ACTIVE LISTENING AND RESPONDING SKILLS

**AIM:** To identify, explore and practice active listening and responding skills

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**
By the end of the session, participants will have:

1. Been introduced to the rationale of the ‘round’ and have an opportunity to put it into practice
2. Identified needs, concerns and expectations
3. Been introduced to a personal journal
4. Identified some examples of what makes good listening and helpful responding
5. Identified some examples of what stops good listening and unhelpful responding
6. Considered ways of accessing the meaning behind the words, or what may be unspoken
7. The opportunity to practice listening skills and experience being listened to
8. Had an opportunity to practice responding skills
9. Be able to give and receive constructive feedback
10. Explored their personal experience of listening and being listened to
11. Be able to recognise the impact that listening and responding may have on a client and a volunteer
‘A Round’

Any person can start. In turn, moving round clockwise, each person says:

1. Their name
2. What feelings they leave behind
3. What feelings they bring with them

This provides an opportunity for each person to introduce themselves and to begin to focus on the session and experience ahead of them.

During a round there should be no interrupting, laughing or commenting afterwards.

It is an opportunity for the speaker to say what they want to say and to know that they will be listened to without interruption or laughter. Also to know that what is said in a round will not be commented on by anyone present afterwards.
RESPONDING APPROPRIATELY

* Open questions  
  to encourage speaker to say more

* Accurate reflecting  
  to reassure speaker you are listening

* Use speaker’s key words  
  shows you are listening

* Remaining silent  
  gives speaker time to process thoughts and feelings

AVOID

* assumptions  
  you may have had a similar experience but speaker's feelings are their own

* Leading questions  
  may get answer you want, yet not necessarily the truth

* Closed questions  
  leading to a 'yes' or 'no' response

* Multiple questions  
  confuses the speaker

* Filling the silences  
  may divert focus from speaker - answer needs of listener

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PERSONAL JOURNAL

We encourage you to keep a record of your feelings and experiences during training. It is an opportunity to:

1. Reflect on your responses to the training.

2. To note any challenges you meet on the course and how you respond to and learn from them.

3. To record for yourself significant moments in training.

4. To highlight your own strengths and weaknesses and how you might build on them.

This is a record that is for your eyes only, unless you choose otherwise.
WAYS OF RESPONDING TO ENCOURAGE EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS

1. **Reflecting back** the feeling word  
   e.g. **Client**: “I went for my check-up and the doctors were all very nice, and they brought me a nice cuppa tea, which was a good thing because I was a bit anxious and they ……….”  
   **Volunteer**: “Anxious?”

2. **Staying with the silence**, when client pauses wait for them to break the silence.

3. **Open questions** around feelings, eg.  
   “How did you feel when…..?”  
   “I wonder what was/is going through your mind?”  
   “What did/does that mean to you?”

4. **Noticing body language**, and helping clients be aware of their bodily experiences, e.g. How they hold themselves, how they are breathing, fidgeting, twiddling their fingers, avoidance of eye contact with you

5. **Paraphrasing** to show what you have heard  
   e.g. **Client**: “I feel I’ve not long to go now. While I don’t want to go, I am not frightened any more of death”.  
   **Volunteer**: “You feel that your time is nearly up. The prospect of death, while unwelcome, no longer makes you afraid”

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# PERSONAL JOURNAL

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WAYS OF RESPONDING WHEN CLIENTS ASK YOU DIRECT QUESTIONS

Before you reply automatically think about:

1. What may lie behind the client’s question?

2. Whether it is in the client’s best interests to reply. It may be, but it may not be.

3. How it will influence the development of your relationship as a Volunteer with the client.

Putting the question back to the client keeps the focus on the client, gives you the opportunity to think this through, may shed more light on the client’s feelings and does not preclude you answering directly if appropriate.

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Active Listening

When working with clients and their families there may be some very powerful emotions exhibited or felt by the client or others. These may include fear, anger or denial. Members of a family may try to protect themselves and each other from such feelings. To be able to offer the opportunity to explore these emotions; to accept and respect those feelings, without judging or imposing your own set of values or religious beliefs, is a valuable gift.

We can do this through ‘Active Listening.’

That is:

1. Listening to what is being said – the ‘direct line.’

2. Listening to what is not being said – the ‘indirect line.’
SUMMARISING

Summary

The definition of ‘summary’ is, ‘a condensed or brief outline of something.’ It needs to be short and concise. It is NOT assuming or guessing. It is the ability to summarise the person’s feelings, and concerns from their own perspective, conflict and integration noted, and reflecting the speaker’s own words and cues from tone and body language that you notice.

Phrase such as:

“I feel that you have been saying……….”

“It sounds to me as if you …………………”

Purpose

* Aids order and organisation from both side
* Gives both time and space to pause and reflect upon what’s been said
* Shows active listening at all times

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ACTIVE LISTENING TO THE
‘DIRECT LINE’

PHYSICAL STANCE
* leaning forward slightly
* facing speaker
* not offering a ‘cold shoulder’
* keeping our arms and legs uncrossed
* keeping an appropriate distance
* care with seating arrangements
* looking calm - even if not feeling it

BODY MOVEMENTS
ie what non verbal messages are you giving
* remaining quite still can denote aloofness
* Slight movements can indicate warmth
* fiddling with pens and the like may indicate a lack of interest
* mirroring the speaker can show empathy

EYE CONTACT
* look at the speaker
* Avoid staring

SILENCE
* gives speaker time to think - time to get in touch with their feelings. It is a powerful catalyst. It gives listener time to reflect on the speaker’s tone and inflection.
PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing is a response to the content of what the person has said. By paraphrasing, the listener summarises the content of what the person has said in such a way as to indicate to the speaker that they have been heard and understood. It assists the listener clarify the content of what is being said.

For example:

Client: “Everything has been total chaos since my cancer was diagnosed. I cannot sleep, my husband isn’t listening to me, my kids are out of control and the washing machine has broken down. On top of that every time I go to the hospital I see a different person. I really don’t think I can cope with much more of this”

Volunteer: “It sounds to me that since your cancer was diagnosed you feel things are out of control and that you are not getting the support you need, and that you don’t think you can cope with much more of this.”

PURPOSE

- Aids focus
- Shows active listening
- Builds trust
- Minimises distortion
- Communicates respect
- Helps contain anxiety
- Manages the outpourings of someone who is jumbled and confused

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ACTIVE LISTENING TO THE
‘INDIRECT LINE’

Effective listening depends on interpreting non-verbal clues which open a channel of communication for receiving and interpreting messages. To do this we need to look at the speaker and try to maintain eye contact for about 70 percent of the time – more than that may be seen as aggressive.

Observing non-verbal clues

Non-verbal clues should always be read in context. We should look for a collection of significant gestures: someone who scratches his or her nose may simply have an itch; but if he or she follows this with shuffling on the spot and glancing away, he or she may be finding the conversation uncomfortable and wants to end it. Facial expressions, gestures and vocal tone and speed all add to the real message. Remember that some people laugh when they are deeply moved, while cultural difference can lead to widespread misunderstanding; someone from West Africa may giggle to indicate a desire to take you seriously, whereas we might find such behaviour flippant. Some societies would find the British norm of 70 per cent eye contact offensive.

The list that follows is not intended to be comprehensive but to offer some of the more common clues and some likely interpretations.

Body position
- Fixed – aggression or amazement
- Arms folded – defensive or aggression
- Turned slightly away – boredom or disinterest

Facial expression
- Staring – nervous or aggressive
- Wide eyed – excited or shocked
- Smiles - nervous or happy
- Poker-like – disinterested or angry

Vocal clues
- Monotone – bored or nervous
- Slow speed – depression or uncertainty
- Emphatic speech – enthusiasm or nervous
- Ascending tone – astonishment or anger or accent
- Abrupt speech – defensiveness, anger, nervous or shy

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REFLECTING

This is reflecting the speaker’s feelings in your own words. The feelings may be expressed either implicitly or explicitly.

For instance in the example used in the paraphrasing section, the reflecting response might be:

“You are feeling overwhelmed by your recent diagnosis and feel that you can’t cope with much more”

Another example:

Client: “I have tried asking my husband to listen to me, but he just doesn’t understand”
Volunteer: “You feel your husband doesn’t understand what is happening for you”

Provided you are being genuine in your attempt to describe the feelings you perceive, the speaker will correct you if you are inaccurate.

PURPOSE

- To convey understanding and acceptance of the speaker’s world.
- To clarify and prepare for deeper understanding
- To build the relationship

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MORE EXAMPLES OF WHAT STOPS GOOD LISTENING

1. **COMPARING**

Comparing makes it hard to listen because you are always trying to assess who is cleverer, more competent, more emotionally healthy – you or the other. You cannot let much in because you are too busy seeing if you measure up.

2. **MIND READING**

The mind reader does not pay much attention to what people say. In fact he often mistrusts it. He is trying to work out what the other person is really thinking and feeling. His notions of the other person are often born of intuition, hunches and vague messages.

3. **REHEARSING**

You do not have time to listen when you are rehearsing what to say. Your attention is on the preparation and crafting of your next comment. You have to look interested but your mind is going a mile a minute.

4. **FILTERING**

When you filter, you listen to some things and not to others. You pay only enough attention to see if somebody is angry or unhappy or if you are in emotional danger. Once assure that the communication contains none of these things you let your mind wander.

5. **JUDGING**

If you prejudge someone as stupid or neurotic or unqualified, you do not pay much attention to what they say. You have already written them off. A basic rule of listening is that judgements should be made only after you have heard and evaluated the content of the message.

6. **DREAMING**

You are only half listening and something the person says suddenly triggers a chain of private associations. You are more prone to dreaming when you feel bored or anxious. Everybody dreams and you sometimes need to make a big effort to stay tuned into to the other person’s conversation. If you dream a lot with certain people it may indicate a lack of commitment to knowing them.
QUESTIONS

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

CLOSED
Questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no”. They leave a very limited choice for answer, with no room for exploration. They can make any situation like an interrogation. Often they begin with “do”, “is”, “are”.

Example:
“Do you feel OK today?”
“Is your pain worse?”

OPEN
Questions that lead to exploration of feelings and facts. Usually begin with “what”, “how”, “when”, “Who.”

Example:
Volunteer:
“How are you feeling today?”
“What would you like to do about your appointment?”
“When would you like to go out?”
“Who do you feel could help you?”

MIRROR/ECHO
Questions are simplistic ways of confirming something and can be done by repeating the last word or phrase.

Example:
Client “I’m feeling rough today”
Volunteer “Rough?”

LEADING QUESTIONS
These expect or lead to an implied answer:
“Shouldn’t you go and do it now?”
They often begin with - “Don’t, Cant’, Wasn’t, Shouldn’t, Wouldn’t, Ought”

LOADED QUESTIONS
Which expect/assume that a certain and expected attitude or action is required, such as:
Volunteer “Do you want to go to the hospital appointment, despite the fact you feel so rough?”

PURPOSE OF QUESTIONS:
Appropriate questions allows exploration of feelings and facts

NB Too many questions may lead to irrelevant information and also may take the initiative away from the speaker who may start expecting to be prompted.

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LISTENING

When I ask you to listen to me
And you start giving advice,
You have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me
And you begin to tell me why I shouldn’t feel
That way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have
To do something to solve my problem you have
Failed me, strange as that may seem.

Listen! All I asked was that you listen,
Not talk or do. Just hear me.

And I can do for myself. I’m not helpless,
Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.

When you do something for me
That I can and need to do for myself,
You contribute to my fear and inadequacy.

But when you accept as a simple fact
That I do feel what I feel, no matter how
Irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you
And can get to the business of
Understanding what’s behind this irrational feeling.

And when that’s clear
The answers are obvious
And I don’t need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense
When we understand what’s behind them.

So please listen and just hear me.
And if you want to talk
Wait a minute for your turn
And I’ll listen to you

Adapted from Ralph Roughton M.D.
Giving Effective Feedback

“Until others give us the feedback we need, we will not know what it is we don’t know” Source: Ashridge

Feedback from others gives us the opportunity to become more aware of what we say, how we say it, as well as our body language. It enables us to become more effective communicators.

To be effective, feedback needs to be given in a clear and constructive way so that the receiver is not left feeling undermined. It is important that you ‘own’ the feedback – “I felt that you…….”- and third party feedback, ie. based on somebody else’s comments, should be clearly identified as such.

A lot of us hear criticism far more readily than we hear positive comments but all feedback should be helpful. The model below can be used to identify change and to congratulate on what achieved.

**Types of feedback**

*Motivational feedback* contains praise and encouragement for things that are done well

OR

*Developmental feedback* focuses on improvement and development areas. You ask the colleague what needs to be improved or further developed, adding possible actions

**Giving Effective Feedback**

E  **Example** – identify what they did, be specific

E  **Effect** – describe the effect of their action, again be specific

C  **Change/Congratulate** – identify changes that need to happen and explore how they can do this OR congratulate them for what they have achieved

Example: - ‘When you asked open questions, such as “How do you feel about that?” it encouraged the other person to talk about how they really felt. That was a very good example of using open questions effectively.’
When you asked the other person “Did you feel unhappy about that?” they tended to answer with a “yes” or “no” and weren’t encouraged to talk about how they really felt. How could you have phrased that differently?
LISTENING

Listening is a far more difficult process than most people imagine: really to listen.............is to let go utterly of ourselves, to let go of all the information, all the concepts, all the ideas, and all the prejudices that our heads are stuffed with.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche said: “The more and more you listen, the more and more you hear, the deeper and deeper your understanding becomes.”

Taken from The Book of Living and Dying by Sogyal Rinpoche
‘RESPONDING SKILLS’

PRACTICE SCENARIO

PRACTICE SCENARIO - ROLES EXPLAINED

**Volunteer**: An opportunity to practice responding skills

**Client**: Provides an interaction to enable the volunteer to practice responding skills.

**Observer**: Observes the practice scenario, then de-briefs the practice scenario and provides feedback to the volunteer.
By the bedside of the dying

A friend of mine, who had just graduated from a famous medical school, started work at one of the larger London hospitals. On her very first day on the ward, four or five people died. It was a terrible shock for her; nothing in her training had equipped her to deal with it at all. Isn’t this astonishing, considering she was being trained to be a doctor?

One old man was lying in his bed staring at the wall. He was alone, with no family of friends to visit him, and he was desperate for someone to talk to. She went over to him. His eyes filled with tears and his voice trembled as he asked her the last questions he had expected to hear: “Do you think God will ever forgive me for my sins?” My friend had no idea at all how to respond; her training had left her completely unprepared for any spiritual questions. She had nothing to say; all she had to hide behind was her professional status as a doctor. There was no chaplain nearby, and she just stood there, paralysed, unable to answer her patient’s desperate call for help and for reassurance about the meaning of life.

She asked me, in her pain and bewilderment: “What would you have done?” I said to her I would have sat by his side, held his hand, and let him talk. I have been amazed again and again by how, if you just let people talk, giving them your complete and compassionate attention, they will say things of a surprising spiritual depth, even when they don’t think they have any spiritual beliefs. Everyone has their own life wisdom, and when you let a person talk you allow this life wisdom to emerge. I have often been very moved by how you can help people to help themselves by helping them to discover their own truth, a truth whose richness, sweetness, and profundity they may never have suspected. The sources of healing and awareness are deep within each of us, and your task is to never under any circumstances to impose your beliefs but to enable them to find these within themselves.
OBSERVER ROLE

The role of the observer is to watch the practice scenario so that you can provide constructive feedback. The following guide may help you.

**Process for Observer:**

The focus for the feedback should be on the person practicing the skill i.e. the volunteer.

Therefore, at the end of the practice scenario, the observer should first ask the volunteer;

[Please find some suggested questions]

1. What was that like for you?
2. What helpful responses did you use?
3. What did you notice when you did?
4. What unhelpful responses did you use?
5. How did using helpful responses impact on you?
6. How may this have impacted on the client?
7. What might you do differently next time?

Observer then asks ‘client’ to give volunteer some feedback. After feedback, please ask the following questions

1. How did you feel when the volunteer used helpful responses?
2. How did you feel when the volunteer used unhelpful responses?

Observer then gives final feedback to volunteer. (Think of feedback Sandwich). Ask role player to de-role.

**How to remove someone from role? Some suggestions**

**De-role process.** Only the person in role needs to de-role. This can be achieved by asking the person to move. Ask them to say who they really are and that they are not the person they have just been. You could also ask them to say that they do not feel (whatever feelings were exhibited in role), or they do not have (whatever illness they were asked to own in the practice scenario).