



# Richmond Centre for Disability

“Promoting a new perspective on disability”

*2012 Business Excellence Awards – Association of the Year Winner*

## ACTIVE LISTENING

Active Listening is a way of responding to someone by trying to understand not merely what the person is saying but what he/she is feeling. Active listening involves techniques that demonstrate what they are saying deserves to be heard. It encourages people to feel comfortable enough to continue talking about difficult issues.

Active Listening Techniques:

Attend	Clear your mind and really pay attention to what the other person is trying to tell you; stop rehearsing what you will say in response; do not interrupt, offer advice or give suggestions; do not bring up similar feelings and problems from your own experience; do not offer suggestions or options. Active listening is focused on helping the person to talk and feel.
Empathize	Try to put yourself in the other peoples shoes to understand what they are saying and how they feel; ask yourself (and not the other person) questions to evoke empathy. Example: “If I were in this situation, how would I feel?” or “Have I been in a situation like that myself?”
Non-verbal communication	Use attending and observing behaviour to encourage people to verbalize their ideas or feelings freely; the physical things you can do to show people you are interested and that they have your full attention include eye contact, comfortable distance, posture (facing and leaning toward the person), tone of voice, gestures and alertness; a person who is sending you a message with body language needs to know this message has been received. Example: “You seem to be upset.” or “You appear angry.”
Clarify	Get additional facts to better understand what is being said; help the person explore all sides of a problem. Example: “How did you react when this happened?” or “Is this the problem as you see it now?”
Encourage	Convey interest and prompt the person to continue talking; use neutral words and avoid disagreeing or agreeing. Example: “Can you tell me more about it?” or “I see what you’re saying.”

Restate (paraphrase)	Check out your assumptions by repeating, in your own words, the main thoughts and ideas that the person has expressed. This shows that you are listening and that you understand what is being said. It allows you to check the meaning and interpretation of what you have heard; it does not mean that you agree or disagree with the content. Example: "As I understand it, your plan is..." or "So what you're telling me is..."
Reflect	Show you understand how the person feels about what he/she is saying; help the person evaluate and/or clarify what he/she is feeling. Example: "It sounds like you feel..." "Do you feel that..."
Use prompts	Let the person know you would like more information by using prompts such as non-verbal reinforcers (a smile, a nod, etc.) or silence. One of the most effective ways to get people to talk is for you to say nothing; use brief prompt phrases to elicit more information. Example: "And then what happened?" or "What did you say to that?"
Ask open-ended questions	Phrase questions so that the person will give you meaningful information; try not to ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." Example: "Tell me how you feel about..." or "Please explain that to me."
Summarize	Put all the information together – the facts and the feelings – to ensure the person has given you all the information, to serve as a springboard for further discussion and to give the person a chance to correct or add anything. Effective summarizing involves statements that are short, to the point and that do not add any new content, meaning or interpretations to what the person has said. Example: "These are the main ideas you have expressed..." or "This is how I understand what you have said..."
Validate	Acknowledge the person's worth, efforts and feelings. Example: "It must have been difficult to do that." or "You've really worked hard to solve this problem."

### ACTIVE LISTENING CHECKLIST

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stop talking                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Get rid of distractions         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empathize with the person                | <input type="checkbox"/> Ask questions                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concentrate on what the person is saying | <input type="checkbox"/> Listen for what is not said     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Look at the person                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to how something is said |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smile and gesture appropriately          | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid making assumptions        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Try to leave your emotions behind        | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid classifying the person    |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid hasty judgments           |

## BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Ineffective listening may result from a failure to listen long enough or with sufficient understanding of the person's feelings to really understand their issues and concerns.

Ordering or demanding	"You must try to do this." or "You have to stop doing that."
Warning or threatening	"You had better do this." or "If you don't do that, then..."
Admonishing or moralizing	"You really should have done this." or "That wasn't very nice to have done that."
Persuading or arguing or lecturing	"Do you realize that..." or "The facts are actually..."
Advising or providing answers	"Why don't you..." or "Let me suggest..."
Criticizing or blaming or disagreeing	"You aren't thinking about this properly." or "Don't you think you should try to stop doing that?"
Inappropriate praising or agreeing	"You handled that just the way I told you to." or "That would be the right thing to do."
Sympathizing or reassuring	"Don't worry." or "You'll feel better."
Probing or inappropriate questioning	"Why did you do that?" or "What did you say that for?"
Interpreting or diagnosing	"What you need is..." or "Your problem is..."
Diverting or avoiding	"We can discuss that later." or "That reminds me of..."
Kidding or using sarcasm	"My elderly aunt said the same thing!" or "When did you last read a newspaper?"
Empty reassurances	"I wouldn't worry about it." or "Everything will be fine."
Rejecting	"Let's not discuss that." or "I don't want to hear about that."
Disapproving	"Was that really wise?" or "I don't like that kind of behaviour."
Defending	"That hospital has a fine reputation." or "No one here would lie to you."
Diminishing expressed feelings	"Everyone feels like that sometimes." or "It's always darkest before the dawn."
Using clichés	"It's for your own good." or "Keep your chin up."

# BEING ASSERTIVE

Communication is the exchange of thoughts, ideas, or feelings between two or more people. It is a basic component of relationships. Therefore it is important that we all learn to communicate directly with each other.

Typically, there are three ways of communicating:

## Passive:

- ▶ Give in and saying yes when you don't want to
- ▶ Put others' feelings and concerns before yours
- ▶ Keep your concerns to yourself

## Aggressive:

- ▶ Dominate others
- ▶ Put yourself first, at the expense of others
- ▶ Use threats or force

## Assertive:

- ▶ Stand up for your rights without denying other people theirs
- ▶ Respect yourself and others
- ▶ Ask for what you want in a straightforward manner

To develop an assertive style of communication, it is important to make eye contact (without staring) and to speak in a clear, firm voice.

The use of "I" messages is also helpful:  
I feel **upset** when **I'm made fun of** and I want **you to stop**.

Your friend tells you to "shut up" during an argument.	I don't like it when you speak to me that way. It makes me feel as though you don't care about me.
Your parents have been arguing a lot lately, and the situation is upsetting you.	I feel upset and worried when I see you arguing so often. Can we talk about the situation?
You are starting to worry that a friend likes you in a romantic way, but you do not feel the same way.	This is really hard for me to talk about, but I'm getting the feeling that you want to be more than just friends. I really like being friends with you, but I'm not attracted to you in that way.
You want to tell your best friend that you are gay.	There's something I need to tell you, but I'm worried about how you might react. I'm gay.