

Urbana IA Ministry, Synchronization Regarding Process Details **(long version, with explanations regarding each point)**

(Urbana 2022, 11/9/22)

It will be important for our IA community volunteers to be as synchronized as possible with respect to how we facilitate prayer sessions with the students. My objective is that keeping our IA community volunteers as synchronized as possible will help this whole Immanuel Approach adventure feel less complicated. (Remember, asking the whole InterVarsity prayer ministry team to use the Immanuel Approach is totally new and a really big deal, and most of the IVCF staff working with us will have much less experience with the Immanuel Approach than we do.)

I also mentioned that the first several segments in the new basic training video series provide demonstrations of the process I would like us all to be using. (These three segments are all available as free-downloads on youtube. I have included the links below for your convenience). Hopefully, the additional thoughts I am sharing here will provide more clarity regarding what I am envisioning with respect to synchronized process.

We're not expecting exact words from exercise handouts: First, I am *not* expecting that we will all be using the exact wording from the practice-exercise handouts that Charlotte and I are working from in the training demonstrations. The exercise handouts provide helpful sample coaching for people who are just learning, but I am aware that we all modify the specific language a bit as we each become comfortable with our own personal style for facilitating IA sessions. (I'm guessing that most of you were already assuming this, but wanted to explicitly mention it just in case.)

Option to start with brief relaxation component: Second, I want to comment briefly regarding the option of starting with a relaxation component. Some ministries teach this as a standard part of the Immanuel Approach process, and include a brief relaxation exercise of some kind (for example, progressive muscle relaxation) at the beginning of every IA session. When I teach the Immanuel Approach, I do not include a relaxation exercise as a required component of the standard process. My observation is that beginning with a relaxation exercise can be helpful when the recipient is starting the session with significant anxiety, but that this is not necessary for many sessions, and I'm always trying to keep the basic process as simple as possible (to be maximally accessible for lay ministers).

However, recent research is showing that anxiety is a big problem for a large percentage of college kids, and that this has especially been the case since the beginning of the pandemic. In light of this reality, the Immanuel Approach summary/outline handout that we are putting together for Urbana includes a "Quiet anxiety" first step for any students that are anxious/agitated at the beginning of the session. If you already have a relaxation technique that you are comfortable with, you can just use that. Otherwise, you can use a very simple deep-breathing exercise that Charlotte and I explain and

demonstrate in a very brief (6 min) video training segment:

<https://youtu.be/rrypeJofVqM>

Deliberate-appreciation focusing on details of positive memory: Some ministries teach a variation of the positive-memory-and-deliberate-appreciation step in which the recipient focuses more on the goodness of God than on the specific details of their positive memory, and in which the recipient speaks their specific appreciations directly to the Lord. With this variation, the recipient focuses only briefly on describing the specifics of their positive memory to the facilitator, and then speaks directly to the Lord to name and appreciate attributes of His character and heart that are demonstrated by the positive memory.

For example, a recipient doing this variation of the positive-memory-and-deliberate-appreciation step might look like this: *(First speaking to the facilitator, for about one minute)* "I'm remembering hiking in Glacier National Park with my wife and friends. (brief pause to recall details) It was a beautiful, clear, sunny day, and the weather was perfect. (brief pause to recall more details) We were surrounded by spectacular, majestic mountains on every side, and our trail was winding through alpine meadows filled with wildflowers. *(And then speaking directly to the Lord, for several minutes)* "Lord, I appreciate Your amazing creativity – Your creation is so amazing and wonderful. (pause) I appreciate Your magnificence, and Your awesomeness, and Your power – that you have created the awe-inspiring, enormous mountains, and the vast alpine meadows. (pause) I appreciate Your generosity to me – that I have the resources to take this vacation, and that I have a wonderful wife and wonderful friends to enjoy it with – thank You for these blessings. (pause) And I appreciate that You have blessed me with good health – that I am able to hike in the mountains...etc."

This variation works well for recipients who are already believers and who do not have triggered negative reactions associated with the Lord. For these recipients, this variation that focuses explicitly on the goodness of God and speaks directly to God is especially relational, and provides additional benefit for the recipient's ongoing relationship with the Lord.

In contrast, the variation of the positive-memory-and-deliberate-appreciation step that I usually teach (and that is explained and demonstrated in the first training segment – link below) just focuses on the details of the positive memory. You just coach the recipient to describe their positive memory in as much detail as possible, and to especially focus on the details that they particularly appreciate. This variation works well for recipients who are not yet believers and/or recipients who have triggered negative reactions associated with the Lord. To my perception, this variation is also a bit simpler to explain

and easier to implement, which are particularly helpful attributes when working with beginner recipients and/or limited time.¹

Because some recipients at Urbana will not be Christians, because many recipients will have negative triggers associated with the Lord, because most recipients will be total neophytes, and because limited time will be an issue for many sessions, we are asking facilitators to use the variation explained and demonstrated in the first training segment – the variation in which you just coach the recipient to focus on and describe the details of the positive memory.

Establishing Jesus-connection in context of positive memory: When I am teaching about establishing the initial interactive connection with Jesus and I have plenty of time, I talk about two options – establishing the connection in the context of the initial positive memory, and establishing the connection in the context of the IA session in the present. And I even talk about how the ideal is to help the recipient perceive and connect with Jesus in both of these contexts. In some settings we will want to use one of these options, in other settings we will want to use the other option, and in still other situations we will have the luxury of using both.

The simplest consideration is just time. For situations with plenty of time, I encourage facilitators to take the time to explain and facilitate both options. In contrast, if time is limited, I encourage facilitators to help recipients establish their Jesus connections in just one context – either the positive memory or the Immanuel session in the present.

Two more considerations are strength of the safety net and ease of deploying the safety net. A connection with Jesus in the context of a detailed positive memory will provide an especially strong safety net; and this variation of connecting with Jesus will also provide a safety net that will be easier to deploy, since it is easier to help a recipient find their way back to the details of an actual autobiographical memory. So for situations in which we will be working with beginner facilitators and/or beginner recipients, and in which we might encounter moderate to severe trauma, I emphasize establishing the Jesus connection in the context of the positive memory.

Yet another consideration is extra benefit with respect to the Immanuel Approach lifestyle. Perceiving Jesus with you in the IA session in the present is just a specific example of perceiving Jesus abiding with you throughout the average day in the present. So coaching the recipient to establish their Jesus connection in the context of

¹ In my own experience, I find that formulating appreciation specifics as attributes of God's character and heart takes me into my left hemisphere and away from the experiential details of the memory, and thereby reduces the emotional intensity of my connection to the positive memory and appreciation. I find that I generate stronger appreciation and establish a stronger safety-net anchor if I just focus on the specifics of the memory.

the ministry session in the present helps them practice a skill that will directly contribute to the Immanuel-Approach-lifestyle goal of learning to perceive Jesus' presence abiding with them throughout the average day. Therefore, for situations in which recipients will not be working with trauma, and/or situations with experienced recipients and mild to moderate trauma, I encourage facilitators to help recipients establish their connections with Jesus in the context of the session in the present.²

In light of these considerations, we are asking volunteers for Urbana to help recipients connect with Jesus in the context of their positive memories. (Time will be limited, so we won't have space to explain and facilitate both options; we will be working with many beginner recipients, so ease of deploying the safety net will be important; and we will be encountering a totally unpredictable range of trauma, so a strong safety net will be important.)

First three segments from new basic training series:

Segment 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TVJHii-fwl&t=17s>

Segment 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGv-dSHBiyE&t=1s>

Segment 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEYtrFKq5s>

² Some recipients, such as myself, seem to experience stronger connections with Jesus in the context of positive memories. For these recipients, this factor must also be considered. For example, I often deliberately establish my connection with Jesus in the context of my positive memory, for the benefit of the stronger connection, even if I am working with mild trauma or not working with trauma at all.