

**Note: See chapter 3 for notes on meeting to collect pack 1 + introduce pack 2.**

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## **4.4 Observation and reflection tasks Phase 1: Discovery (Tasks 5-8)**

**Note: Please include the header in all tasks, to credit the author and acknowledge source**

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Communication Awareness Tools Series – Created by Ane Haaland  
*Observation tasks: Identifying and dealing with irritation, anger and conflict*

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**KEMRI-Wellcome Trust – Kilifi County Hospital**

## **Communicating with awareness and emotional competence**

**Process training for health providers March 2019 – Nov 2019**

**Preparation Pack 2: A series of self-observation and reflection tasks on dealing with anger and irritation with (or without) emotional intelligence, and a story of change**

### **Introduction**

Thank you very much for your excellent examples from your baseline questionnaire and (the Most Significant Change stories) of how you have observed yourselves listening while discussing with patient's/study participants and colleagues. Your descriptions of what you have discovered and of the many changes you have already made in the way you communicate, are inspiring to read! The examples continue to show the power of "just" paying attention to what you are doing with "new eyes" and reflecting about the effect of your actions: **These are the first important steps of developing emotional intelligence**. The "secret" is simply to continue to do it and continue to learn. And – to discuss and share with other participants who may have other experiences, or who may find it difficult to practice this new learning method. Practising this method becomes easier when you have done it for a while, and when you discuss your challenges and experiences with colleagues.

The second pack of our observations is a set of very crucial tasks which address emotional aspects of our behaviour which cause problems to many: Irritation, anger and conflict.

**Each of these tasks is adding a new aspect of the emotional intelligence skills.**

Please read through all the tasks before you start. For easy use – we are sending all tasks in an overview, and then each of tasks 5, 6 and 7 as a separate file – to enable you to download to your mobile, so they are accessible to you in your work place.

### **Observation tasks 5-8: Identifying and managing irritation and anger**

We hope you are finding the observation tasks useful, and that you are all learning important things about how you communicate with study participants and colleagues. Attached are further tasks to observe and reflect on what triggers your emotions, and cause reactions that can affect your communication and sometimes lead to conflict. Understanding and dealing with emotions is a very important area when interacting with study participants, patients and colleagues. **Each task should be done for one week.**

### **Emotions are natural**

Emotions are natural part of life. We are faced with many small and some bigger irritations every day. Depending on how we feel and act, some of them may develop into conflicts. Dealing well with

emotions is a very useful skill for relationships with patients'/parents, colleagues and personal partners (husband or wife).

In the next three weeks, you are invited to become more familiar with what and who makes you react, what you do and how you feel in these situations, what effect your actions have on others. Then, you can reflect on what you would like to do differently.

#### 4.4.1 Observation task week 5: Make an emotional reactions map

##### WHAT makes you react? How?

**Background:** The first task is to define what irritates or frustrates you or makes you angry in your daily life and work, and how you react in each of these cases: **Make your emotional map.**

**Define** what is it that makes you react negatively in your daily life? Who cause these reactions? Is it special people? Or is it special situations? Is it worse on certain days? Is it better when you have slept well, or feel well for other reasons? Which of these situations can result in a conflict? **Also note how you react** (see list of suggestions reactions below).

Make a map to become more familiar with your patters of reactions. Make your own system for taking notes if you want to add other aspects. The important thing is that you observe what makes you react negatively **every day during one whole week**, and that you write down quick notes several times during the day (as soon as possible after it happens). Otherwise, you will forget. At the end of the day, take five minutes to check your notes, reflect and make some notes: **(Use table 1 below to write your response)**

Write down as many as possible of the things that make you react. You could add a few aspects of your choice (e.g. how long does the irritation/anger last? What makes it go away?), but do not add too many things. The secret behind good observation it to keep the task **simple**.

Try to identify what your pattern is, by observing your reactions. You might have different reactions depending on the situation and the person (patient/study participant, colleague, supervisor). Be honest with yourself, as well as you can. **This is not an easy exercise, but it is a very important one**

**NOTE:** Our response to irritating situations is often **automatic**. It is essential to become aware of how you react automatically – when you have recognized this, you can start to take action – to change.

#### Task week 5: May 8<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>

**Table 1: My personal emotional reactions map: WHAT do I react to? How?**

Day	Action, reaction or situation that irritates/ frustrates me, or makes me angry (WHAT do I react to)	Who/what causes it?	HOW do I react?
1			
2			
3			
4	(use more space or lines, as needed)		

**My example** (Write down briefly a typical example of what makes you react negatively and what the result is (disagreement? Conflict? Withdrawing – you “swallow” the feeling?)):

Comments and reflections, including surprises, on what you have discovered and what you have learnt (use more space if needed)

*This task is related to developing the first skill needed to practice Emotional Intelligence.*

#### **4.4.2 Observation task week 6: My (automatic) response to irritation and anger: HOW do I react?**

##### **Task week 6: 15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> May**

**Background:** Study the chart/map from last week and pick out a category of people you react most to and that result in smaller or larger disagreements or conflicts. Follow this group for one week.

Our response to irritating situations is often automatic. Here are some common reactions people have (you might have other reactions):

- Avoid the situation (leave, physically)
- Pretend you do not react (withdraw, hide your feelings)
- Show non-verbally that you are irritated (sigh, frown, tap your fingers, shake your head, wave your finger, etc)
- Confront in a neutral way
- Confront in an aggressive way
- Blame the other for the problem
- Discuss the problem with the other person while the problem is hot
- Ask questions to find out what is the cause of the problem (seen from the other person’s point of view)
- Take a step back (i.e. consciously not react), and see what happens
- Explain that what you did was right, and that it is for the benefit of the other person
- Explain why you did what you did
- Take responsibility for a part of the problem
- Defend your action
- Invite the person(s) to talk about it when tempers have cooled down
- Other....

Try to identify what your pattern is, by observing your reactions for one week. You might have different reactions to small irritations and to larger ones, and different reactions depending on the situation and the person (patient, colleague, supervisor).

Be honest with yourself, as well as you can. **This is not an easy exercise**, but it is a very important one. If you find it difficult to decide how your reaction is (e.g. how you look – if you show a non-verbal reaction), ask a colleague you trust to give you feedback in the beginning. However – it is most important for you to learn to see for yourself how you react. This will come with practice.

#### **How do you feel behind the irritation or anger?**

Irritation and anger is showing on the surface. Underneath there are other reaction and feelings. What are these? Can you start to identify that little (or big) feeling which is there, and which gets

covered up by irritation or anger? Very often, the feeling goes away so quickly that we are not even aware of it.

This is the time to become aware of it again. Understanding what is behind the irritation and anger is **key** to learning how to deal well with disagreements and conflict.

**Table 2: My (automatic) reactions to Patients (or colleagues):**  
***HOW do I react, and what are my feelings behind the reactions?***

Day	Action, reaction or situation	My response (what do I do, including non-verbal action)	How do I feel?
5			
6			
7			
8	(use more lines and more space as needed)		

**My example(s)** (Please write down one or two examples of typical situations that make you react, and your response, and feelings behind it):

**Comments and reflections, including surprises, on what you have discovered and what you have learnt** (*use more space if needed*):

*This task is related to developing the first and second skills needed to practice Emotional Intelligence.*

**4.4.3 Observation task week 7: Effect of your irritation and anger on others**  
**How do THEY react, and what are (possibly) their feelings behind the reactions?**

**Task week 7 (22<sup>nd</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> May)**

**Background – automatic reactions:** You are now familiar with your main automatic reactions when you are irritated or angry. You have made your reflections.

Now is the time to look at the response of the other person(s) to your different ways of expressing emotions such as irritation, frustration and anger. You can choose one group (patients or colleagues) to observe for some days, then observe the other group (colleagues) for some more days.

We cannot do this task earlier in the process. When a person is irritated or angry, she or he tends to focus on herself/himself, and not on the effect on the other person. Now that you are familiar with what you react to and how you react, these reactions may not be so strong any more: **You have strengthened your awareness.**

You can now start to look at what is **the effect** of your irritation or anger on the person(s) you interact with, and on the communication between you. You can also think about (or ask about) how the other person feels (*depending on the situation, this may be easier to do when the situation has calmed down*).

**Some possible reactions you might get from the other person:**

- Avoids the situation (leaves, physically)
- Pretends he/she does not react (withdraws, hides his feelings)
- Cries, or becomes very sad
- Becomes very passive and agrees to everything you say
- Shows non-verbally that she is irritated (sighs, frowns, taps her fingers, shakes her head, waves her finger, etc.)
- Confronts you in an aggressive way
- Blames you for the problem
- Discusses the problem with you while the problem is hot
- Asks questions to find out what is the cause of the problem (seen from your point of view)
- Observes/takes a step back (i.e. consciously does not react), and sees what happens
- Explains that what he did was right, and that it is for your benefit
- Explains why she did what she did
- Takes responsibility for a part of the problem
- Defends his action
- Invites you to talk about it when tempers have cooled down
- Other....

Try to identify what the effects of your actions and reactions are by observing this for 1 week. Also reflect about or ask about **the feelings behind the other person's reactions** (this may be easier to do when you and the other person have calmed down). Be honest with yourself, as well as you can. Ask colleagues for assistance when it feels natural.

**Table 3: Effects of my irritation and anger on the other person(s):**

***How do THEY react, and what could be their feelings behind the reactions?***

Day	Action, reaction or situation	My response/ action (and feeling)	The action/reaction of the other person	Possible feelings of another person
1				
2				
3				
4				
5	Use more space/ days as needed			

**My example(s)** (*Please write down briefly an example of the effects on others of your irritation and anger*):

**Comments and reflections, including surprises, on what I have discovered and what I have learnt** (*use more space if needed*):

***This task is related to developing the first, second and third skills needed to practice Emotional Intelligence.***

#### **4.4.4 Observation task week 8 - Final reflections, how do you do them?**

##### **And - writing your reflections in a Most Significant Change story**

We encourage you to meet informally with colleagues and/or friends to discuss your observations during this time. Discussing observations with others is a very good method to get feedback and share reflections, and to feel that others may have similar (and different) insights to your own.

**However – please be careful, and protect yourself!** Some of your insights might be very personal and very sensitive, and you should consider carefully whom you share them with. When you do share, it is important to agree to listen to each other **with respect**, and to not laugh at any of the findings of your colleagues or make her/him feel that observations are not “correct”, or not “true”. See the last page for some practical tips on how to do this.

You might decide to meet in a group to discuss some of your findings. Such a meeting would be very useful as a preparation for the course. The group could also decide on what they suggest should be topics for the course, and what and how you want to learn.

##### **Some background on anger, fear and insecurity**

- Anger is often a useful response, e.g. if someone is trying to exploit you, or to push you to do something you really don't want to do;
- Anger is about setting boundaries (or limits, to say what is OK and not OK for you)
- Anger can also be a cover up for fear

##### **Remember –**

- Feeling insecure (or sad, or afraid, or vulnerable), is normal
- In family and society, we are mostly trained **not** to feel insecure (or at least not to show it)
- We are trained to cover up when we feel bad or sad, by showing (or pretending) we can manage
- When you (or others) are irritated or angry, there is often a feeling of fear or sadness behind
- Learning to recognize and respect this fear or sadness is important to be able to manage, and later prevent - conflict.

#### **Week 8: Writing your reflections on learning – a new story of change**

You have observed over the last 3 weeks what happens to you and others when you get angry or irritated, and how it affects feelings and communication. You may also have seen some changes in how you work when these emotions are present. This often happens when people start becoming more aware of what they do and don't do in relation to others – to patients'/study participants, and colleagues.

We invite you to reflect about what has happened – alone, and/or with your colleagues, and to share with us a story (or example) which describes **the most important, or significant, change** you have felt or experienced during this time. A story in this context is a description of a situation that made you realize something important. *In other words – we are asking you to write the same kind of story as after the first pack of observation tasks.*

Please tell the story, and also add **WHY** you think this is significant to you. You can also add your reflections on the effects of your different actions, on yourself and on your work.

***Please hand in your feedback by 5<sup>th</sup> June.***

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## Additional ideas: How to discuss with your colleagues

- about how they do their observations, and about what you have experienced, and found out. This may help you to get used to doing this task.

### How can you do this constructively?

Below: Choices, and implications on what will happen/what you can learn

### Choice 1: Discuss to support motivation and insights

Learning about yourself can be a sensitive issue. When discussing observations with colleagues, show respect and appreciation – then they will feel safe, and you will help them (and yourself) learn well.

**How do you do this?** Please **ask open ended questions** to understand more about what colleagues have observed, and please listen actively.



Help him/her explore what they have observed, and how they feel about it. What was the effect on the patient/colleague? What insight(s) did the person get from the experience?

Be **encouraging and appreciative** to help your colleague talk and share. Then you can share from your observations, and let him/her ask you questions. This gives a good basis for a discussion of how you can use what you have seen, to improve practice.

**Choice 2: "Turn your colleague's motivation off":** Many things we may do automatically without a bad intent, may make your colleague shut up rather than share from her/his experience of doing observations. Thus, here are some **Things to avoid**: If you judge or devalue what your colleague has seen and felt, it will hurt, and your colleague might get angry – or shut up. With good reason! You might get into a "ping-pong" exchange of what he/she observed and what it meant – this is useless, and de-motivating. The message he/she might get from you is: "I know better what this means than you do". You can imagine how this feels... and how it affects your communication.

Another "turn off" is when you start commenting about your own observations when your colleague has just started to describe his/her own findings. Your focus is then on getting her/him to listen to YOU, rather than you listening to him/her. You also know how this feels. Watch what it does to the communication, when you fall into this trap!

**SO – Be respectful, appreciative and curious, and generous with your listening!**

**NB:** This **does not mean** you have to agree with each other - it just means you agree to try to see the other person's point of view, from his/her perspective.

**Tip:** Take this list with you when you discuss observations. At the end – discuss how well you communicated – if you listened to each others' experiences, with respect and genuine interest. Give each other **feedback** – also this in a supportive and constructive way!