Workshop 2: Supporting families when a child has cancer

The quality of support offered by health and social care professionals to children and families can be enhanced through developing a warm and trusting relationship, where the needs of the patient and family are central. Here are a series of positive influencing behaviours likely to establish a climate conducive to supporting families:

**Genuineness** – This is about being real, being yourself, open and authentic, taking a genuine interest rather than simply offering a blank face.

**Honesty** – Being honest, helps create credibility. Providing realistic targets rather than making false promises can build the foundation of trust with other people.

**Empathy** – Empathy is about striving to see the world from the other person’s perspective. Acknowledging the challenges faced, can help a person feel less isolated and lighten the load. Seeing the world from another person’s shoes goes far beyond sympathy which is about feeling sorrow or pity for the hardship of others.

**Enthusiasm** – Being upbeat and enthusiastic can provide a positive powerful message. Enthusiasm can hold people's attention and has an infectious quality.

**Warmth** – Providing a warm welcome can do much to establish a collaborative atmosphere. A friendly persona can defuse tension and hostility and put people at ease.

**Sense of humour** – Humour has the potential to connect us with other people and can reduce tension and stress.

**Being positive** – Being positive encourages people to look forward rather than focus on the past. It can bring some hope (without giving false hope).

**Respect** – “Treat others as you want to be treated yourself.” Giving individuals a fair hearing without dismissal. Acknowledging points made and seeking joint solutions to problems. Often in planning for difficult conversations, consider in advance what you intend saying and ask, “If I was on the receiving end how would I feel?”

**Unconditional positive regard** – This means putting your opinions to one side (even if you do not approve of all you are hearing). Listening with interest and warmth to what is being said. In the absence of judgement or criticism the other person’s confidence and self-esteem begins to grow which can lead to them opening up and expressing themselves in greater detail.

**Listening** – Listening forms a major part of the support you provide, sadly most people do not listen at a very deep level. In times of stress, we may become self-absorbed with our own priorities and find it difficult to take in what others are saying. We may be quick to interpret messages applying our own judgements and values. Genuine listening requires full concentration, paying attention not only to words but also the tone and non-verbal cues expressed. Key listening skills include:

**Reflective listening** - This involves reflecting back the exact words or sentence used by the speaker. This allows the speaker to consider what they have said.
Paraphrasing - This time in your own words repeat back what has been said. This allows the speaker to reflect on their own message and reframe if necessary.

Summarising – This allows both the listener and speaker to confirm their understanding of what has been said.

Reassurance – This can encourage the reticent, shy, or unwilling speaker to open up and tell their story.

Probing – Asking questions to elicit more information enables the listener to dig deeper and gain a more complete picture of the issues being discussed.

Positive body language – The speaker is more likely to tell their story if the listener appears genuinely interested in the message. Reassuring nods, facial expressions, eye contact and leaning forward can provide positive cues to the speaker.

Observation – Is the body language of the speaker aligned to the emotions expressed in the message or does the body language suggest a different story?

In this workshop we also explore:

- How to effectively communicate with children
- Useful distraction techniques for reducing a child’s pain and anxiety during medical procedures
- A process to help you with breaking bad news to families

If you are interested to find out more about attending this workshop, you can register your interest in the Psychosocial Support Training Package by contacting megan.cruise@worldchildcancer.org