



John Sturrock Podcast

(transcript)

Dealing with Difficult Situations

Session 3: CARE

Remember that question last time about condensing AARREE into three parts? This is where we explore how we might do some of that condensing but let's try four parts and use the more memorable mnemonic **CARE**.

You may remember the example of the two brothers. As we saw with the older brother, he needed first to pause (I have always used the expression, the power of the pause, as it seems so important) and consider what to say and do, not just respond with a knee jerk reaction under pressure. Just a second or two will engage the conscious brain, the part that helps you to be thoughtful and careful before you speak, enabling you both to be composed and to compose.

What a useful word that is: **Compose** is defined as: "to make yourself calm after being very angry, upset, or nervous" – that is an ideal description of a part of our stage one; the "C" in CARE. The other meaning of "compose" – pulling words together – is also perfect for our purpose as we try to find the most helpful things to say. So, both meanings fit into our C in CARE.

Then A would cover **Acknowledgment** with all that that embraces about how the other person sees and has experienced things – not necessarily agreeing with it but accepting it and its impact on the other (thus including recognition too).

R could then be **Reassurance**: that essential expression of showing respect to the other person whatever our views and differences, valuing them as an individual, and indicating a willingness to work together to find a way forward if possible.

E would be for **Explanation**: that important part of all this which is being able to set out how we see things, to talk about the what, the why and the how from our perspective, even if that means that something has to happen with which the other person does not agree.

Again, the order matters. It's much easier for the other person to accept something they find difficult if they feel listened to and respected. So, there we have it: **CARE**. *Let's take an example from the medical world.*

The setting: This is a very difficult matter in which a family member has died in tragic circumstances. Other family members are angry and wish to sue the hospital and the doctors. Meetings have been arranged with the medical team. The biggest impact on the family comes in a meeting with one of the doctors. After pausing for a moment or two before she starts, this is what she says to the family:

"This must be awful for you. I can't imagine what it must be like to go through this. Every night, I think about you and what happened that day. I know you think we got things wrong. I really want to help you to get through this and for you to understand what happened. We all need to learn from something like this, so it doesn't happen again to someone else, if at all possible. I ask myself what could we have done differently? We have looked at everything that we did. Honestly, hand on heart, I don't think we could have prevented this. Let me tell you what we think happened.... and what we are going to do in the future...."

Heartfelt, genuine, authentic in sentiment and tone. Taking time to **compose** herself, **acknowledging** the family's pain and concerns, **reassuring** them about trying to understand what happened and, importantly, trying to avoid it happening to others, and then offering an **explanation**.

CARE. This is not perfect by any means, nothing ever can be, especially in a situation like this – but perhaps it's the best anyone can do.