



## FACILITATOR GUIDE:

# Responding to Strong Emotions DocCom Module 13

**Check-in:** (5min) Ask questions like: “What’s happening in your lives?”; “What do we have to do to clear the air so we can begin the session?”; “Do you have any major stressors?”

**Self-assessment:** Ask residents to mark pre-session conviction and confidence scales. (handout)

### Session Goal Setting:

Inform your group members of the following goals:

- Describe the effects (on patients and on clinicians) of clinicians’ empathic responses to strong emotions, as well as, the effects of ignoring strong emotions.
- Identify likely origins of strong emotions.
- Describe how clear personal boundaries promote clinical effectiveness and professional growth.
- Demonstrate ability to respond empathically to strong emotions.
- Describe situations that may require referral or medication as adjunctive responses to strong emotions.

**Personalized Goal Setting:** Ask what specific skills from the Behavior Checklist each resident wants to improve for him/herself. (Write these on the board or easel.)

### Engaging Learner Interest/Discussion: (10-15 min)

- Inquire about residents’ prior experience.
- Module review: Ask what they found most useful in the module, either about the conceptual framework or the specific communication skills presented.
- Personal experience.

**Personal Reflection:** (A useful exercise, if you have time) Ask residents to jot down answers to these questions. If you have a large group, they can then discuss their answers in groups of 2-3 for 15 minutes and then share their contributions and insights with the larger group. Otherwise, you can conduct a group discussion.

- In what circumstances are you aware when a patient is feeling strong emotions? In what situations are you caught off guard?
- How do you respond to patients who get angry with you?
- When patients demonstrate strong emotions, which of your reactions tend to help the situation resolve? Which tend to escalate discomfort in the room?
- In your non-medical life, does fear, anger or sadness tend to cause you the most discomfort?
- How do you determine whether you need specialty consultations with patients who are emotionally distressed? When do you consult your peers?



### Skills Development: (25 min)

Show VIDEO: Module 13: Responding to Emotions/Intense Anger/click on green icon. While watching the video and using the BCL, each learner should identify at least five skills demonstrated by the clinician in the video.

- **Debrief Video Exercise:** “What skills were demonstrated that would be easy for learners to adopt?”; “Which skills would be more difficult?”
- **Role Play:** Ask residents to pair up (or do role play in front of the group).
- **Debrief (5 min):** Allow 5 minutes at the end of this segment to have a general discussion about what worked, what were the barriers, etc. Another approach to role play is to play the patient yourself, and ask a resident to be the doctor in the scenario above. The resident can ask for time outs, if necessary, and ask colleagues for help. You might interrupt the role play at the two minute mark to tell the resident how you are feeling as the patient and to suggest fruitful next steps.

### Conclusion/Next Steps: (5 min)

Ask residents to complete the handout items, provide assignment for next session and collect handouts. The handout items are:

- Conviction and confidence post-session scales
- A skill they plan to practice in the coming week in their clinical work
- What else they learned in the session today
- What you might do to improve a future session (feedback)

### Next Session Assignment:

Read **DocCom Module 41: Professionalism: Boundary Issues**.

Complete the MCQs and respond to one of the questions in Discussion Question 2.



## LEARNER HANDOUT:

# Responding to Strong Emotions DocCom Module 13

### Rationale:

Illness often generates strong emotions in patients and their family members: fear, sadness, anger, shame, anxiety, resentment, bitterness and more. Sometimes you will be the target of these strong emotions. Seeking to understand the nature of these emotions, and responding directly using specific skills, tends to strengthen trust and relationship and promote healing. Many clinicians are reluctant to respond directly to emotions, especially strongly expressed anger, fear or sadness. Failing to respond, or responding reactively or defensively when your “buttons are pushed”, tends to weaken the relationship and diminishes both patients’ and clinicians’ satisfaction.

### Learning Goals:

At the completion of this session you will be able to:

- Describe the effects (on patients and on clinicians) of clinicians’ empathic responses to strong emotions, as well as, the effects of ignoring strong emotions.
- Identify likely origins of strong emotions.
- Describe how clear personal boundaries promote clinical effectiveness and professional growth.
- Demonstrate ability to respond empathically to strong emotions.
- Describe situations that may require referral or medication as adjunctive responses to strong emotions.

### Key Principles:

- Strong emotions can originate in the patient or the clinician or the strong emotions can derive from the interaction between clinician and patient. Identifying the origin of emotions promotes clear boundaries and enhanced clinical effectiveness.
- Responding to emotions thoughtfully tends to strengthen the clinical alliance and promote healing; responding reactively or defensively tends to disrupt or weaken that alliance and diminish both patients’ and clinicians’ satisfaction.
- Strong emotions in clinician’-patient’ interactions are neither good nor bad. They are a natural human consequence of life-changing events.
- Exploring clinicians’ emotions that arise in the interview as well as the ways that clinicians respond to patients’ emotions promotes personal and professional growth.



**Pre-session: Conviction and Confidence:**

How **convinced** are you that responding effectively to strong emotions is an essential clinician competency?

*(0 = not at all; 10 = totally)*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How **confident** are you that you can respond compassionately, and without defensiveness, to anger, sadness, fear or other strong emotions of patients and family members? *(0 = not at all; 10 = totally)*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



**Post-session: Conviction and Confidence:**

How **convinced** are you that responding effectively to strong emotions is an essential clinician competency?

*(0 = not at all; 10 = totally)*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How **confident** are you that you can respond compassionately, and without defensiveness, to anger, sadness, fear or other strong emotions of patients and family members? *(0 = not at all; 10 = totally)*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What are two or three main points that you learned in the session today?

What skill do you plan to practice in your clinical work in the coming week?