

LISTENING SKILLS TRAINING

Practical Application Video

KEY CONCEPTS AND IDEAS

7 FUNDAMENTAL LISTENING SKILLS

- Prompting and Probing
- Empathy
- Emotional Vocabulary Building
- Universalization and Normalization
- Using Tentative Language
- Incarnational or Sacrificial Relating (One-Way Relating)
- Challenging and Confronting

Listening is patient and kind; listening does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. Listening does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; Listening does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Listening bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Listening should never end, because God doesn't stop listening to us.

Based on 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

PROMPTING AND PROBING

Prompts and probes are verbal and sometimes nonverbal tactics for helping people talk more freely or to clarify understanding. Common types of prompts and probes are open-ended questions beginning with either "What" or "How" in order to invite a more in-depth answer. Other examples include:

Verbal and Non-Verbal Examples:

Single words - "uh-huh", "I see", "ah", "sure", "yeah", etc.

Statements - "I'm not sure I understand...", "That sounds...."

Repeating key words - repeat key words the other person uses

Requests - "Can you tell me more about...", "Help me understand..."

Nonverbal - head nods, leaning in/back, raising eyebrows, smiling, etc.

Friend: That was almost believable, Darius. **What's really going on? How are you really doing?**

Darius: Weren't fooled for a second, huh? I'm gonna just be real with you since I know you'd eventually get it out of me anyways.

Friend: **Uh huh.**

Darius: To be honest, I don't even feel like getting out of bed anymore on most days. I wake up and just lie in bed and wonder, "What's the point?"

EMPATHY - *Listening is patient*

Empathy involves tuning in, listening and responding to another by sharing a nonjudgmental understanding of what they are feeling, thinking or experiencing. Rather than being an interpretation, empathy, conveys a desire to understand how people see themselves, others and the world from their personal point-of-view. Empathy seeks to know what it is like to walk in another's footsteps.

“Empathy underlies virtually everything that makes society work—like trust, altruism, collaboration, love, charity. Failure to empathize is a key part of most social problems—crime, violence, war, racism, child abuse, and inequity, to name just a few.” — Dr. Bruce D. Perry, *Born for Love: Why Empathy Is Essential--and Endangered*

Empathy Statement Basic Formula:

“You feel...[insert the perceived emotion]...because...[insert the appropriate experiences, thoughts and behaviors that give rise to the feeling].”

Friend: No, Darius, there's no need to be sorry. I'm glad you called. **It seems like you're feeling pretty depressed because of how life is going for you right now.**

Darius: Maybe, but I don't know if 'depressed' is the word for it. It seems like it's something more than that, or different, I'm just not sure what it is.

EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY BUILDING - *Listening is kind*

Be willing to learn a wide vocabulary of emotions, so you can help shepherd and guide others towards clearer understanding and connection. Having an apt word for someone can be truly lifegiving, both for others and ourselves (Proverbs 18:21)

Friend: So depressed doesn't quite fit, huh? Maybe **downhearted** or **dejected**? Or maybe even **devastated** fits better?

Darius: Wow! The thought never really crossed my mind until you said it, but I really think I do feel **devastated**.

UNIVERSALIZATION AND NORMALIZATION - *Listening does not envy*

Although each of us has a uniqueness in our own right, there is a universal aspect to our experiences in this world, and particularly to our struggles and pain. These help us know we are not alone.

“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” - Romans 3:23

“When they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.” - 2 Corinthians 10:12b

Friend: Being devastated totally makes sense given what you've been through and are still facing. **It's actually hard for me to imagine someone feeling much differently.** I can see any one of those things being devastating by themselves – your wife, your job, your health, the pandemic – but **having all of them is like a whole other level!**

Darius: That's really helpful to hear. Honestly, I was really beginning to wonder whether I was just going crazy or there was just something super wrong with me.

USING TENTATIVE LANGUAGE - *Listening is not arrogant or rude; it does not insist on its own way*

People are much more receptive to hearing and receiving counsel when you approach them with humility, gentleness and compassion. Simple language adjustments can be very effective in helping avoid defensiveness and being heard. Helpful Tips include:

- Avoid addressing difficult situations using the phrase “at least”
- Avoid asking too many questions
- Avoid giving advice unless asked for or granted permission

Helpful Tentative Opening Statements:

It sounds like you feel _____ about _____.

I hear you saying that you feel _____ because of _____.

If I hear you correctly you feel _____ when _____.

You seem to be saying you feel _____ about _____.

I think I hear you saying you feel _____ because _____.

I'm not sure I'm following how you feel _____ about _____.

Am I hearing you say you feel _____ when _____.

Can you help me understand _____?

Friend: Darius, **do you mind if I share something with you?**

Darius: Sure, go ahead

Friend: I feel like I have a lot of questions for you and a lot of things to say, but I'm also pretty concerned about how difficult your situation is and what you shared with me about the struggles with simply getting out of bed and how life is seeming so pointless to you right now. **Would you be willing to talk with a counselor or someone who has some more experience dealing with stuff like this?**

INCARNATIONAL OR SACRIFICIAL RELATING - *Listening is not irritable or resentful.*

Incarnational relating happens when we lay down our personal and individual rights for the sake of another. We set aside our desire to share our own stories, to satisfy our curiosities and to offer advice. We set aside expectations of fairness or mutuality in the relationship and devote ourselves entirely to the service of helping meet the other person's needs.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” - Philippians 2:5-7

Challenging and confronting while listening is not about picking fights or starting arguments. It's all about pointing out inconsistencies within what you are hearing. Truth, above all else, is known by consistency. Inconsistencies can also be positive in the sense that they can point out strengths and desirable qualities the speaker doesn't appear to be noticing or focusing on.

Darius: I don't know about all that, a counselor, really? I mean it's really not that bad. I'm fine. I was just talking. I don't need all that.

Friend: I've heard you talking, Darius. I really have. I've heard how hard life is for you right now and I've heard how alone and helpless you're feeling because you told me. **'Devastated' doesn't quite mix well with either "not that bad" or "fine"**. And like I said, what you're facing is legit – it's tough. I just don't want you to face these things alone and I don't want you to give up on life.

Friend: Plus, **I'm not sure you realize that you've already taken the first and most important step, you reached out.** I have to imagine it wasn't easy sharing what you did with me today was it?

Darius: You don't know the half of it. I must have picked up the phone a dozen times to call you before I actually did. And I almost didn't do it again today. I don't know, I guess something inside me just told me it was the right thing to do.

Friend: I think that "something" inside of you is strength. And, like it or not, **I don't think you give yourself enough credit for the strength you have. I know it feels like you've been knocked down and spun around, but even just sharing with me what you did today shows there's some fight left in you.** I just think a counselor might be able to help you find some more strength and fight.

Darius: Yeah, you are right - I don't like it. But I also think you're right reaching out for some more help. I guess I can at least give it a shot. Sitting at devastated there's probably only one way to go. You have any recommendations for who I can call?

HOPE COUNSELING CENTER

Making a Referral

Our team of Licensed Professional Counselors is here to assist those struggling with anxiety, depression, relational or family issues and other mental health issues.

Call 614.252.2500 or email hopecounseling@victorycoh.org to connect with our team!

