



**Effective Listening Skills**  
**Using Active Listening in a**  
**Helping Situation**

## **From our website . . .**

- The CCNC has been created by members of Christadelphian ecclesias in Canada to provide spiritual instruction, guidance, encouragement and peer support to Christadelphians and their families. We help them with the trials, problems and sorrows of life, and to encourage them as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

# Goals of Helping

- GOAL ONE: Help individuals manage their problems in living more effectively and develop their unused resources and opportunities more fully.
- GOAL TWO: Help individuals become better at helping themselves in their everyday lives. (Egan, 2002, p.7,8)

# What helping does

- Few of us naturally have “life skills” such as problem management, opportunity identification and development, sensible decision making and the skills of interpersonal relating.
- Helping at its best, therefore, provides individuals with these tools in order that they can become more effective self-helpers.

# True dialogue requires . . .

- Taking turns
- Connecting
- Mutual influencing
- Creating outcomes together (Egan, 2002, p.65)

“Dialogue,” from Greek “dialogos” from “dia” through and “legein” to speak, means the act of conversation between two or more people

# Communication Skills

- Tuning in
- Active Listening
- Sharing Empathic Highlights
- Probing and Summarizing

# Tuning In: The Importance of Presence

- Remember the acronym SOLER/SOLAR
- **S**: Face the person SQUARELY
- **O**: Adopt an OPEN posture
- **L**: LEAN towards the other person
- **E**: Maintain good EYE contact or AIM
- **R**: Try to be RELAXED in these behaviours (Egan, 2002, p.68-69).

# Ask Yourself . . .

- What are my attitudes towards this person?
- How would I rate the quality of my presence with this person?
- What attitudes am I expressing in my nonverbal behaviour?
- What attitudes am I expressing in my verbal behaviour?
- To what degree does this person experience me as effectively present and working with him or her?



# Ask Yourself. . .

- To what degree does my nonverbal behaviour reinforce my internal attitudes?
- In what ways am I distracted from giving my full attention to this person? What am I doing to handle these distractions? How might I be more effectively present with this person?

# Active Listening: The Foundation of Understanding

- “It means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever that he or she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in the other’s life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments.” (Rogers, 1980, p.42).

# Listen To . . .

- Stories
- Experiences
- Behaviours

## Listen For . . .

- Affect: Feelings, Emotions, Moods
- Point of View
- Decisions
- Intentions or Proposals
- Opportunities and Resources

# Processing: The Thoughtful Search for Meaning

- Identify key messages and feelings
- Understand through context
- Hear the slant or spin: Tough-minded listening and processing
- Muse on what's missing

# **Listen to Yourself: Tune in to the Second Channel**

- How can I be of further help to this person?
- What might be standing in the way of being with and listening to this person?

# Obstacles: Forms of Distorted Listening

- Filtered listening
- Evaluative listening
- Stereotype-based listening
- Fact-centred rather than person-centred listening
- Sympathetic listening
- Interrupting

# Filtered Listening

- Personal, familial, sociological, and cultural filters introduce various forms of bias into our listening, without our being aware of it. The stronger the cultural filters, the greater the likelihood of bias . . . Prejudices, whether conscious or not, distort understanding. Like everyone else, helpers are tempted to pigeonhole clients because of gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, social status, religious persuasion, political preferences, lifestyle and the like. Self-knowledge on the part of helpers is essential. This includes ferreting out the biases and prejudices that distort listening.

(Egan, 2002, p.90)

# Evaluative Listening

- Most people as they listen are judging what the other person is saying as good/bad, right/wrong, acceptable/unacceptable, likable/unlikable, relevant/irrelevant, and so forth. Evaluative listening gives way to advice giving. Clients should first be understood, then, if necessary, challenged or helped to challenge themselves. . . .It is possible to set one's judgment aside for the time being in the interest of understanding clients, their worlds, their stories, their points of view, and their decisions "from the inside."



# Stereotype-based listening

- Labels are interpretations rather than understandings and can help organize what you hear, but can also distort your listening. The *person* must remain in the forefront of your attention and models and theories about this person should be knowledge that remains in the background that is only used in the interest of understanding and helping this unique individual.

# Fact-centred rather than person-centred listening

- It is possible to collect facts by asking many informational questions, but miss the person!
- The antidote: Listen contextually, trying to focus on themes and key messages.

# Sympathetic listening

- Sympathy has an unmistakable place in human relationships, but its “use” is limited in helping. Sympathizing makes you an accomplice, taking sides without knowing the complete story. Expressing sympathy can reinforce self-pity, and self-pity has a way of driving out problem-managing action.

# Interrupting

- Interrupting gently can promote dialogue that serves the problem-management process. For example: “You have made several points. I want to make sure that I have understood them.”
- However, interrupting can also hinder the listener, who stops listening to interrupt and say something that they have been rehearsing.

# Sharing Empathic Highlights

- “If visibly tuning in and listening are the skills that enable helpers to get in touch with the world of the client, then sharing highlights is the skill that enables them both to communicate their understanding of that world and to check the accuracy of that understanding. A secure starting point in helping others is listening to them carefully, struggling to understand their concerns, and sharing that understanding with them.” (Egan, 2002, p.97)

# Empathy leads to Success

- “Empathically accurate perceivers are those who are consistently good at ‘reading’ other people’s thoughts and feelings. All else being equal, they are likely to be the most tactful advisors, the most diplomatic officials, the most effective negotiators, the most electable politicians, the most productive salespersons, the most successful teachers, and the most insightful therapists” (Ickes, 1997, p.2)

# Building Blocks of Empathic Highlights

- The Basic Formula
- Respond Accurately to Feelings, Emotions, Moods
- Respond Accurately to Key Experiences and Behaviours
- Respond with Highlights to Points of View, Decisions and Proposals

# Principles of Sharing Highlights

- Use empathic highlights at every stage of the helping process
  - Respond selectively to core messages
  - Respond to the context, not just the words
  - Use highlights as a mild social-influence process
  - Use highlights to stimulate movement
  - Recover from inaccurate understanding
  - Use highlights to bridge diversity gaps
- (Egan, 2002, p.105-110)



# The Basic Formula

- **YOU FEEL . . .** [name the correct emotion expressed by the person]
- **BECAUSE . . .** [indicate the correct experiences and behaviours that give rise to the feelings]

# Respond Accurately by . . .

- Using the right family of emotions and the right intensity
- Distinguish between expressed and discussed feelings
- Read and respond to feelings and emotions embedded in non-verbal behaviour
- Be sensitive in naming emotions

# Respond Accurately to Key Experiences

- Follow “because” in the empathic highlight formula with an indication of the experiences and behaviours underlying the feelings. The highlight will then capture the flavour of the person’s experiences, behaviours and feelings. At this point the person will often clarify their situation with the helper.

# Sharing Empathic Highlights. . .

Helps to communicate understanding of the other person's

- Point of view
- Decisions
- Intentions and proposals

# SAD, MAD, BAD and GLAD

- *Sad, Mad, Bad,* and *Glad* refer to four of the main families of emotions.



- Within the **GLAD** family *content, quite happy,* and *overjoyed* refer to different intensities of emotion.

# Listening to Your Own Feelings and Emotions

- When I feel *accepted*, I feel . . .



. . .warm inside, safe, free to be myself,  
like sitting back and relaxing, that I can let  
my guard down, like sharing myself, some  
of my fears easing away, at home, at  
peace, my loneliness melting away

# Listening to Your Own Feelings and Emotions

- When I feel *scared* . . . .



My mouth dries up, there are butterflies in my stomach, I feel like running away, I feel very uncomfortable, I turn in on myself, I'm unable to concentrate, I feel very vulnerable, I sometimes feel like crying

# Describing Emotions

- Accepted, affectionate, afraid, angry, anxious, attracted, bored, competitive, confused, defensive, desperate, disappointed, free, frustrated, guilty, hopeful, hurt, inferior, interested, intimate, jealous, joyful, lonely, loving, rejected, respected, sad, satisfied, shocked, shy, superior, suspicious, trusting



# Sensitize yourself to a wide variety of expression of emotions

- Choose four emotions from the list.
- Try ones you have difficulty with . . .it is important to listen to yourself when you are experiencing emotions that are not easy for you to handle.
- Picture yourself in situations in which you have experienced these emotions.
- Write down in detail what you experienced

# Listening to core messages

- You are asked to listen to and identify the **key experiences and behaviours** that give rise to the person's main feelings.
- Listen carefully to what the person is saying.
- Identify key **experiences** – what is happening to him or her?
- Identify key **behaviours** – what are they doing or failing to do?
- Identify key **feelings and emotions** associated with the experiences and behaviours.

## For example . . .

- A thirty year old man is talking to an older brother about a visit with his mother the previous day. “I just don’t know what got into me! She kept nagging me the way she always does, asking me why I don’t visit her more often. She went on and on, I got more and more angry. I finally began screaming at her. I told her to get off my case. I called her names. . . Then I left and slammed the door in her face.”

# Analysis

- ***Key experiences:*** Mother's nagging.
- ***Key behaviours:*** Losing his temper, yelling, calling her names, slamming the door in her face.
- ***Feelings/emotions generated:*** He feels embarrassed, guilty, ashamed, distraught, extremely disappointed with himself, remorseful.

# Practice

- A 64 year old has been told that he has terminal lung cancer. “Why me? Why me? I’m not even that old! I keep looking for answers and there are none. I’ve sat for hours with my Bible open and I come away feeling empty. Why me? I don’t smoke or anything like that. Listen to me. I thought I had some guts and I’m just a slobbering mess. Why terminal? Why can’t it be treated? What are the next months going to be like?”

# More Practice

- An unmarried woman talking about a situation with a friend: “My best friend has just turned her back on me. I don’t even know why! From the way she acted, I think she has the idea that I’m talking behind her back. I simply have not! This ecclesia is full of spiteful gossips. She should know that. If she has been listening to one of those – they just want to stir up trouble – she could at least tell me what’s going on!”

# Even more practice . . .

- An individual talking about a situation at work: “I don’t know where to turn. They’re asking me to do things at work that I just don’t think are right. If I don’t do them – well, I probably be let go. And I don’t know where I’m going to get another job in this economy. But if I do what they want me to, I think I could get into trouble, I mean legal trouble. And I’d be the fall guy. My head’s spinning . . . I’ve never had to face anything like this before. Where do I turn?”

# Identifying Core Messages

- You are asked to identify **key experiences, behaviours, and feelings** and translate these into a core message.
- Listen carefully to the statement.
- Identify key experiences, behaviours, and the feelings they generate.
- Pull them together in a statement of the client's **core message**.



## For example . . .

- Person recovering in rehab unit: “They told me it would be tough going. And I thought I had prepared myself for it. I thought I had some courage in me. But now I can’t find any at all. Everything takes so much effort. I keep breaking down and crying when I am alone. I just keep giving in . . . I’m just inches down a path that seems miles long. It seems endless . . . I just can’t do it . . .

# Analysis

- **Key experience:** Finding the rehab program so difficult.
- **Key behaviour:** Inability to find courage; giving in to disappointment.
- **Key feelings/emotions:** disappointment, discouragement, despair.
- **Core message:** *She is feeling disappointment almost to the point of despair because she has failed to tap into the resources that will keep her going in a very tough rehab program.*

# Practice

- Woman about to go to her daughter's college graduation: "I never thought that my daughter would make it through. I've invested a lot of money in her education. It meant scrimping and saving and not having some of the things I wanted. But it's not just money. . .I've put a lot of emotion into making this day happen. I had to do a lot of hand-holding to help her get through. There were times when neither of us thought this day would come."

# More Practice

- A man has just had his wallet stolen: “I had just cashed my paycheck and the money was all in the wallet. Everything is going wrong . . . my sister was in a car accident last week. I was on my way to visit my nephew. He was detained by police for a minor theft earlier this week. He’s probably thinking I have given up on him. It’s too much all at once . . .

## Even more practice . . .

- A person waiting for the results of medical tests: “I’ve been losing weight for the past two months and feeling tired and listless all the time. I’m afraid of what these tests are going to say. I know I’ve been putting them off. I just hate hospitals and this kind of stuff. Well, now the waiting is getting to me. I just don’t know where I stand. Nobody said anything during the tests . . . .that’s not a good sign . . . .”

# Using a Formula to Express Empathy

- Empathy focuses on the key messages – key experiences and /or key behaviours plus the feelings and emotions they generate.
- Use the formula: “***You feel . . .***” (followed by the right emotion and some indication of its intensity) “***because. . .***” (followed by the key experiences and/or behaviours that give rise to the emotion).

## For example . . .

- A woman talking about her relationship: “A couple of months ago he began abusing me, calling me names, describing my defects. A couple of times I tried to stand up for myself and he became even more abusive. He hasn’t hit me or anything . . . .but I’ve just been sitting there, taking it . . . .like a dog or something. Do you think this is just his bizarre way of getting rid of me? Why doesn’t he just tell me it’s over?”

# Analysis

- ***Key experience:*** Being abused by companion, escalation in abuse
- ***Key behaviour:*** trying to stand up for herself, becoming passive, trying to figure things out
- ***Key feelings/emotions:*** distraught, confused, angry



# Empathic response

- ***Empathic response (using formula):***

**“You feel angry and confused because the abuse came from out of the blue and now you’re wondering whether this is just his strange way of ending the relationship.”**

# Practice

- Older man talking: “My wife died last year, and this year my youngest son went away to college. The other children are married. So now that I’m retired, I spend a lot of time rambling around a house that’s . . . .really too big for me . . . . You know, when I was working there was a certain fullness to life. I always knew what to do. I made a difference . . . .now that I’m retired . . . .”

# More practice

- Man talking about having two jobs to support his family: “I guess I’m fortunate to have both jobs, but I’ve got no time for myself. The jobs eat into the evening hours and the weekends. I think what really bothers me is that no-one in the family notices my absence. They just take it for granted. It’s as if life is about nothing else but work and no-one else cares.”

# Even more practice . . .

- Young man whose wife has left: “We’ve been married for about a year . . . She left a note saying that this has not been working out. Just like that. You know, I thought things were going fairly well. Not perfect of course. We had our ups and downs, but everyone does. Maybe I was so busy at work that I didn’t notice . . . I don’t know if there’s someone else. I really don’t know why . . . I must sound stupid. I have no idea what to do to get her back. You can’t make someone love you.”

# Probing and Summarizing

- A probe is a statement or question that invites fuller discussion of an issue.
- Probes can clarify issues, search for missing data, expand perspectives, and point towards possible action. The purpose of a probe is not to just gather information, but to explore experiences, behaviours and feelings and enhance the process of problem management and opportunity development.

## For example . . .

- A man talking about the temptation to have an affair: “I don’t blame myself or my wife, though I’m not sure that I will ever have the kind of satisfaction I want with her. I guess I’m not thinking straight . . .I have these really strong urges. What’s going to happen to my marriage? Where does this all lead? Have I just become an adolescent again?”

# Analysis

- ***Empathic statement:*** “It sounds as if your sexual urges are so strong that right now they are in the driver’s seat.”
- ***Possible probe:*** “When you ask yourself questions like ‘What’s going to happen to my marriage,’ what are some of the answers you come up with?”
- ***Reason for probe:*** To find out how far he has thought through some of the implications of his current thinking and behaviour.

# Examples of Probes

- It's still not clear to me. . . .
- I'm not sure I understand . . . .
- I guess I'm still confused about . . . .
- Tell me what you mean when you say . . . .
- What keeps you from making a decision?
- What is standing in your way?
- What is it like?



# Use Probes to

- Fully engage in the process
- Achieve concreteness and clarity
- Help complete the picture
- Get a balanced view of problem situations and opportunities
- Move into more beneficial stages of the helping process
- Explore and clarify points of view, decisions and proposals
- Challenge

# Probes can assist clarity

- Listeners can help “fill in the picture” by asking for concrete and specific statements in terms of key experiences, behaviours, points of view, decisions, intentions and feelings. For example: “I tend to be a bit domineering at times” followed by the probe, “Maybe you could think of some times when this has happened?”

## Can be followed by a concrete statement

- “I try, usually in subtle ways, to get others to do what I want to do. I even pride myself on this [still vague]. In conversations, I take the lead. I interrupt others, jokingly and in a good-natured way, but I make my points. If a friend is talking about something serious when I am not in the mood to hear it, I change the subject [specific examples].”

# Probing for Key Issues and Clarity

- An unmarried female college student dealing with an unplanned pregnancy: “I realize the father could be either of two guys. That probably says something about me right there. I’m not sure what I want to do about the baby. I haven’t told my parents yet. I think that they will be very upset, but in the end sympathetic. I know I have gotten myself into this mess and I have to get myself out.”

# Responses

- Empathic statement:
- Possible probe:

# Practice

- “I do not take criticism well. When I receive almost any kind of negative feedback, I usually smile and seem to shrug it off, but inside I pout. Also, deep inside, I put the person who gave me the feedback on a ‘list.’ Those on the list have to pay for what they did. I find this hard to admit, even to myself. It sounds so petty. For instance, two weeks ago I received some negative feedback from Cindy. I felt angry and hurt because I thought she was my friend. Since then I’ve tried to see what mistakes she makes. I’ve even felt a bit disappointed because I haven’t been able to catch her in any glaring mistake. It goes without saying that I’m embarrassed to say all this.”

# Responses

- Empathic statement
- Possible probe

# More practice

- “I feel guilty and depressed whenever my mother calls and implies that she’s lonely. Then I get angry with myself for giving in to guilt so easily. Then the whole day has a cloud over it. I get nervous and irritable and take it out on others. Or I brood. Sometimes it even interferes with my work. Then I do what I have to.”



# Responses

- Empathic response
- Possible probe

# Summaries help Focus and Challenge

- Show that the listener has been attentive
- Helps move beyond “poor me” and “being stuck”
- Helps to see the bigger picture
- Keeps the ball in the other person’s court especially if **they** summarize the main points