Listening Skills Training
Befrienders Worldwide gratefully acknowledges the contributions made by the following individuals in the production of this training material.

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This Listening Skills Training material is accompanied by the series of workshops which are listed below.

Each workshop is intended to achieve one or more of the Desired Outcomes on Pages 5-6.

The Desired Outcomes and Workshops are colour coded as a guide.

♦ Befriending through Active Listening

♦ Introduction to Suicide Awareness and Exploring Suicidal Feelings:
  Suicide Awareness (Part 1)
  Exploring Suicidal Feelings (Part 2)

♦ Callers with whom we have Difficulty

♦ Befriending through Face to Face Emotional Support

♦ ‘The Wrong Shop’

♦ The Longer Term Caller

♦ Prejudice

♦ Volunteer Support and Giving Feedback
**Introduction**

The purpose of this material is to assist those who are involved in the Preparation and Training of volunteers so that the volunteers will be able to use this approach when helping suicidal people.

**Befrienders Worldwide Vision and Mission**

**Vision**

To contribute to a society where suicide is understood both locally and globally, leading to fewer deaths by suicide.

**Mission**

To be a principal resource in emotional support and to share research which can lead to innovative service practices, delivered by volunteers.

**The training material**

This material has been designed for Centres to use either as initial training for new volunteers or as ‘on-going’ training material to use with serving volunteers who wish to develop and further enhance their listening skills.

The content will:

- give clear guidance on the use of the training workshops
- suggest how best to develop an Initial Training Programme using the material
- suggest On-Going Training programmes for further development for existing volunteers

**Befrienders Worldwide (BW) volunteers**

It is very important to understand that this material is designed to be used with volunteers who have been selected using an appropriate selection process which you have adopted and practised in your Centre.

In line with Best Practice, the selection process should have ensured that those selected to become volunteers have demonstrated the following qualities and behaviours:

- a warm and positive demeanour
- a genuine interest in other people
- an understanding and caring attitude, demonstrated both verbally and in their body language
- the ability to listen with empathy and without trying to problem solve
- the ability to allow callers freedom of expression
- a willingness to understand and respect other people’s views, without allowing their own personal views to become apparent
• the ability to accept Befrienders’ stance on confidentiality
• an attitude of openness and honesty about themselves and in the way they interact with others
• a willingness to explore their own views and to learn from others
• an understanding of what triggers their own emotions and the ability to cope with those feelings
• the ability to recognise when support may be needed and to ask for it
• a willingness to be guided and directed by others

Befrienders Worldwide (BW) wholly adheres to the principles of befriending those who contact them experiencing feelings of extreme distress and suicidal intent.

BW Centres seek to alleviate these feelings by offering emotional support in a non-judgemental environment, giving space and time in which a caller may explore available options and, where possible, move forward in their life path.

However, should this journey prove difficult, the extended emotional support and care which BW Centres offer will not impose their own convictions or influence on callers and will respect the caller’s right to self determination, and to break contact at any point.

As shown above, it is essential to understand how important it is to use the appropriate selection process because the task of preparing newly selected volunteers is a vital part of the journey to successful volunteering within a Befriending Centre.

**General notes and guidance for trainers**

The following is intended to prepare trainers for the appropriate use of this material.

Consider the preparation required. It is important to ensure that any form of training is thoroughly prepared and that all the material used is carefully collated and appropriately produced.

Consider the volunteers. Remember that when working with a diverse group of individuals each learner must be assessed as an individual. For example, remember to have large print versions available for those volunteers who may require them.

Never assume that everybody in a group understands because nobody asked any questions.

Trainers have the responsibility to decide which approach works best in a given set of circumstances. If working with one or two new volunteers (or in an On-Going Training session with a variety of experienced volunteers) there might be the opportunity to use a question and answer approach to allow them to decide on the best approach to a specific subject.

When developing a training programme from this material it is important to consider the following points:

• what is the aim?
• what are the objectives?
• who is to be trained?
• when will the training take place?
• where will the training take place?
• who will do the training?
• what form will the training take?
• how will you know you have been effective?
• who has overall responsibility?

Refer also to APPENDIX 1: Training Best Practice and Explanatory Notes for Trainers

This training material has been designed to enable BW member Centres to develop a new volunteer preparation course, or appropriate training sessions for on-going training with existing volunteers and occasions when you have a need to cover a specific set of skills.

Centres will need to adjust and develop the suggested timescales to suit the availability of their volunteer trainers.

There are however Best Practice suggestions. These are strongly recommended to ensure the different skills required are given sufficient time to enable appropriate skills practice, reflection and evaluation of the work undertaken throughout the course of training.

It is generally accepted that the recognised length of time required by a volunteer undertaking a preparation course should total 21 hours.

This may be achieved in several ways:
• in four full days (e.g., 9.00am – 4.00pm)
• in 8 x 2.5 hour sessions
• a combination of the above two

One very important proviso is that it is very important to take account of the necessary reflection time between each session. This reflection time allows volunteers to absorb and fully understand the session, and have the opportunity to reflect in a constructive way with a member of the training team or appointed mentor if appropriate.

Whichever method/combination is decided upon, it is hoped that the material will ensure that a stimulating, rewarding and beneficial course is available to volunteers.

The workshops provided with this training are designed to mirror the outcomes listed below.

**Desired outcomes from training befriending volunteers:**

All the workshop training provided here is designed to promote best practice. Each workshop is colour coded to link with the following desired outcomes.

**Befrienders will:**

♦ be familiar with Befrienders Worldwide’s Vision and Mission

♦ be familiar with the methods of communication appropriate to their Centre and be confident with each method of support (such as face-to-face, telephone befriending, written word, Email befriending)
♦ have understood what is meant by emotional support and listening
♦ be able to listen with empathy and with the focus on a caller’s feelings
♦ have understood what is meant by confidentiality and honesty in the context of befriending
♦ have recognised and understood the barriers to listening
♦ be aware of their own prejudices and how to manage them
♦ have understood and accept the barriers to offering emotional support, such as self-disclosure and offering advice
♦ have explored a range of possible emotions, especially feelings of distress and despair
♦ be able to explore feelings which may lead to suicide and recognise without prejudice that a person has the fundamental decision about their own life
♦ be able to offer and seek and accept emotional support within the Centre when needed

♦ recognise when a follow-up contact may be appropriate
♦ be able to recognise when a referral to a third party may be appropriate and manage the referral in line with the Centre’s referral procedures
♦ know how to deal with third party contacts in line with their Centre’s procedures

♦ be able to recognise and manage challenging calls and inappropriate calls, such as sexually demanding calls and abusive calls
♦ be able to end calls appropriately when the need arises

♦ recognise the need for consistency and adhere to any agreed plans for specific callers which may have been developed by the caller care team in their Centre
APPENDIX 1

Training Best Practice and Explanatory Notes for Trainers

What is training?
Training is a creative learning process where people work together sharing knowledge, skills and experiences, so that all involved can learn.

Trainers need to create an environment of learning where concern for people is demonstrated by mutual trust and where trainers have an understanding and appreciation of human behaviour.

Trainers need to be aware of this so that any training group can be ‘a safe place to learn’.

Training is:
• The process by which people acquire skills and knowledge
• The promotion of helpful attitudes to the work in hand
• The passing on of certain identified skills to enable the volunteer to work with confidence and competence
• The practical part of equipping the volunteer to do the job
• Organising opportunities for learning
• Preparing volunteers for what they will encounter
• Imparting basic principles

Why train people?
Training is invaluable because:
✓ It develops skills and keeps the trainers up to date in thinking and practice
✓ It stimulates interest
✓ It provides support and confidence
✓ There will be an awareness of pitfalls
✓ There will be an understanding of known boundaries
✓ There will be a knowledge of available resources
✓ It offers credibility
✓ It enables fears and anxieties to be expressed and addressed
✓ It ensures a competent and effective service
The training cycle
There are four stages in the training cycle:

Stage 1 – Decide what training is actually needed
Stage 2 – Decide on the content and how the training will be carried out
Stage 3 - Implement the training
Stage 4 – Evaluate its effectiveness

What are the Aims and Objectives?
When developing a Training Programme, either a course to prepare new volunteers or training for longer standing members, it is important to have a clear statement of what you are trying to achieve. If you have a set clear Aims and Objectives from the beginning, those being trained will know precisely in which direction they are travelling and you will know whether or not they are getting there.

Aim
This is a general statement of the purpose of the training

Objective
What will the volunteer know/be able to do/feel at the end of the training?
To what level of skills/knowledge/qualities will the volunteer be able to respond?

Who is a Trainer?
Not everyone!!
A trainer:

• has skills in processing learning
• is a designer of courses
• has technical proficiency in the delivery of materials
• is able to manage conflict
• should continuously be modelling the behaviours expected

Good trainers create an atmosphere in which others can learn.
They do not take responsibility for the learning of the group, but rather encourage participants to take responsibility for themselves and become self directed learners.

Trainers are enablers not tellers.
Working with Groups

The role of the facilitator
A facilitator is a person who is not necessarily an expert on a specific issue (though can be), but who is an expert on process. A facilitator is trained in:

- communication (verbal and non-verbal)
- working with people
- resistance
- group dynamics
- effective meetings
- decision-making
- workshop design and implementation
- dealing with crises

A facilitator’s speciality is, literally translated from Latin, “to make things work”.

Working with discomfort
Watch for the non-verbal symptoms:

- silence
- shuffling
- frequent breaks
- side conversations
- repeated returns to more comfortable terrains
- personal attacks
- avoidance

Ask the participants to acknowledge the non-verbal behaviour/s and address and discuss them accordingly. Always ask permission to pursue discomfort.

Identify what you think is happening and ask the group to do the same. It might be a different way of dealing with the agenda than planned.

Clarify what they mean – for example, “are you saying ...............?”; “say something more about that”; “do you mean ...............?”

Don’t be afraid of silence. Try to avoid filling the spaces. Give them the support to talk about their feelings.

Ask the group if the process is useful. Record what people say on a flip chart for referral and memory.

Ensure there will be time to heal. Don’t pursue this during the last 5 minutes; people need time to heal and come back together as a group, referring what has happened to the process and their goals.

Encourage participants to contribute as they have equal responsibility for the process.

Then know when to move on!
## APPENDIX 2 - Examples of Training Techniques

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
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<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role-play</strong></td>
<td>To bring learners as close as possible to real situations</td>
<td>We use role-play as a vehicle for testing the way we handle our emotions, for practising listening skills, and for learning by exploring our own feelings. It is <strong>not</strong> acting - acting is playing a part in order to affect <strong>other</strong> people. But if the practice is to be useful it is important for those taking part to enter as fully as possible into the roles they are playing. Hence, it is essential to prepare carefully beforehand and to 'de-role' and debrief afterwards. If you are a trainer, take care when setting up skills practice; it is best done in twos and threes (see pairs and triads below).</td>
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<tr>
<td>(<strong>skills practice</strong>)</td>
<td>Particularly valuable in learning about how we express ourselves</td>
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<td><strong>Pairs</strong></td>
<td>Useful for discussion and practising listening skills</td>
<td>A non-threatening setting, in which people are most likely to express themselves freely. See also ‘buzz groups’.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Triads</strong></td>
<td>See ‘pairs’ above</td>
<td>This works the same way as in ‘Pairs’ but with groups of three volunteers instead of two, one volunteer often acting as an observer. <strong>Role of the Observer:</strong> to watch the interaction between the ‘listener’ and the ‘talker’ without being involved themselves. At the end of the practice the observer will debrief the talker, then the listener, asking questions such as what helped/what felt uncomfortable/were suicidal thoughts explored appropriately? Next, the observer widens the discussion to include what was observed, and any other areas that might be explored with the talker. If staying in triads for more skills practice, rotate the roles so that the person who was talker becomes observer, observer becomes listener, and listener becomes talker.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Re-wind role-play</strong></td>
<td>The chance to do the role-play better in the light of discussion</td>
<td>After discussion in triads, you can return to the roles and pick up the role-play again. The volunteer taking the role of the talker can then try a different way of saying things, or pick up something missed in the previous practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Role demonstration</strong></td>
<td>For trainers to:</td>
<td>This is an effective role-play performed by trainers, not for their own learning but for the benefit of the volunteers. Trainers may still need to de-role afterwards.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• demonstrate points</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• provoke discussion</td>
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<td><strong>Interrupted role demonstration</strong></td>
<td>Use this to start an exercise</td>
<td>Stop the role demonstration part way through and then ask the volunteers to continue it in pairs or triads, or to discuss any issues which have arisen.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consultation role demonstration</strong></td>
<td>Use this to test theories and try out new approaches.</td>
<td>Stop the demonstration at intervals for the group of volunteers to suggest how to continue. The role-players then continue as advised – this requires skill on the part of the role-players!</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Carousel</strong></td>
<td>A way of easily repeating a pairs role-play. Allows them to see different ways of developing the conversation.</td>
<td>Chairs are placed in a circle facing outwards, and an outer circle of chairs is placed to face them. Each person in the inner circle role-plays with the person opposite. Next, the outer circle moves round one place to repeat the role-play with the next person.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theatre role-play (or group role-play)</strong></td>
<td>Skills practice, plus learning from other people’s responses.</td>
<td>This only works well with a group of less than ten, sitting in a tight circle which includes the trainer. The trainer role-plays the talker, and the group reacts (through any member of the group) as the listener.</td>
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<td><strong>Serial role-play</strong></td>
<td>Similar to theatre role-play</td>
<td>As theatre role-play, except that the trainer, as the talker, directs the first words to one group member who replies, then continues to the next group member, and so on round the circle.</td>
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<td><strong>Pepper pots (sometimes called machine gunners)</strong></td>
<td>To help volunteers examine and adjust their instant reactions so that they learn to deal with difficult situations</td>
<td>These are very short role-plays which demand a quick reaction, such as reinforcing the ‘rules’, when a talker puts pressure on the volunteer to break them. Pace and brevity are important.</td>
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<td><strong>Two, fours and eights</strong></td>
<td>Useful for:</td>
<td>Start the discussion in pairs, then ask each pair to report to another pair, then four to report to another four.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• promoting discussion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• sharing ideas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• setting up informal groups</td>
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<td><strong>Poster pairs</strong></td>
<td>This is a briefing method for pairs exercises.</td>
<td>Divide the volunteers into two equal groups and place them at opposite ends of room. The first group are shown their information on one poster (handout), the second group are shown other information on a separate poster. They then pair off and work on the information given.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thumbs game</strong></td>
<td>To provoke thought, generate discussion,</td>
<td>Enact a situation and ask group members to react at whatever points they choose by silently indicating thumbs up or down. Different</td>
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<td>Lecture or talk</td>
<td>Economic way of presenting factual material, of explaining concepts, and of giving information.</td>
<td>Unless the lecturer is unusually good, the talk should be short, i.e., not more than 5/10 minutes. Better to make only a few major points, and provide material for subsequent discussion. Where possible use other methods in conjunction with the talk, such as visual presentation/question and answer/brainstorming/buzz groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Used to: • draw upon the resources of group members • encourage participation • ascertain the level of learning and identify any gaps • provoke deeper thought</td>
<td>You will need someone with discussion group facilitation skills, whether the group is large or small. In a large group, you will need careful management to ensure participation and focus, (for example, discussion in small sub-groups, followed by feedback to the full group). Feedback can easily become repetitive – you can avoid this by focusing each small group on a different aspect.</td>
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<td>Groups</td>
<td>As under ‘Discussion’ above Also: • to reach decisions (the committee role of the group) • to help people feel at ease (the social role of the group) • to help members cope with their feelings (the support role of group)</td>
<td>This is a useful way of getting members to explore a topic thoroughly (for example, through case study), but note the need for skilful leadership. Used sensitively, this can be effective in resolving emotive situations. This is the group’s role when it has to agree a solution to a task, or make decisions about its own way of working. E.g., as the group assembles or disperses. (Be aware here that as the group disperses there may be some further discussion among the volunteers. Be alert to look out for any volunteer who may need some individual support about the work just done.</td>
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| Brainstorming | Useful for: • stimulating thought and ideas • starting a session in a lively way • changing the pace | Ask members to call out their first thoughts (single words) about the subject. Write these on a board as they arise so they are in no particular order, without question or comment. As ideas become exhausted, invite the class to derive order and meaning from the random words; “what do these words tell us about our responses
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<tr>
<td>Buzz groups</td>
<td>Useful, especially with large groups:</td>
<td>Ask the group to discuss an idea, question or proposition in pairs or threes. If the full group is not too big, feedback from buzz groups may then be useful - but see comments on ‘Discussion’.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• for checking understanding of ideas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• for generating further ideas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• for increasing involvement</td>
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<td>Visual presentation</td>
<td>Use these:</td>
<td>The text must be large enough to be read easily. As the talk proceeds, build up a summary of the talk on a chalkboard, writing the key words or headings. By the end this will give a visual reminder of the talk. Tables of figures should contain only minimal information: complex data displayed for a short time confuse the learner. Generally, statistics presented in simple diagrammatic form are more effective. (If necessary, best to give detailed data in handouts for later study).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• to clarify and reinforce what is heard</td>
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<td>• to stimulate interest</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• to provide variety</td>
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<td>Media:</td>
<td>Chalkboard: immediate, disposable and cheap</td>
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<td>Flipchart: writing space is limited, so only use in small groups</td>
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<td>Overhead projector: either for immediate, disposable and cheap presentation (you can face the audience while writing!); or for previously prepared material. The overlay technique is effective</td>
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<td>Slides: could be useful for displaying material</td>
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<td>Video/DVD:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a) prepared video tapes/DVDs should be short and followed by carefully structured related activities, to avoid passive acceptance or nodding off to sleep!</td>
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<td>b) Video camera, either in closed circuit TV or subsequent playback – very useful in learning about face to face work and for training the</td>
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<td>Audio tapes</td>
<td>Use these:</td>
<td>As with Talks, concentration soon drops, but playback is available if a point needs to be debated or emphasised (see also Video/DVD (a))</td>
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<td>• to make available good and authoritative speakers</td>
<td>You can use the ‘stop tape’ - prepared as a participatory exercise, to be stopped at key points for group discussion.</td>
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<td>• to promote participation</td>
<td>Each volunteer’s voice can be recorded (especially over the telephone), and played back for comment.</td>
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<td>• to learn about one’s own voice</td>
<td>From time to time this can be an effective aid to learning, for example, as a mood inducer or mood changer, or through a song with a relevant message.</td>
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<td>• to provide music</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handouts</td>
<td>Use these:</td>
<td>Handouts should be brief (though references to fuller detail may be included). Type if possible.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• before a session as preparation</td>
<td>Layout is important, so use a simple font, good spacing and tabulations. Pictorial representations often help.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• during a session as material to be worked upon</td>
<td>Questionnaires can be useful to clarify thoughts and start a discussion.</td>
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<td>• after a session as consolidation or further reading</td>
<td>Distribute the material at start of the session only if the handout is to be used during it – otherwise attention will be drawn to the handout rather than where you want it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>The purpose of case studies is:</td>
<td>Details of a specific case (usually fictional or heavily disguised, because of confidentiality) are given for discussion or as a basis for role-play; a discussion is less demanding, but it may lead to emphasis on the problems rather than on feelings of those involved.</td>
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<td>• to introduce volunteers to the type of situation they will meet</td>
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<td>• to make more specific the general principles being presented</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sculpting</td>
<td>This clarifies inter-relationships between the people involved in a situation.</td>
<td>Some of the group express relationships visually in a static tableau which can be described and discussed, and can be remodelled by the rest of the group (see modelling below).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modelling</td>
<td>This should help group members towards a deeper understanding of underlying aspects of a situation.</td>
<td>A symbolic representation of a situation - for example, group members acting as a wall in a situation where barriers can arise. Movement may be part of it - this is a sort of ‘mobile sculpt’!</td>
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<td>Games</td>
<td>These offer exploration, learning and reinforcement through activity with an element of competition, cooperation and fun.</td>
<td>A game element may be introduced into many activities and can be useful in lightening a heavy session. Can be very stimulating and lively – always an aid to learning; you can include board games, use of cards in a variety of ways and endless other possibilities. Much scope for your inventiveness here!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>To enhance learning by cooperating on a group project.</td>
<td>The essence of the workshop approach is participation. Your task is to prepare linked activities centred on the workshop theme in which every member can participate. In the course of the workshop you can use a number of the above approaches.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>To make training enjoyable and memorable.</td>
<td>No training event should be without it!</td>
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</table>

And finally............ Evaluation

It is important for the trainer to assess if the desired objectives have been successfully achieved.

And for the learner it is important to gain an understanding of what they have learnt and what still needs clarification.

What is evaluation?

Evaluation is a process that enables the learner to critically examine the training session, and the impact it has had on them.

For the trainer it is a mechanism by which they can assess whether the desired objectives have been achieved.

Why is evaluation important for the trainer?

For the trainer it is important to assess and adapt training material periodically to ensure it is as effective as it can be.

For future training it is essential to identify areas for improvement and ultimately achieve the objectives more efficiently.

Why is evaluation important for the learner?

The trainee is a responsible partner, both in the learning-process and in identifying their own training needs.