

OARS Model: Essential Communication Skills

OARS is a skills-based, client-centered model of interactive techniques. These skills include verbal and non-verbal responses and behaviors that need to be culturally sensitive and appropriate. This model integrates the five principles of providing quality counseling from the QFP recommendations. Using these skills will help establish and maintain rapport with your client, assess your client's needs, and personalize your counseling and education responses.

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OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- ▶ Establish a safe environment and help to build rapport and a trusting and respectful professional relationship.
- ▶ Explore, clarify and gain an understanding of your client's world.
- ▶ Learn about your client's experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and hopes for the future.

You may ask:

- ✓ *What... brings you to the clinic today?*
- ✓ *When... if ever, might you want to be a parent?*
- ✓ *Where... will you get the support you need?*
- ✓ *Who... have you talked to about birth control?*
- ✓ *How... have you made decisions before about birth control?*
- ✓ *Tell me more about...?*

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AFFIRMING

- ▶ Build rapport, demonstrate empathy, and affirm your client's strengths and abilities.
- ▶ Build on your client's level of self-efficacy and share a belief that they can be responsible for their own decisions and life choices.

You may ask:

- ✓ *It's great that you are here today. It's not always easy...*
- ✓ *It sounds like you've been really thoughtful about your decision.*
- ✓ *You're really trying hard to...*
- ✓ *It seems like you are really good at...*

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REFLECTIVE LISTENING

- ▶ Listen to your client to help you gain a deeper understanding of their life.
- ▶ Listen, observe, and share (reflect on) your own perceptions of what your client shares.
- ▶ Reflect on the words that they use — *You say you really don't want to be pregnant right now.*
- ▶ Reflect on behavior and feelings — *You have tears in your eyes and you sound sad...*
- ▶ Your client gains an opportunity to “hear” your experience of what was shared reflected back to them.

You can reflect words, emotions, and/or behaviors:

(Reflecting words) Some of what I heard you say...

(Reflecting emotions) You seem [to be feeling]...

- ✓ *sad*
- ✓ *frustrated*
- ✓ *excited*
- ✓ *angry*

(Reflecting behavior) I noticed...

- ✓ *tears in your eyes...*
- ✓ *your voice sounds shaky...*
- ✓ *you smiled when you said that...*

S

SUMMARIZING

- ▶ Help move the conversation from the beginning, through the middle, to closing.
- ▶ Check that you are understanding your client's goals and preferences.
- ▶ Confirm that your client has an understanding of the key elements of a plan.

Summarizing can be demonstrated in three ways:

- ✓ A collective summary — *So let's go over what we have talked about so far.*
 - ✓ A linking summary — *A minute ago you said you wanted to talk to your partner... Would you like to talk more about how you might try?*
 - ✓ A transitional summary to close — *So you've just described your plan. We're always here to help in any way. What other questions do you have before you leave today?*
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