Building Trust with Cases and Contacts

**Guest Speakers**

- **Ezekiel Baskin** - Ezekiel has held various roles at the CTC including contact tracer, case investigator and mentor. Ezekiel is an experienced educator and artist with an interest in utilizing performing arts as a public health intervention to support health promotion and building community resilience, especially within LGBTQ+ communities.

- **Paula Lee** - Paula Lee has been with the CTC since April 2020, serving in various roles including contact tracer, case investigator and mentor. She has been on the CTC Training Team since last December. She has extensive human services and spiritual leadership experience, and holds a PhD in Religious and Psychological Studies. She is a former secondary school educator, and is currently an adjunct professor at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado.
Lessons Learned

• Effective outbreak investigation is key to stopping the spread of COVID-19.
• Accompaniment and care are core principles of outbreak investigation.
• Good communication builds better rapport and gets better results.
• Open ended questions and other key skills enable us to build trust with cases and contacts.
• Skill building leads to confidence when interviewing.
• Resilience and self-care are essential in the work of outbreak investigation.
Accompaniment
What is Accompaniment?

- Derives from the idea of pragmatic solidarity: Sentiment *along with* the goods and services necessary to diminish hardship.
- For accompaniment to work, it must be based in equity.
- It feels like sitting shoulder to shoulder instead of across the table.
- Sharing our best resources with people with gentleness and humility.
- When something does not go well, accompaniment means asking: "What can I do differently in this situation to help this person thrive?"
- Accompaniment is driven by compassion and solidarity, and not limited in time or scope.
- Accompaniment can look like listening. This is an act of care.
- We accompany our cases and contacts; our colleagues and team accompany us.

Adapted from: [Accompaniment and Health](https://example.com), Caitlyn Bradburn, May 2020
COVID-19 Moves Within Social Circles

Because COVID cases are likely linked in social groups:

• It is even more important that we gain trust and access to social networks.

• Cases may center around specific locations that we want to know about.

• Getting social information can be the key to stopping spread.
"Why Should I Trust You?"

- At the CTC, we were often met with initial mistrust from cases/contacts who hadn't heard of us, weren't open to our help, or were worried we were scamming them. We worked to develop the following skills to build trust and help cases/contacts open up to us.

- We found these skills helped us connect with cases/contacts more effectively and helped us improve the quality of interviews and information gathered.
Scenario 1: A Person Does Not Want to Talk to Us

• I understand your hesitancy.
• Our goal is to collect information on the virus to help stop the spread and protect the community.
• Let me tell you about some success we have had in doing this.
• Let me tell you about some of the resources we can help you with.
• Can you tell me what is behind your hesitation so I can better understand?
• Are you concerned about work?
• Are you concerned about providing for your family?
Scenario 2:
A Person Does Not Want to Provide Close Contacts

- I understand your hesitation.
- The purpose of our question is to help track the spread of the virus and protect the community.
- We never reveal your identity; reaching out and informing an individual of potential exposure helps us to stop the spread.
- Would you be willing to provide these contacts with our phone number?
- If you change your mind, you can always call us back.
Role Playing: Hesitancy

Here are some examples of how we have learned to have these conversations.
Key Skills
What are some of the key skills needed?

- Empathy
- Active listening
- Open-ended questions
- Curiosity
- Partializing
- Emotional support and validation
- Slowing down
Skill #1 – Empathy

• Empathy means understanding where a person is coming from and relating on a very human level.

• The empathetic response starts with trying to imagine the experience, thinking, and feelings of the other person. Think: feeling with.

• Your experience might be different; however, your feelings may be similar.
Skill #2 – Active Listening

Why We Listen:
• We listen to obtain information.
• We listen to understand.
• We listen to learn.

Ways We Listen:
• Pay close attention
• Pick up on verbal cues
• Provide feedback
• Defer judgment
• Respond appropriately
Skill #3 – Asking Open-Ended Questions

Open-Ended

• Clarify ambivalence
• Clarify feelings, values, reactions
• Provide opportunities for client to voice what they are not saying

Closed-Ended

• Gathering basic information
• Gathering specific information
• Gathering demographic information
Some Examples of Open-Ended Questions

• What are some of the ways you are coping with your diagnosis?
• What are some of the challenges that you are facing with this isolation / quarantine?
• How has your family been handling these challenging times?
• How are you getting food for yourself and your family?
• How has your work been affected due to COVID-19?
• How can I help you?
• What sort of help would you find acceptable?
• Can you tell me more about your hesitation to answer my questions? What is behind your hesitation?
Skill #4 – Curiosity

• Approaching those we serve in this work with curiosity can help us stay engaged.
• Curiosity helps us build connection with cases & contacts.
• Curiosity + empathy help guide our open-ended questions.
• Curiosity is vital when investigating outbreaks of ever-changing diseases like COVID-19; curiosity is key to identifying clusters.
• Approaching this work with curiosity helps us continuously improve our skills; with every interview, we're likely to learn something that will help with a future interview.
Skill #5 – Partializing

• Breaking down big problems into smaller pieces, especially to create actionable steps.
• Can help reduce overwhelm for both client and case investigator (you!).
• **Example**: "I can hear that you have so many things causing stress. I'm here to support you, where would you like to start?"
• Support the client in taking the lead.
Some Prompts to Lead to Actionable Steps

• How are you holding up?
• How do you feel like your kids are coping?
• How have you coped with difficult situations in the past?
• It may seem crazy to even ask this in the middle of everything, but what are some things you do to take care of yourself?
• What are you doing to keep yourself busy during quarantine?
• Who are the people in your life who make you feel supported?
Skill #6 – Emotional Support and Validation

• A bridge to help and support.
• Provides a way to respond to strong feelings (anger, despair, shame, etc.).
• Sometimes people feel ashamed about taking a "handout" or accepting help.
• We can help people understand that accepting help is difficult, and it’s something we all need at times.
Some Support and Validation Examples

• You did everything you could to prevent yourself from getting COVID, this feels so unfair.

• You are working so hard to take care of your family.

• You have been feeling sick for so long, it might be hard to imagine feeling better. I am hopeful that you are going to feel well again, and I can hold on to that hope for you while you rest and take care of yourself.

• It sounds like you have done everything right, and you still aren't getting the help you need.

• I am so sorry to hear that.

• Thank you so much for talking with me, and for sharing your story. It has been so nice getting a chance to know you.

• Don't hesitate to allow space and silence in your conversation. Strong reactions can benefit from "sitting" in the air for a moment.
Skill #7 – Slowing Down

• Even when there's a lot to get through, it's important to slow down and take time to get to know the individuals we're speaking with.

• Letting them lead the conversation is a key piece of this, as is asking open-ended questions and listening actively.

• Slowing down and taking time can help us better understand and consider cultural background, trauma history, history of past interactions with government agencies and medical professionals, which can help us provide trauma informed & culturally competent care.
Tips from a professional interviewer!

What is the most important skill in an interview?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=343kpguUXU The One Question Oprah Winfrey Says Every Guest Asked, 2017
Using a Script or Interview Tool

Scripts and Interview Tools:

• Help us to develop rapport with those we serve.
• Enable robust information gathering.
• Are a good jumping off point – but it's important to let the conversation flow.
  • Sections of the script can be rearranged or adapted based on your conversation with the case or contact.
  • It's important to follow verbal cues from the case or contact while also keeping the overarching purpose of the interview in mind.
• Keep conversations from becoming robotic.
Supporting Staff Well-Being

• You and your staff are also human beings living through a pandemic, just like your cases and contacts.
  • Be aware of signs of emotional distress.
  • Acknowledge and discuss in staff meetings.

• Inform staff of mental health coverage and resources available.

• Create an environment that promotes well-being.
  • Opportunities for staff to take breaks.
  • Opportunities for staff to connect with colleagues.

• Be aware of vicarious trauma
  • Trauma symptoms that can result from repeated exposure to others' difficult situations.
  • Staff members are bearing witness to stories of grief, loss, unemployment, financial and housing insecurity resulting from the pandemic.
Building Our Own Resilience

• Practicing self-compassion.
• Our feelings and emotions are normal.
• Remember our important contributions to advocacy and care through this work.
• Pause and breathe.
• Talking with peers and colleagues as a reminder that the responsibility does not fall only on us!
Components of Trust Building

• Creating a context of accompaniment
• Utilizing key skills:
  • Empathy
  • Active listening
  • Asking open-ended questions
  • Curiosity
  • Partializing
  • Emotional Support and Validation
  • Slowing Down
• Building your own resilience serves you and this work
Thank you for your time!