



LESSON 2

Learning Comfort as a Skill

Why is it hard?



Busy schedules, and barriers like uncertainty and second-guessing – what we call the Awkward Zone™ – prevent us from recognizing who around us is hurting; and keep us stuck in a cycle where we don't comfort.



AWKWARD ZONE

"I don't want to make things worse."

"I think somebody else is better at this."

"I think they're probably over it."

"I just don't know what to say."



Lesson 2

Learning Comfort as a Skill – Why is it hard?

Teaching Points / Topics / Themes

1. Start the discussion by asking participants to state their name and tell of a time that someone was kind to them or they were kind to someone else that made an impression on them.
2. Try to point out with each example what was good about being kind
3. Introduce the awkward zone graphic and note 3 main zones – busy zone (pink) / awkward zone and comfort zone.
4. Explain that comforting is not natural. Being kind is easier than comforting. No one is really good at comforting without practice because it's hard. You can have the biggest heart in the world and still have to learn how to comfort. But it doesn't have to be hard. Remind participants of the 8 lessons of the comfort dogs. They show us the way.
5. Write the word UNcomfortABLE on the board. Note how COMFORT is the middle word. And point out how "UNABLE" surrounds comfort to make us uncomfortable. With practice, we can take the "un" out of uncomfortable.
6. Remind participants how important it is to reach those that are hurting. They need people to reach them in the comfort zone. If we don't learn to comfort them, they will be isolated and lonely.
7. Review each step of the awkward zone graphic with the explanations below:

Awkward Zone Graphic

- PACE OF LIFE

Our lives are getting more complicated every day. Technology usage has a way of absorbing us in our own "tech bubble". It sucks us in... it can distract us from life all around us. We miss things. And that makes us feel worse. It's a nonstop cycle of busyness that weighs us down. Face to face communications are being replaced with screen to screen interactions and this is having a whole host of negative effects. If we are struggling ourselves, we feel as if we are "stuck" as everyone else and their lives fly by us. Feeling like we are broken when everyone else is whole.

- MISFORTUNE

When we see or hear of misfortune happening, it usually catches our attention. Especially if it is a social media saturated event. We slow down for a second and feel terrible. Sometimes we hear of a sad event and it immediately slips our mind due to the craziness of life. And that makes us feel bad too. In reality, every single one of us has, has had or will have misfortune in our lives.

We all have “stuff”. We all need to know that someone sees us. We need to take care of each other.

- **I WANT TO DO SOMETHING**

Every time we hear of misfortune we have a choice. Many fall into the “empathy/action gap”. Wanting to do something but not taking action. In this case, we just go on with our busy lives. And the cycle of everyday life continues. But there are two other directions we can go:

- **SMALL ACT OF KINDNESS**

When we want to do something, we usually want to do it quickly. It’s while the news is still fresh that we feel the urgency to do something. Anything. Some donate money to the Red Cross after a hurricane, others send teddy bears or casseroles. Some are a simple “click away” and allow the sender to feel better that they have helped. All of these actions are meant well. But sometimes these acts don’t really benefit the person that is suffering the most. In fact, sometimes these actions can add an unnecessary burden – what we refer to as misplaced empathy.

- **AWKWARD ZONE**

The harder step to move into is the Awkward Zone.... When you want to comfort the person who is hurting, but what do you say? How do you comfort them? Too often, we don’t do enough, paralyzed by this state of mind. In the Awkward Zone, we’re confronted with second-guessing and doubt, which often inhibit comfort and connection. Barriers like these have always been there, but modern life has made them stronger.

WHY DON’T WE COMFORT OTHERS?

There are real barriers in THE AWKWARD ZONE:

Fear

“I’m afraid I’m not a good enough friend”, “Maybe they don’t want to hear from me”, “I’m afraid to bring it up, it might ruin their day” “I think they just want to be with their close friends & Family.” “I don’t want to make it worse.”

Paralyzing Perfectionism

“I’ll wait to send the perfect thing at the perfect time” when ultimately, nothing gets sent. Good intentions, but lack of follow through.

Group Think / Image

“My friends don’t think it’s a good idea”, “I don’t want to do something that no one else is doing.”

Avoidance - Priorities / Requires Energy

“I really want to do something, I’m just so busy” “I told them I would pray for them and then completely forgot.”

Passivity – Assume others will do it better

“I’m really not very good at this. There are others that are much better at knowing what to do. They have it covered.”

Emotional reactive event, not in control of timing (unlike RAK’s)

“I saw my friend in the grocery store and I froze. I just didn’t know what to say and was afraid I would say the wrong thing, so I avoided talking to her.”

Lack of Awareness

“I think they are over it, they seem fine.” “It’s been over 6 months now, things should be getting back to normal.”

Caregiving Fatigue

“I just don’t know what to do anymore. It’s been so long and I’ve tried everything to help them.”

Lack of Knowledge

“I want to do something, but really just don’t know what to do.”