



## LISTENING

**Listening is not passive. It is very active. It takes work.**  
**Listening to someone shows that you care for the person.**

Many people go to the doctor or counsellor simply because no one else will listen to them.  
*Really* listen....

If you, as a hospice volunteer, can communicate “I CARE” to people by opening your ears and your hearts to them, *you will have gone a long way in the process of helping and supporting them.*

There are no easy short cuts around the work of listening. We cannot emphasize enough that to be a good listener, you have to *want* to do it. A strong desire to listen carefully is the bedrock upon which good listening skills are built.

Remember that it is important to listen carefully, whether the listening is done on the phone or in person.

1. **BE PATIENT.** It is their time, not ours.
2. **BE ATTENTIVE.** Have you ever watched a predatory animal crouched and ready to pounce on its prey? For example, a cat that is ready to jump on a mouse? Did you notice how the cat was supremely attentive to everything that was going on with the mouse and it waited to move in? While I don't mean to suggest that the helping encounter is in any way hostile, I want to stress that a good listener is as attentive to the words of the client as a predatory animal is to the movements of its prey. Attentiveness means listening ever so actively; *it means hanging on to the clients every word.*  
*Listening in this way can be very tiring.*



## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**FEELINGS:** What does the client feel...deep inside? (Sadness, despair, hate...?)

**THOUGHTS:** What thoughts or ideas does the client have?

**ATTITUDES:** How does the client view his or her life and environment?

**PHYSICAL ASPECTS:** What does the client's body language communicate to you?

**FACTS OR INFORMATION:** What events happened to the client? When did they happen? Were any family members involved? Were there any other kinds of support?

**LISTENING TO WHAT IS NOT BEING SAID:** "You've talked about John and Mary a great deal, but you haven't talked much about how you are feeling."

## SPECIFIC LISTENING TECHNIQUES

The table below outlines some key listening techniques, the purpose of each and how each can be used. In each case, understanding them intellectually is quite easy. The real challenge is in using them effectively in our relationships with other people. This requires practice, and practice requires repetition and patience.



## THE LISTENING TECHNIQUES

TYPES	PURPOSE	EXAMPLES
<b>1. Clarifying</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To get at additional facts</li> <li>- To help the other person explore all sides of a problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Can you clarify this?”</li> <li>- “Do you mean this...?”</li> <li>- “Is this the problem as you see it now?”</li> </ul>
<b>2. Restatement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To check your meaning and interpretation with the other person’s</li> <li>- To show you are listening and that you understand what he/she is saying</li> <li>- To encourage her/him to analyze other aspects of the matter being considered and to discuss it with you.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “as I understand it then, your plan is....”</li> <li>- This is what you have decided to do. And the reasons are...?”</li> </ul>
<b>3. Neutral</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To convey that you are interested and listening</li> <li>- To encourage the person to continue talking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “I see”</li> <li>- “Uh-huh”</li> <li>- “That’s very interesting”</li> <li>- “I understand”</li> <li>- “Say something more about that”</li> </ul>
<b>4. Summarizing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To bring all the discussion into focus in terms of a summary</li> <li>- To serve as a spring board for further discussion on a new aspect or problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “These are the key ideas you have expressed...”</li> <li>- “So what I hear you saying is....”</li> </ul>



## **EFFECTIVE LISTENING SKILLS**

Some people think that “listening” is the same as “hearing”. It’s not! Listening must be learned. You must actively participate in a conversation and comprehend the ideas behind the words in order to really listen and understand. To listen actively, listen to BOTH what the speaker says and what the speaker does.

### *SHOW THE SPEAKER THAT YOU ARE INTERESTED*

**TONE OF VOICE:** Be aware of the tone of your voice when you respond to the speaker. A monotone communicates boredom. Even with moderate tones, you also show boredom when combined with certain tones in the voice. Change the level (modulation) of your voice to show interest when you are responding.

**EXPRESSION:** Look the speaker in the eye – it shows that you are paying attention to what is being said and lets the other person know that you are friendly and receptive.

**GESTURES:** Gestures indicate that you like the speaker. In fact, a lack of gestures can indicate unfriendliness. Open palms and large open gestures with the hands show that you like people.

**POSTURE:** Leaning toward the speaker shows interest. It doesn’t need to be overdone, but a movement of the upper half of the body towards the speaker says that you are really interested in what’s being said. If you fold your arms or back away, you show that you aren’t interested in what the speaker is saying.

**ASK:** Get the full story by asking questions. Don’t assume that you know what is going to be said. Listen so you will be able to ask relevant questions to get even more information.

### **CREATE A SAFE, PEACEFUL ATMOSPHERE**

Sit across from, and on the same level with, the person. Be sure you are not seated at a higher level, looking down at them.

Shut the door and let the person know that you are there to listen.

Note bad eyesight or hearing problems and situate yourself so as to decrease the impact of either of these handicaps.

Above all, **DO NOT JUDGE**. Do not try to convince the person of what YOU believe. A person must find their own solutions; they must recognize their own problems and experience them for themselves. We are there to provide an environment that is safe and understanding from the heart. Be open and non-judgmental. Only then will the person feel **SAFE**.



## GOING EMPTY

The term *going empty* means to leave your agenda, your issues (your “stuff”) outside when you are going to visit the dying person. This does not mean that you never say anything personal, but it does mean that you are there primarily to listen to and support the dying person. *They* set the agenda. Their needs determine the content of the visit. As aware as we are of this, it can still be a challenge, especially after a difficult or busy day. Here are some suggestions, which might help you to “empty” yourself before a visit.

1. If the dying person lives within walking distance, walking could provide you with some quiet time and to rid yourself of the day’s stuff.
2. Listening to some special music can help to quiet your mind.
3. A relaxing bath can work wonders to leave stresses behind.
4. Visualize that as you enter the dying person’s room you are leaving your own worries and cares outside the door.
5. Make sure that you are getting enough sleep and that you are meeting the needs in all four areas of your life – mental, physical, spiritual and emotional. **SELF-CARE** is so important in the helping field.
6. Set boundaries and respect them. Do not over extend yourself. When we overdo, it speaks more of our needs than the dying person’s needs.
7. If you are extremely upset or emotional, you would probably be wise to postpone the visit.
8. Take time to reflect on the previous visit. Some visitors find journaling helps them to express their thoughts and feelings.
9. Take a few deep breaths before the visit.
10. Talk to the Creator, or whoever your Higher Power is.
11. Other suggestions: (fill in your own ideas)

## BROWN BAG YOUR STUFF AND LEAVE IT AT THE DOOR