

Helpful Communication Skills

Active Listening

Active listening is an attempt to understand the content and emotion of what the other person is saying. When you actively listen, you promote honesty, acceptance, respect and courage. Remember, only give advice when asked!

L = Look interested – get interested
I = Involve yourself by responding
S = Stay on target
T = Test your understanding
E = Evaluate the message
N = Neutralize your feelings

“I” Messages

These messages give the opportunity to keep the focus on you and explain your feelings in response to someone else’s behavior. Because “I” messages don’t place blame, they avoid judgments and help keep communication open.

Try: “I was really looking forward to spending time with you the other day and I was upset when you didn’t show up. Why weren’t you able to make it?”

Avoid: “You didn’t show up. I waited for an hour! You could have at least called me.”

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing focuses on listening first and then reflecting the two parts of the speaker’s message — **fact** and **feeling** — back to the speaker. Often, the fact is clearly stated, but a good listener is “listening between the lines” for the “feeling” part of the communication.

Examples for **fact**:

- “So you’re saying that...”
- “You believe that...”

Examples for **feeling**:

- “You feel that...”
- “Your reaction is...”

Paraphrases are not an opportunity to respond by evaluating, sympathizing, giving an opinion, offering advice, analyzing or questioning.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are intended to collect information by exploring feelings, attitudes and how the other person views a situation. To maintain an active dialogue without interrogating, try to ask a few questions that cannot be answered with a “yes,” “no,” “I don’t know,” or a grunt.

Examples:

- “What do you know about the situation?”
- “Which solution seems best to you?”
- “What part did you play?”
- “How does it affect you?”

Note: Using the question “Why did you do that?” may sometimes yield a defensive response rather than a clarifying response.