

# **ACTIVE LISTENING**

The basic goal of “active listening” over the telephone or otherwise, is to give a person the chance to express, explore, and understand his/her own feelings. Essential to achieving this goal is the awareness that the listener cannot solve this individual’s problems. The person must solve the problem. However, a situation cannot be changed or a problem solved until the person is aware of his/her own feelings about the situation or problem. For example, if I’m unemployed and need money, the rational solution is to go out and look for a job. I may procrastinate, however, because at some deeper level, I feel afraid of being turned down, or I like being at home, or some other feeling. Until I deal with that feeling, I probably won’t start looking for a job, no matter how much sense it makes.

## **BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ACTIVE LISTENING**

### **ACHIEVE A RELATIONSHIP**

- 👂 Listen with compassion to what the person is feeling and experiencing.
- 👂 "Check out" what you understand them to be saying to see if you are on the same wavelength.
- 👂 Let them experience your warmth and concern. Be genuine.
- 👂 Allow them to tell you about the crisis or problem at hand, when it started, how it developed and how they feel about it.
- 👂 Let the survivor know you would like to work together to find something that can be done to help - preferably to help them to help themselves.

### **ISOLATE THE PROBLEM**

- 👂 Help them to sort out the pieces of the problem they are facing.
- 👂 Help them in separating those parts about which something can be done from those about which nothing can be done.
- 👂 Encourage them to describe what has been tried. (This way you will not repeat those things that have not worked.)
- 👂 Encourage the survivor to describe or discover other possible options.
- 👂 Help them examine each option in terms of their probable consequences. "What will happen if...?"

- 👂 Help them to decide which of the various options they may want to try now.

## **ENCOURAGE ACTION**

- 👂 Encourage the survivor to plan just how he/she might begin doing what he/she has decided to do; the plan should be realistic with achievable goals.
- 👂 Encourage commitment to self, beginning soon and at an agreed upon time.
- 👂 If you perceive resistance to action on the problem, help them discuss and resolve these feelings.
- 👂 Assure them that someone will be available as they try to act in a constructive way; support with realistic hope. Remember not to be judgmental if your expectations are not met as to the best course of action.
- 👂 Encourage step taking. (Avoid doing things for them if they can do it alone - this allows them control of situations.)
- 👂 Show support by telling them that as they begin to do things, however small, they may feel better, less depressed, more hopeful, etc.
- 👂 Help examine and discover resources to cope - interpersonal, inner, spiritual.

## **COMMUNICATION AND ACTIVE LISTENING, ASPECTS OF CRISIS INTERVENTION**

There are several aspects of intervention that can facilitate a beginning toward healing. It is important that the advocate demonstrates these aspects in order to create a trusting and effective relationship. One of the ways to let the survivor know and feel good about this relationship is to actively listen.

### **Empathy:**

Let the survivor know you understand the feelings he/she is experiencing and validate those feelings.

### **Respect:**

Let the survivor know you honor his/her experience and respect his/her courage to reach out.

### **Warmth:**

Let the survivor know of your willingness to help and listen, and affirm that the survivor is accepted and significant.

**Genuineness:**

The survivor should feel like your messages, whether they are verbal or non-verbal, match your feelings. Try not to express emotions that could detract from the relationship.

**Appropriate Self-disclosure:**

Infrequently reveal ideas, attitudes, and experiences relevant to the survivor's concerns. Be careful of thinking, because of your own experiences, that you know exactly how the survivor feels.

**ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS****Allow Silences:**

Communication does include allowing silences or long pauses. Often, survivors need time to think, and/or to get in touch with their feelings. They may not know what to say or how to say it. They may need time to think about something you said. If the silence begins to feel overly prolonged, you might intervene with comments like:

- \* *It's all right not to talk.*
- \* *Take your time.*
- \* *It seems hard for you to talk right now.*
- \* *Can you tell me what you're thinking about?*

**Provide noncommittal acknowledgments:**

These show continued interest and encourage the survivor to continue talking.

- \* *Uh huh.*
- \* *Oh?*
- \* *I see.*
- \* *Mmmm.*
- \* *Go on.*

**Door openers:**

These are invitations to the survivor to talk or say more.

- \* *Would you like to talk about it?*
- \* *I'd be interested in what you have to say.*
- \* *I'd really like to hear what you're thinking.*
- \* *Who would you feel talking about it?*
- \* *Sounds like you have some feelings/thoughts about this.*
- \* *Could you say more about that?*
- \* *How is it that...?*
- \* *How do you feel about that?*

**REFLECTIVE STATEMENTS**

This type of statement encourages examination and clarification, confirmation, reassurance, and validation. The survivor knows she/he is being heard and understood. It gives impetus

for the survivor to continue talking and can often give him/her the permission to feel. There are different kinds of reflective statements.

### **PARROTING:**

Consists of repetition of all or a selected part of the survivor's previous statement. Neither adds nor detracts from the previous statement.

Survivor: I'm furious that my husband doesn't understand.

Advocate: **You're furious that your husband doesn't understand.**

### **PARAPHRASING:**

Consists of mirroring the feelings and/or emotions and meaning of feelings expressed.

Survivor: I'm furious that my husband doesn't understand.

Advocate: **You're angry that your husband doesn't understand your feelings.**

### **REFLECTION OF CONTENT:**

This is reflecting back what the survivor has just said. A little more invested than parroting or paraphrasing.

Survivor: I'm furious that my husband doesn't understand.

Advocate: **You do sound angry about how he has responded to this.**

### **REFLECTION OF FEELINGS**

Checks out your understanding of what the person has just said. Attaches a feeling to a specific source.

Survivor: I'm furious that my husband doesn't understand.

Advocate: **Sounds like you're feeling a bit betrayed by the person you are closest to.**

### **OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:**

These are facilitative in nature. They encourage a person to explore the situation, get specific, and focus on a point of concern or distress. The goal is to elicit information and feelings in the survivor, not to inhibit the survivor's expression.

Open-ended questions require more than a yes/no or other one word answers. Closed-ended questions are generally non-facilitative and demand a yes/no answer.

Closed-ended question:

*Did you feel guilty?*

*Were you upset when she said that?*

*You were probably outraged, weren't you?*

Open-ended question:

*How did you feel?*

*How did you feel when she said that?*

*How did you react to that?*

More open-ended questions:

*What would you like to talk about?*

*What concerns you most about that?*

*What's the worst/best thing that could happen?*

*What's happening with that?*

*How can you tell her about it?*

*What's it like when you feel like that?*

*What/where/when would you feel most comfortable doing/saying that?*

*How do you usually handle that type of thing?*

*What did you think about that?*

*What is your biggest concern?*

*What would you like to see happen?*

*How do you feel?*

*How do you think he'll feel?*

## CLARIFYING

This is a way of checking out what the person is saying. It is a way to make sure you understand what they are saying. It is also a way to help the person clarify what they are saying.

Survivor: I was almost raped, but I beat the guy up.

Survivor: Yeah, I was with friends drinking, and he had a knife and wow, was I scared.

**Advocate: I'm not sure I understand. You were out with friends and a guy pulled a knife?**

Survivor: No. I was out with my friends, then I went home. He was there when I walked into my house.

## SUMMARIZING

This lets the person know what they have covered and can be a way to restate many different problems so that the person can see them separately and deal with them one at a time.

*Survivor is telling you what happened when she was raped:*

Survivor: What was I saying?

**Advocate: You were in bed and you heard someone open the door.**

Survivor: I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm scared. I don't want anyone to touch me. My children know something is wrong but I wouldn't know how to tell them about it. I'm really in a lot of pain. I just know my friends aren't going to talk to me when they find out.

**Advocate: It sounds like a lot of different things are on your mind right now. You're feeling scared, having a hard time with your children, worried about losing your friends, and in some pain.**

**Maybe we can take these things one at a time. Can you tell me more about the pain you're having?**

## **FOCUSING**

This is a way of concentrating on a specific time-relevant concern or feeling. Try to keep the conversation in the present. Explore how the problem is affecting the survivor now.

**Survivor:** I was raped when I was 13. I'm 25 now and can't seem to deal with it.

**Advocate:** **You're having some feelings about being assaulted that are coming up years later.**

**Survivor:** I feel really stupid about it. I mean it was 12 years ago and I should be over it by now. I just want to have a normal life and it's just not working.

**Advocate:** **I understand it must feel a bit crazy to have feelings come up so many years after the assault, but that's really normal. For some survivors, feelings surface 5, 10, or even 20 years after the assault.**

**Survivor:** Really? That's good to know. I still don't understand why my life isn't normal.

**Advocate:** **Something is happening in your life right now that you feel isn't normal?**

**Survivor:** I can't deal with men. Sexually I mean (pause). At least this one man that wants me to go to bed with him. I really love him, but I just can't. I'm so afraid we're going to break up. (starts crying).

**Advocate:** **Sounds like this relationship is very important to you.**

## **COMMANDMENTS FOR GOOD LISTENING**

◆ **STOP TALKING!**

You cannot listen if you are talking.

◆ **PUT THE SURVIVOR AT EASE.**

Help the survivor know that he/she is free to talk. This is often called a "permissive environment."

◆ **SHOW THE SURVIVOR THAT YOU WANT TO LISTEN**

Look and act interested. Listen to understand rather to reply.

◆ **REMOVE DISTRACTIONS**

Don't doodle, tap your finger or pencil, or shuffle papers. Shut the door to ensure privacy.

◆ **EMPATHIZE WITH THE SURVIVOR**

Try to put yourself in the survivor's place in order to better see his/her point of view.

◆ BE PATIENT

Allow plenty of time. Do not interrupt the survivor.

◆ GO EASY ON ARGUMENTS

This puts the survivor on the defensive and may cause the survivor to clam up or get angry. Do not argue. If you win, you lose.

◆ ASK QUESTIONS

This encourages the survivor and shows you care and are listening.

◆ STOP TALKING!

This is the first and last commandment because all others depend on it. You can't do a good job of listening if you are talking.