

6 - Affective and Empathetic Counseling

Storyline

A caregiver brings her child to the clinic because he has a fever. A frontline worker (FLW) asks about the child's vaccination status while the mother insists that her son needs to be seen by a doctor. The FLW's insistence on talking to the caregiver about vaccination leads the caregiver to become upset.

Upon hearing this, another FLW apologizes for her colleague's behavior and quickly arranges for the child to be checked. The child is taken to the doctor and it is found that the child has a mild viral fever and will recover soon.

After the checkup, one of the FLWs asks the caregiver if she has time to talk about immunization. The caregiver is in a hurry so they schedule a home visit for the next day.

When the FLWs go for the home visit, the mother-in-law is initially rude to them and asks them to leave but then the caregiver intervenes and invites the FLWs in. As the FLWs find out more about why the child has missed some of his vaccination doses, the caregiver is more open to talking about the challenges she has faced. Using good IPC skills, the FLWs are able to address the concerns of the caregiver and her mother-in-law. By the end of the visit, the FLWs are able to revise the child's immunization schedule and the caregiver agrees to come for the next vaccination day.

As the FLWs leave the house, the FLW who first greeted the caregiver admits that she is impressed with how expressing empathy and practicing affective counseling can improve the interactions with caregivers, and she commits to improving her IPC skills.

Characters

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| Liya | FLW1 |
| Aida | Caregiver of a sick child |
| Aisha | FLW2 |
| Nurse | Nurse at the facility |
| Rahim | Sick child who is almost 1 year old |
| Mom | Aida's mother in law |

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Scene 1 – Interior – Health Facility:

(Aisha is shown busily writing in a register and doing lots of paperwork in the health facility in her area. Aida enters the clinic carrying a child and looking very worried. She approaches Aisha for help who is engrossed doing her paperwork.)

Aida (Stressed): Hi, Umm... My child is sick... Is the doctor in?

Aisha: (not looking up from her register) Ok, sit down. Are you up-to-date with your child's vaccination?

Aida: Umm... what? Actually I'm really worried because he has been running a fever since last night and-

Aisha: (still buried in paperwork) Oh ok. But is your child vaccinated or not? How old is he?

Aida: Uh, he's 1. No, um...his father doesn't want that and he blames me for the fever too. He doesn't see that I have to take care of the house and everything else. Everybody just blames the mother for everything.

Aisha: That's too bad (she says quite indifferently). Well, did you at least bring his vaccination record with you?

Aida:...what? Look my son is sick! I don't care about your vaccines. I need to get him checked.

[Another FLW, Liya, sees the heated discussion and intervenes]

Liya: Oh Aida! What's the matter?

Aida: Liya! My son is sick and your colleague here keeps pestering me about vaccination. All I care about is getting my son treated for this fever.

Liya: I understand that completely. Your child's recovery should be our first & foremost priority. Let's get him checked immediately.

(Liya looks over to the nurse who gestures towards Liya to ask her to come with the caregiver & her child)

Liya: Okay, please come with me, the doctor will see you now.

(The nurse takes Aida & the child to the doctor's room while Liya stays behind)

Scene 2 – Interior – Health Facility

(Aida comes out of the doctor's office. She looks a lot less worried. Liya shows concern about Rahim, and ends up convincing Aida to let her come to Aida's house & speak to her)

Liya: So, what did the doctor say? Everything okay?

Aida: The doctor thinks it's just a viral fever, thankfully. The doctor has given me some paracetamol and says he will be fine in a couple of days.

Liya (looks at the child & ruffles his hair): That's great news. Isn't it? Your mama loves you very much.

(Aida finds this moment really touching and feels she was a little harsh earlier)

Aida: Listen, I'm sorry if I was a little harsh with your colleague.

Liya: Not at all! We should've understood that you were worried about your child. After all, like I said, our foremost priority, like yours, is the safety and wellbeing of every child in this community. And that is why we are so concerned about children's immunization.

Aida: I understand. That's really nice to hear. It's good to know you are there for our children.

Liya: Absolutely! Anytime! I'd love to talk to you about your son's health & the role of vaccinations in it.

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Aida: I wish I had time to talk to you, my husband's waiting for me and I really have to get home.

Liya: I completely understand. I won't take any more of your time right now. But do you think I could visit your house some time to talk about this?

Aida: Sure, I think that will work better for me. You can come tomorrow afternoon.

Liya: Excellent! Alright then, see you Liya (*turns to the child and waves at him*) ... Bye little fellow!!

Scene 3 – Exterior – Aida's house

(We see Liya and Aisha in front of Aida's house. She knocks a few times and waits. After a few moments, Aida's mother in law opens the door.)

Mother in law: Are you the health workers who treated my daughter in-law badly at the health center? Why are you both here? Are you here to worry her again about immunizing the child? She has lots of chores and is busy. I think you better leave without causing any more trouble.

Aida: Oh mother, please don't chastise them. They are here only because they care about your grandson and want to help him be healthy.

Aida (*turns to the health workers and says*): I am sorry about this reception!

Liya: No problem, Aida. How are you? May we come in?

Aida: Yes of course! Come in, come in.

(They enter the house and Aida leads them to a sitting area. The mother in law follows them in as well. The child is also playing there.)

Liya: So, I see Rahim is doing pretty good.

Aida: Oh, yes! The medicines really helped bring the fever down.

Liya: That's good. You told me that Rahim has missed some of his vaccinations?

Aida: Yes, some of them. You know how it is. I think we were out of the city when they were due or something...but yes, he hasn't gotten all of them.

Liya: I understand. I know your routine is very hectic and you have lots of responsibilities at home too.

Aida (jokes): Ha... I wish my husband thought like you.

Liya: Well the best thing is that we can resume the vaccinations without any problems.

Aida: Will we have to start the vaccines all over again?

Liya: Oh, no, don't worry. The vaccines that have been given to Rahim are still effective. We will revise the vaccination schedule and won't repeat the vaccines he has already gotten.

(Mother in law who is sitting nearby listening now chimes into the conversation)

Mother in law: I always wonder; so many medicines for such a little child. Just doesn't feel right.

Liya: I understand your concern. But these vaccines are not only safe, they are very important to protect the child from dangerous diseases, some of which are incurable if your child is not vaccinated.

Aida: I just get confused sometimes. There's so much you hear from people about vaccines and how they're not safe.

Liya: I used to have all these questions too, but I only got answers by asking questions. And that's how I discovered the countless benefits of these vaccines. That is why we encourage people to ask as many questions, so you can be sure of the safety of these vaccines and their importance in children's lives.

Aida: So, when do I bring my child for the next vaccination?

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Liya: (*hands Aida back her health card*) I have marked all the vaccination dates on Rahim's health card for you. Remember, it is very important that you stick to the schedule and bring it with you. It records your child's immunization history and all the vaccines he is yet to get.

(Mother-in-law takes the card from Aida and starts to study the card).

Aisha: It's a very useful record for you as well as the health worker. Do not lose this card, and please bring it to your next visit.

Aida: Okay, thank you so much. I'll keep this in a safe place.

Liya: Now, tell me, when are you due to bring your child to the clinic next for vaccination?

(Before Aida could say it the mother-in-law who is still looking at the card quickly responds)

Mother-in-law: October 1st.

Liya: Excellent! See you and this adorable little one on the 1st then.

Aisha (turning to mother in law): You can remind Aida and come along with them too if you would like.

Mother-in-law: Definitely!

Aida: Thanks to you both for coming all the way and taking the time to explain everything in detail!

(Liya and Aisha leave)

Aisha: Liya, I can't believe this is the same caregiver who refused to talk about vaccination yesterday. Today she seems really receptive and asked a lot of good questions.

Liya: Most parents are just concerned about their children's health, Aisha. Our job is to show them some empathy and understanding and to respond to their questions and reassure them. Sometimes when we are stressed ourselves or feel overwhelmed at work, we tend to forget that.

Aisha: You're right. At the health center yesterday I felt overburdened and just followed the protocol without realizing how worried the mother was. I should have responded to her need first which would have built trust, and then talked to her about vaccination.

Liya: Exactly! Remember you can show empathy not just verbally but also non-verbally through your body language, gestures and by making eye contact with caregivers.

Aisha: I am glad I came along with you, Liya. You even managed to convince her mother in law! I have learned a lot and now I intend to practice empathy just like you.

The End.