

NEEDS AND FEELINGS ICEBERG

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OBJECTIVE

Participants will understand the unmet needs that are the root of challenging behaviors.

MATERIALS

A visual of an iceberg with sections labeled behavior, feelings, and needs (see attached image for an example). If you are facilitating this activity online or in a small space, this can be a visual on a slide or large poster. If you are facilitating the activity in person and have adequate space, we recommend constructing a large version of the iceberg visual on the floor that participants can engage with. Or go outside and turn a playground structure into an iceberg!

INSTRUCTIONS

Begin by explaining the visual of the iceberg model (see example attached). What we can see (what is above water) is a person's behavior. What we don't see is what is hiding beneath the surface. At the waterline (where we can sometimes see them and sometimes cannot), are the feelings that a person might be experiencing. Beneath those feelings are the unmet needs of the individual that are ultimately driving the behavior. When we learn to see challenging or problematic behavior through the lens of understanding the need that behavior is seeking to address, we become more empathetic and effective restorative practitioners. We become better able to support a process of identifying a pro-social way for those needs to be recognized and met, thereby addressing the root cause (the need) instead of the symptom (the behavior).

After explaining the iceberg visual, share an example case study of a problematic behavior and enough information about the person demonstrating the behavior for the group to be able to put themselves in that person's shoes and consider which feelings and needs may be at the root of the behavior.

We recommend that you use an example case study from your context (whether that is a community justice program, a school, a university, a workplace, or some other space) that will feel relevant to your community of learners. We are including one sample case study below from a schools context.

Example Case:

Joshua is in 10th grade and his school is currently fully online due to COVID-19. Every morning at 8am, Joshua's day begins with a 50-minute class session with his homeroom teacher and 25 classmates over Zoom. Every day this week, Joshua has done something to disrupt the class. One morning he dressed his dog in his clothing and had his camera facing the dog for the entire class. The next day he put up a Zoom background that made it look like he was in a strip club. Another time he turned off his camera, unmuted himself, and started making sex noises, getting louder each time the teacher asked him to stop.

In pre-COVID times, Joshua often acted a bit like a class clown, always making the other students laugh, while still being a relatively engaged student. He has been fairly isolated since the beginning of COVID-19. He is an only child and lives with his mom who works as a nurse at a hospital and is gone for long shifts during the day and night. Joshua's mom has been worried about the level of exposure they have through her job as a nurse, so she has severely restricted Joshua's ability to see friends.

After sharing the case study, divide the group into two smaller groups and assign one group to reflect on the feelings and one group to reflect on the needs that might be at the root of the behavior. It is important to remind learners that until they have a safe and respectful way to communicate directly with someone about their behavior, they are simply taking educated guesses about the feelings and needs at the root of that behavior. Encourage learners to remain curious. Remind them that the purpose of this hypothetical reflection is to move away from making quick, reactive assumptions about someone's behavior, and instead to broaden our thinking to become more empathetic and curious about what is driving that behavior.

There are a couple different ways you may wish to ask the groups to engage in this reflection process.

1. Using Non-Violent Communication Resources

Bring a list of feelings and a list of needs provided through Marshall Rosenberg's Non-Violent Communication website (GROK cards is another product we recommend). Give the feelings list to the feelings group and the needs list to the needs group. Ask the groups to identify which feelings and needs may be relevant to the case and to add them to the iceberg model so that the group is co-constructing a visual of the feelings and needs that can then be discussed and debriefed as a large group. The feelings and needs can be written directly onto the iceberg, or you can have participants write each word on a Post-It and stick it to the large iceberg to create the visual.

2. An Embodied Experience

You can make this activity more embodied by asking the feelings and needs groups to think about how to physically represent (through movement, physical poses, facial expressions, etc.) the feelings and needs they think are related to the behavior. When the groups come back together, ask a few representatives from the feelings group to demonstrate, through embodied expression, the feelings they came up with. Ask the needs group to guess what feelings are being acted out and to reflect on what they are seeing. Then, ask a few representatives from the needs group to demonstrate through embodied expression the needs they identified. Ask the feelings group to guess what needs are being demonstrated and to reflect on what they are seeing. Facilitate a mini-debrief about the role of picking up on non-verbal communication in restorative processes.

This activity asks participants to put themselves in the shoes of someone who is acting out (possibly the responsible party in a Restorative Justice case) to consider what their feelings and needs may be. **It is a great way to build empathy and to expand our understanding of the relationship between needs, feelings, and behavior, but in an actual scenario, we would want to understand the feelings and needs at the root of the behavior by asking skillful, open-ended questions with a spirit of curiosity.** Facilitate a conversation about how specifically to do that with the group by posing the following two questions.

1. What open-ended questions would you ask in a conversation with the person demonstrating this behavior in order to surface the feelings they were experiencing?

Make a list together.

2. What open-ended questions would you ask in a conversation with the person demonstrating this behavior in order to understand the unmet needs that may be at the root of their behavior?

Make a list together.

DEBRIEF

How has this activity changed your perception of the behavior? How does an understanding of needs change your thoughts about possible outcomes? How will this understanding of the relationship between needs and behaviors influence you moving forward?

LESSON

The behaviors we can see are just the tip of the iceberg. In order to develop restorative ways to explore behavior and build connection, we need to create space to consider the feelings and unmet needs that are at the root of those behaviors and work to address them in a supportive, strengths-based way.

An illustration of an iceberg floating in the ocean. The top of the iceberg is above the water line, and the bottom is below. The water is a gradient of light blue to teal. The iceberg is white and blue, with a jagged, crystalline shape. A small whale is swimming near the bottom of the iceberg. The background is a light blue sky with small white dots.

Behavior

Feelings

Needs