

SESSION 3 COURSE NOTES HOLDING SPACE WITH HEART – SUPPORTIVE RESPONSES TO DISCLOSURE

Hi there,

Welcome to your easy-to-follow notes for Session 3. These are your friendly companion for today, whether you read them before we gather, keep them nearby during the session, or look back afterwards. They're written in a simple, conversational way, just like we're chatting together.

In the sessions so far we have learned to see clearly and to step up safely using the 5 D's. Sometimes, when we notice something or when someone trusts us enough to speak, they share something difficult. How we respond in that moment can either open a door to help or close it. Today we focus on the heart of a supportive response (Listen & Believe) and how a caring reply can be the first step that prevents further harm and helps a family find safety.

This matters deeply for South African children and families. When someone feels believed and supported, they are more likely to take steps that keep their children safe. In the true spirit of ubuntu ("I am because we are") we create safety in the moment so the person does not regret speaking. You do not have to be a counsellor. You simply hold space with heart.

By the end of this session you will be able to:

- Demonstrate Listen & Believe skills.
- Identify phrases that help and phrases that harm.
- Know how to offer warm referrals while maintaining boundaries and safety.

These are practical skills you can use the same day, whether you're a shift supervisor, a colleague in an office or factory, a teacher, a parent at a school event, or a community member someone turns to when things feel heavy.

BEFORE WE BEGIN – A QUICK PRIVATE REFLECTION (5 QUESTIONS)

Take two minutes now to answer these in your head or on a scrap of paper. There are no right or wrong answers, this is simply to help you see where your thinking is at and get the most from our time together.

1. When someone shares something painful or frightening, do you usually feel you need to fix it or give advice straight away?
2. What does it feel like when someone truly listens to you without interrupting or judging?
3. Can you think of a phrase that might accidentally make someone feel worse when they're sharing something difficult?
4. How might a caring response from one adult help protect children in a family that is struggling?
5. Right now, how confident do you feel about responding supportively if someone discloses something heavy? (Rate yourself 1–5, where 1 is "not confident at all" and 5 is "very confident".)

Hold onto your thoughts. By the end of this session you'll have clear, practical language and the confidence to use it.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN OUR SESSION TOGETHER

We keep everything interactive, emotionally safe, and hopeful. Participation is completely voluntary, you can listen, observe, or step out at any time. No one is asked to share personal disclosures or stories. We focus on building practical skills with hope and respect. This topic can touch emotions, so we move gently and keep the tone calm, steady, and compassionate.

Here's how the session flows:

- We open with a short, powerful 5-minute introduction video that shows a hopeful South African story of someone disclosing and receiving a supportive response. It explains exactly what we'll practise and why a caring reply can protect children and families.
- A brief pair reflection on what stood out.
- Clear input on Listen & Believe, helpful phrases, phrases that can harm, and how to offer warm referrals while keeping boundaries.
- One hopeful story from a retail distribution centre in the Western Cape that shows how one person's steady, believing presence opened the door to safety for a colleague and her children.
- A simple, steadying breath together before we practise.
- Pair work on two realistic South African scenarios; one from a workplace and one from a family or community setting. You'll take turns practising Listen & Believe responses.
- A structured group debrief where we share what felt supportive (only what feels comfortable).
- Three quick verbal questions to lock in the learning.
- A warm close and transition to the next session.

Everything is designed to feel safe and practical. We focus on skill, not trauma.

THE HEART OF SESSION 3: LISTEN & BELIEVE – THE HEART OF A SUPPORTIVE RESPONSE

When someone discloses something painful or frightening, they are taking a risk. They are trusting us with something heavy. Our first and most important job is not to fix it, investigate it, or give advice. Our job is to create safety in that moment so they do not regret speaking.

We call this Listen & Believe. It sounds simple, but it is powerful.

Listen - Give your full attention. Put your phone away. Make eye contact if it feels right. Let your body show you are present. Sometimes silence and a nod are enough.

Believe - Take what they say at face value. You do not need proof in that moment. Believing them does not mean you have all the facts, it means you honour their courage in speaking.

Here are some helpful phrases that create safety:

- "I'm really glad you told me."
- "That sounds incredibly hard. I'm here with you."
- "It's not your fault."

- “Thank you for trusting me with this.”
- “You don’t have to go through this alone.”

Here are some phrases that can harm, even when we mean well:

- “Why didn’t you leave / tell someone sooner?”
- “Are you sure that’s what happened?”
- “You should just...” or giving quick solutions.
- Minimising: “It could be worse” or “At least...”
- Blaming or shaming the person.

You do not have to have the perfect words. Presence, belief, and a simple “I’m here” can be enough to change the trajectory for a person and their children.

A HOPEFUL SOUTH AFRICAN STORY

Let me share a story from a retail distribution centre in the Western Cape. A shift supervisor named Fatima noticed that one of her team members, a single mother named Aisha, had been arriving late and looking exhausted. One afternoon Aisha asked to speak privately. With tears in her eyes, she said her ex-partner had started threatening her again and was using the children to control her.

Fatima did not try to solve it on the spot. She sat with Aisha, looked at her gently and said, “I’m really glad you told me. That sounds so heavy. I’m here.” She listened without interrupting. When Aisha finished, Fatima said, “You don’t have to carry this by yourself. There are people who can help you and the children safely. Would you like me to sit with you while we find the right number?”

Aisha later said that Fatima’s calm belief in her story gave her the strength to reach out for support that same week. Her children are now safer, and Aisha feels less alone at work. One person’s steady, believing presence opened the door.

Fatima did not need to be a counsellor. She simply held space with heart. That is what we are learning today.

THE CENTRING PAUSE

Before we move into practising together, we’ll take one steady breath together, in through the nose, out through the mouth. This helps us stay present and calm, ready to truly listen, just as we might before an important conversation with someone we care about. It’s a small, practical tool you can use anytime.

YOUR PAIR ACTIVITY

You’ll work in pairs on two short, realistic South African scenarios where someone might disclose something difficult, one from a workplace and one from a family or community setting. In pairs, take turns. One person will share as the person disclosing (you can use the scenario or speak generally). The other person will practise Listen & Believe responses. After 3–4 minutes, swap roles.

Remember: You are not expected to fix anything. Your only job is to listen, believe, and respond with care. If you prefer to observe rather than practise, that is completely fine and very valuable. We are practising skills that can help us support others, including children.

STRUCTURED DEBRIEF & KEY TAKEAWAY

We'll come back together and hear from a few pairs, you can share what felt helpful in the responses you received or gave. No one has to share what was disclosed.

We'll reflect on what words or ways of listening felt supportive, what was challenging about just listening without jumping to solutions, and how a response like this can help protect children in the situation.

The key takeaway we'll emphasise together is this:

You do not have to have the perfect words. Presence, belief, and a simple "I'm here" can be enough to change the trajectory for a person and their children. When someone feels believed and supported, they are more likely to take steps that keep their children safe.

AFTER SESSION 3 – WHAT YOU TAKE WITH YOU

You now have the heart and the practical skill to respond when someone trusts you with something heavy. A supportive response can be the first step that prevents further harm and helps a family find safety, exactly what resilient families and safer workplaces are built on.

Remember: Your Certificate of Attendance and the full resource pack (with more phrase examples, scripts, and national support numbers including the GBV Command Centre 0800 428 428 and Childline 116) will be emailed to you after the entire workshop. Everything is created professionally and sent directly to the email address you provided. No printing is required from you.

You have taken another meaningful step today. Thank you for the care and respect you brought to this session.

10 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SESSION 3

1. **What if the person starts crying or gets very emotional when they disclose?** That's completely normal and okay. You don't have to stop them or "fix" their feelings. Simply stay present, offer a tissue if you have one, and keep listening. Your calm presence says, "I'm here with you." That is often the most supportive thing you can do.
2. **What if I don't know what to say or I freeze?** Freezing is human. You can start with a simple, honest phrase like "I'm really glad you told me" or "That sounds incredibly hard. I'm here." Silence and a gentle nod are also powerful. You don't need perfect words, your presence and belief matter most.
3. **Is it okay to offer advice or solutions when someone discloses?** Usually it's better to wait. When someone is sharing something heavy, advice can feel like pressure or minimising. First listen and believe. Later, if they ask for ideas or seem ready, you can gently offer options or a warm referral. The first step is creating safety through listening.
4. **How do I offer a warm referral without pushing the person or making them feel forced?** You can say something like: "You don't have to carry this by yourself. There are people who can help you and the children safely. Would you like me to sit with you while we find the right number?" This keeps the choice with them and shows you're alongside them, not directing them.
5. **What if the person disclosing is a close friend or family member - does that change how I respond?** The core skills stay the same: Listen & Believe first. With people close to you it can feel

even more important to stay calm and not jump to fixing or investigating. You can still offer to sit with them while they call a helpline or connect with support. Your steady presence is a gift.

6. **Do I have to keep everything completely secret forever, or can I tell someone else if I'm worried?** Confidentiality builds trust, but safety comes first. If there is immediate danger to the person or children, you may need to involve others (a manager, HR, or authorities). You can say, "I want to support you, and I may need to bring in someone who can help keep everyone safe." Most of the time, though, you can keep what was shared private while still offering support.
7. **What if I feel overwhelmed or emotional myself after someone discloses to me?** That's a normal human response. You are not expected to carry everything alone. After the conversation, you can speak to a trusted colleague, use your EAP if available, or call a helpline yourself for support. Taking care of your own steadiness helps you stay present for others.
8. **How does a supportive response actually help protect children?** When someone feels believed and supported, they are more likely to reach out for help earlier. This can reduce ongoing harm, increase stability for the children, and connect the family to resources sooner. Your caring response can be the turning point that helps a parent or caregiver take protective steps for their children.
9. **What is the one phrase I should try hardest to avoid when someone shares something painful?** Any version of "Why didn't you...?" (leave, tell someone sooner, etc.). These questions can feel blaming or shaming, even when we don't mean them that way. They can close the door instead of opening it. Replace them with validating phrases like "I'm really glad you told me" or "That sounds incredibly hard."
10. **Can I still use the 5 D's from Session 2 if someone discloses to me?** Yes. Listen & Believe is often the first and most important response. After that, you might Delegate (sit with them while they call a helpline), Document (if it's safe and helpful later), or Delay (check in again later). The skills from both sessions work together beautifully.

Thank you for the care and openness you're bringing to this session. You now have the heart and the practical skill to respond when someone trusts you with something heavy. Every time you listen and believe, you help open a door to safety for children and families.

See you in the room. You're already making a real difference.