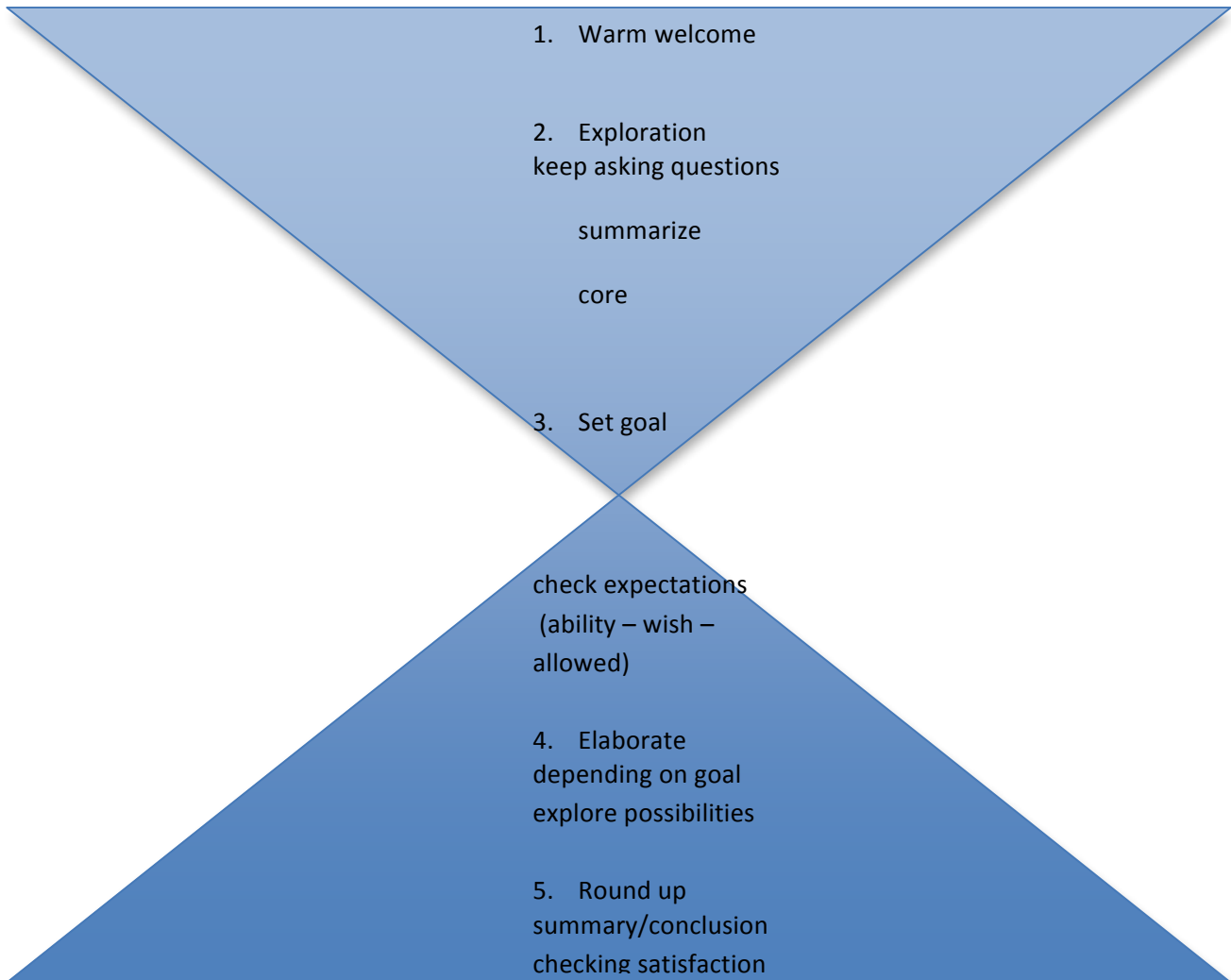


PHASES IN A CONVERSATION

In a conversation there are five phases to be distinguished.



1. WARM WELCOME

Right at the start you and the other get to know each other and you invite the caller to talk. The start of the conversation is very important for the course of the conversation. Especially in a chat a warm welcome is important for the contact because you do not hear or see each other. The interpretation of words plays an important role. The interpretation of everything you ask or say can be influenced by the contact. For example: if the contact is good, the question of a listener shall be regarded as sincere which remains to be seen when the contact is not that good. When the contact is bad a question will be regarded as offensive or accusing. This means that when the contact is good, not every word is put on a scale which gives you more freedom and less concerns about how your words will be interpreted. That is why a warm welcome in the beginning is of utmost importance.

How do you do that?

A warm welcome can be offered by showing your involvement and commitment. Of course it is important during the total course of the conversation, but it's especially important in the beginning. There are different ways of doing it. You can find some examples below. Take care: it is not the intention that you use them all. It depends on who you are talking to. You can offer a warm welcome by:

- inviting: 'take your time, I listen to you...'
- explaining about your service: '*the name of the service* is anonymous, you can reach us day and night. We are there for you when you are in need of contact and you want to talk about your feelings, worries and problems'.
- mentioning your feelings: 'You sound troubled....'
- showing empathy: 'that seems very difficult to me to go through'
- giving a compliment: 'very good that you talk about this...'

Try to tune into the person you are talking to. That is something you have to feel and will feel most of the time. Every time you will make contact in a different way; the way you feel fits best. It could also be laughing together about something funny.

Focus points for chat conversations

- To make the contact more personal, you can address the chatter with his or her nickname and react to the subject which he or she mentioned before the start of the chat.
- Watch out with irony and sarcasm. During a chat it is not always clear that something is meant to be funny because the voice is missing. You can compensate the lack of non-verbal communication a little bit by using emoticons.

2. EXPLORATION

In the explorative phase you assemble all the information you need to get a clear picture of the question/problem or story of the person you are talking to. Even if the person has a rather concrete question or clearly formulated problem, it still is worthwhile to take time to explore the context of the question or problem.

Focus points

In order to explore as optimal as possible:

- listen closely
- ask open questions
- ask for facts and feelings
- stimulate the other to come with his story even though there may be silences
- when you recognise problems, don't give back your own feelings but ask the other how he or she feels or thinks
- try to move away from vague expressions to more specific feelings and experiences
- show tangible attention and interest in the other person



- structurize the conversation, re-arrange the various elements
- with numerous problems let the other make a choice.

The exploration phase ends with a summary. Try to come to the heart of the matter. An exception to this is a 'contact'- talk: in these talks more than one subject is addressed and it is not appropriate nor possible to come to the core of these types of conversation.

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3. SET GOAL

In this third phase you check the expectation (or need) of the person you are talking to; what does he or she expect from this conversation and thus, what will be your role. Then you know what type of conversation it will be: a 'contact'-talk, a 'clarifying' talk, an informative talk, a crisis talk or a talk we do not want.

When the expectation of the help seeker is not clear, just ask it. Ask an open question like e.g.:

- what can I do for you in this conversation?
- you are calling (*name of service*), what did you think when you called us?

In case you already have an idea of what the person expects, check whether you got it right or not:

- I get the idea that you would very much like to discuss all that has happened, is that so? (contact conversation)
- If I understand you correctly, you would like to know what you can do in your situation in order to....., is that correct? (clarifying talk)
- Do you want to know who could help you with this question? (informative talk)
- At the start of our talk you panicked and now I notice you have calmed down. Was that also the reason for you to call (*name of service*)? (crisis talk)

By asking the expectation/need of your conversation partner you offer the space to set the goal of the talk. After setting the goal it is important to check it to the following criteria:

- Am I able?
- Do I want that?
- Am I allowed to do so?

Examples:

- Somebody tells you about his nausea and dizziness. He expects you to tell him where that comes from and what it is. → you can't and you aren't allowed to tell him

- Somebody wants a conversation with you so badly that he or she expects you to listen to you whole night → you probably don't want to



- Somebody wants to be sexually satisfied by you. → you are not allowed to (and probably don't want to).

It is not always possible to live up to the expectations of somebody. If the answer to one of the three questions (Am I able? Do I want to? Am I allowed?) is NO, then you cannot step up to the next phase of the conversation. Then it is up to the other whether or not another expectation is present.

4. ELABORATE THE GOAL

After setting the goal in the third phase of the talk, you can start the elaboration. In the fourth part you support the progress in the whole process. Depending on the question of your partner, the fourth phase may consist of different actions, e.g. listening, supporting somebody in making a choice, giving information or referring.

Elaborating the goal in the 5 types of conversation:

- With 'contact'-talks, the contact is the goal in itself. Mostly your conversation partner does not expect an advice and the most important thing you can do is offer real attention. Elaborating the goal means giving space so that he or she can tell his story, that you give the other the feeling that he or she is heard. The person you are talking to expects reciprocity; he or she likes you to be open about yourself as well.

- With talks that have a problem solving character, your 'partner' expects something else from you. Quite often he or she wants you to give direction in order to find an answer or a solution. If somebody wants a solution to a fight, ask him first how he wants to solve it himself. E.g. he wants the relationship to be healed, but it can also be that he wants the contact to be broken. Elaborating the goal means that you bring order in all the possibilities and then discuss the possible consequences.

- With crisis conversations, the expectation of your 'partner' can be quite diverse. There are crisis talks in which your partner is panicking and wants to calm down. Elaborating the goal could consist of giving attention to the emotions and structuring the conversation to get a grip on it. It can also very well be that the goal of the crisis talk is to find help adequately and urgently.

- With informative talks your partner expects a concrete answer to a question or support in finding the answer. Suppose if someone wants to know where he can get a therapy against depression, you can look (together) for the right organisation that provides it.

- With conversations that we do not want, there won't be a fourth phase in the conversation. You will try to end the conversation in a correct way. This could be making clear that you will not go into the matter further.



5. ROUNDING UP

The conversation can be rounded up with a summary or a conclusion and checking out if the conversation was living up to the expectation of the caller: is he satisfied with the talk.

The talk can end in a natural way in which you work to an end together. It can also be that you or your partner takes the initiative to end the conversation.

Before ending the talk, you can refer to the expectations of your partner and you check whether you have lived up to the other's expectations. E.g.:

“ You contacted us because you were unsure about asking a second opinion and you wanted to exchange ideas about that. We discussed about pro's and con's and you decided to not continue with a second opinion. Does this mean you have an answer to your question?”

Focus points:

- Start in time with this phase of the conversation and leave space for reflection.

- With 'contact'-talks it is less clear whether you satisfy the needs of your partner. The goal is contact but often it is not clear for how long. You have to make sure that you guard your boundaries and you can end the conversation at any moment that you think you have given real attention. An example of how you can end the talk:

“ You said you wanted to talk for a while and I have the idea that we discussed everything. Was it worthwhile for you?”

It can be that your partner expects more of it. Check out for yourself if you can/want/may live up to that expectation and be clear in your communication if you want to end it, e.g.:

“ I would like to end the conversation...”

- To end the conversation you could give a summary or tell the conclusion but you can choose to let that be done by your conversation partner, e.g. by asking:

“ What have you decided? / What are you going to do? / What are your conclusions?”

The advantage is that you stimulate the independence. You activate the other by letting him think about the next steps.

- Sometimes it is not possible to come to a solution or conclusion. That is OK. You can talk about that:

“ We are already talking for a while and I have the feeling that we do not make any progression.... How do you feel about that? Can I be of any help to you still?”



Be aware that you do not force a conclusion or solution by doing that for the other. So don't:

“Just go and try it, never shot is never hit”

It is all right if your partner is not able to come to a conclusion/solution.

- When you are rounding up, don't start new conversation topics. If you do so, the other thinks that the conversation can go on.
- Don't be afraid to round up if there is nothing to discuss anymore.

TIPS

- A couple of useful lines you could use:

* “I have the idea everything is discussed; I would like to round up”

* “Do you think you have enough to go on now?”

* Telling the time, e.g. “We are talking now for half an hour”.

* “I have the idea that we are repeating ourselves”

* During a long talk: “I notice that I am getting a bit tired, I would like to round up”

- Look after your own energy level and your own boundaries; a tired listener is not so nice for the other conversation partner.
- Be honest and do not say too quickly: “You can always call back”, or “More people may call”, but rather say why you would like to round up.
- Use your notes to check out how the conversation went, especially with a (too)long or (too) short talk. Why was it so long/short and what does that say about me?