



General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

youth ministries
department



8



Listening Skills

Themes in This Series:

Book 1: Incorporating Mentoring in Your Youth Ministry

Introduction to the purpose and philosophy of this resource along with a guide for implementing an intentional mentoring program in your school, church, club, workplace or other organisation.

Book 2: The Need for Being Connected

An exploration of current statistics regarding the behaviour crisis facing today's youth and the answers presented to us through empirical evidence.

Book 3: Definitions and Types of Mentoring

An introduction to the history and use of the term "mentoring" and an examination of mentoring applications in today's culture.

Book 4: Benefits of Mentoring

An overview of compelling reasons for being involved in mentoring.

Book 5: Being a Mentor

Basic principles and practical tips for being a mentor. This is considered fundamental information for those involved in any mentoring situation.

Book 6: Being a Mentor Partner

A preparation presentation for those who want to find a mentor for themselves or for those who will be entering a mentoring relationship.

Book 7: Passing On Values

Guidelines and practical tips for assisting the mentor in passing on positive values to a mentor partner.

Book 8: Listening Skills

An interactive tutorial on developing crucial fundamental listening skills for all relationships with information on dealing with crisis situations and mandatory reporting.

The **Bsomebody2someone** Mentor Training Series was originally developed in connection with 'Getting Connected,' a project of ADRA Australia. It has been adopted and reshaped by the General Conference Youth Ministries Department to be implemented globally.

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Bsomebody2someone

Mentoring Training Series

A Note from the Director

The significance of mentoring in the context of intergenerational youth ministry has been one of the main topics of discussions in credible youth forums and literature recently. Youth professionals have long concluded that what has been characterized as the 'One ear mickey mouse' approach to ministry, where young people are isolated from the rest of the congregation and placed in an environment that is 'supposedly' conducive to their spiritual development, is a fallacy, in spite of all good intents and purposes.

While it is recognized that the 'isolationist' approach was a pragmatic reaction to the many challenges that youth leaders were encountering in an age of unprecedented change, its long-term effects have not proved to be beneficial for the body of Christ. There is a current call to a return to more family and intergenerational-based approach to youth ministry. It calls for the collaboration of youth professionals, volunteers, parents, pastors and the church at large. This might be the longer, more arduous road to travel, but it is the one prescribed in the Scriptures, the one that will prove to pay eternal dividends.

Bsomebody2someone is a valuable tool in your hands to assist in this paradigm shift in youth ministry.

Bsomebody2someone is a series of training presentations designed to enable individuals and groups to intentionally engage in mentoring, both to find a mentor for themselves and to be a mentor for others.

This resource package consists of seven presentations for use in groups to educate, inspire and equip mentors and mentor partners. Each presentation is a discreet topic on its own and is produced as a set of PowerPoint slides with notes for the presenter. Our intention is that anyone interested in mentoring can use this package. No previous training or special knowledge is required to present this material or lead a group in its exploration of mentoring. There are some activities written into the notes. These activities are optional, but they are given with the intention of applying the concepts presented and engaging the group in the learning process.



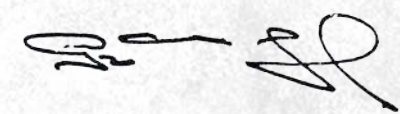
Listening Skills

A Note from the Director *(continued)*

The topics in the series are listed in order of suggested presentation for a complete training package. However, not all topics will be required for all mentoring applications. Examine each presentation and use those that will be most useful to you.

The time required to move a group through each presentation will vary according to the group and the leader. If a presenter uses the activities provided and adds time for discussion and other activities, each program could stretch to one or more hours. Of course, the presentation could be as short as the time it takes to click through the slides. Remember, the more the group processes, discusses and absorbs the information on each slide, the more effective the material will be.

Sincerely,



Gilbert R. Cangy, Director
General Conference Youth Ministries Department

Note for leaders: *There is no required supplementary material. All that is required is the projection of the PowerPoint show, note taking paper and a pen.*

Topics

- Our values define who we are
- How to pass on values
- The need for and levels of communication
- Attending skills
- Body language and body placement
- Active listening
- Listening that doesn't work
- Confronting
- Counselling first aid
- Confidentiality
- Supervision

This presentation covers a large amount of material and has some activities included to help the group process and practice the information. It is recommended to divide the material into two or more sessions.

Suggested:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Session One | The need for and levels of communication, attending skills, body language and body placement |
| Session Two | Active listening, ineffective listening, confronting |
| Session Three | Counselling first aid, confidentiality, supervision |

If possible, ask a professional counsellor or psychologist to present or at least attend your presentations. You will find professional advice extremely helpful and worthwhile on this topic.



"I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen."
Orestes Lindsey

"...perhaps we have two ears and only one mouth for good reason."
C.K. Lewis

Listening

Listening is a fundamental component of communication — perhaps THE fundamental component of communication. Yet we tend to ignore both the importance and the development of listening as a skill. A person with good listening skills is obviously more capable of gathering information, understanding and helping others. To listen is a sign of respect and an acknowledgement of the value of another individual.

This presentation will introduce you to the skills of attending and active listening, some practical hints on how to handle more difficult listening situations and some guidelines for mandatory reporting.

ACTIVITY: Divide into pairs and label one person as person 'A' and the other as person 'B'. This is a simple listening activity to demonstrate how much information a person can absorb in a short period of time if they are concentrating. Give person 'A' one minute to talk, with person 'B' listening. Assign a topic (below) for person 'A' to speak about, and tell the person 'B' that the goal is to remember at least five (and try for 10) facts within the time period.

After person 'A' has finished, take a few minutes to ask people to share the facts that they learned (ensure that Person 'A' has given permission for 'B' to share than information). Then switch and allow person 'B' to speak and follow the same process.

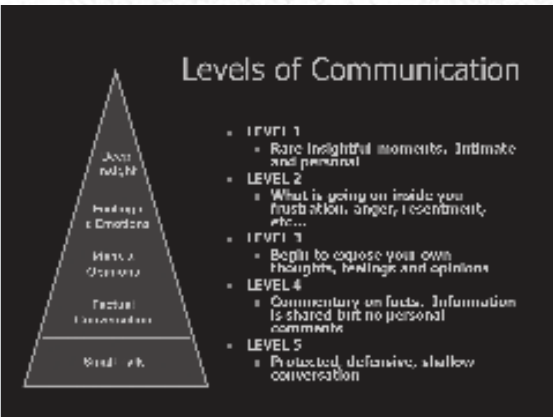
Some topic ideas: pets, old schools, socks, favourite holidays, childhood romances, desserts, etc...



Talking

It has been said that the most intimate thing two people can do is talk. We often get fooled by the media into thinking that sex is the pinnacle of intimacy in a relationship. But to share deeply in trust with another person; to listen and be heard — this is the source of the deepest bond between humans.





Levels of Communication

John Powell, in his book *‘Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?’* describes five levels on which we can communicate. An understanding of these levels is essential.

Level 5: SMALL TALK — At this level, shallow conversation takes place, such as, “How are you?” “What have you been doing?” “How are things going?” Such conversation borders on the meaningless, but it can sometimes be better than embarrassing silence.

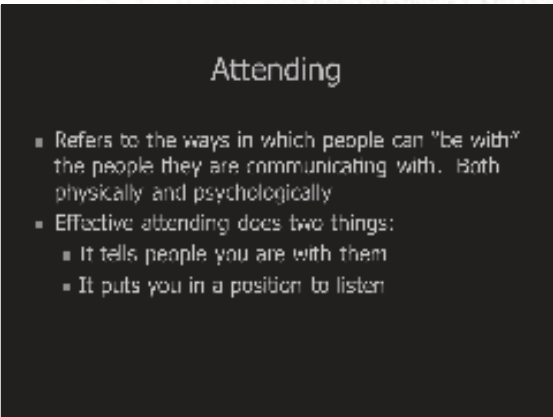
Level 4: FACTUAL CONVERSATION — At this level, information is shared, but there are no personal comments along with it. You tell what has happened, but do not reveal how you feel about it.

Level 3: IDEAS AND OPINIONS — Real intimacy begins here, for on this level you risk exposing your own thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Because you feel free to express yourself and verbalize personal ideas, your partner has a better chance to know you intimately.

Level 2: FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS — Communication at this level describes what is going on inside you — how you feel about someone else or a situation. You verbalize feelings of frustration, anger, resentment, or happiness. If you honestly share with someone else in a give-and-take manner, showing interest in his/her feelings as well as in expressing your own, this will enrich and enlarge your relationship.

Level 1: DEEP INSIGHT — Rare insightful moments will occur when you are perfectly in tune with another in understanding, depth, and emotional satisfaction. Usually a peak experience or something deeply personal is related. Communication about such experiences often makes a deep impression on both parties and enriches the relationship.

ACTIVITY: Consider each level of communication listed and write down the names of two people — or perhaps two situations — for each that apply to your life. Realise that there should be fewer people who might fit into Level 1, so you may need to think about past relationships. Invite people to share with the group about how difficult it was to think of people or situations at the progressively deeper levels.



Attending

It is estimated that 80% – 95% of effective communication takes place without words. This is termed ‘non-verbal’ communication and happens via body language and verbal cues (which are ‘non-word’ sounds we make as we listen to another person).

The term used for the skills that enable a person to listen without speaking words is called ‘attending’. Because the way we communicate with our body language and verbal cues is so subtle (including minute changes in facial expression, a glance of the eyes, or a move of the hand, etc.), the skill of attending begins with the attitude of the listener.

If a listener is fully focused on the person they are listening to — most often their body will automatically reflect and communicate their attention. This is called psychological attending or being ‘present’ with another person.

ACTIVITY: Ask the group to collectively ‘act’ bored without saying anything. Ask them to freeze in those positions and then look around the room and make comment on some of the body positions and facial expressions that you notice.

Now ask them to act interested in you as the speaker. Again, have them freeze and ask them to note what differences they made in their own body language and facial expression.

For another exercise, ask the group to adopt a neutral body position. Then ask them to encourage you with verbal cues (not words) as you begin to tell a story (use any story — “The Three Bears”?). After about a minute (or less) stop and review the kinds of sounds they made that encouraged you to keep telling your story.

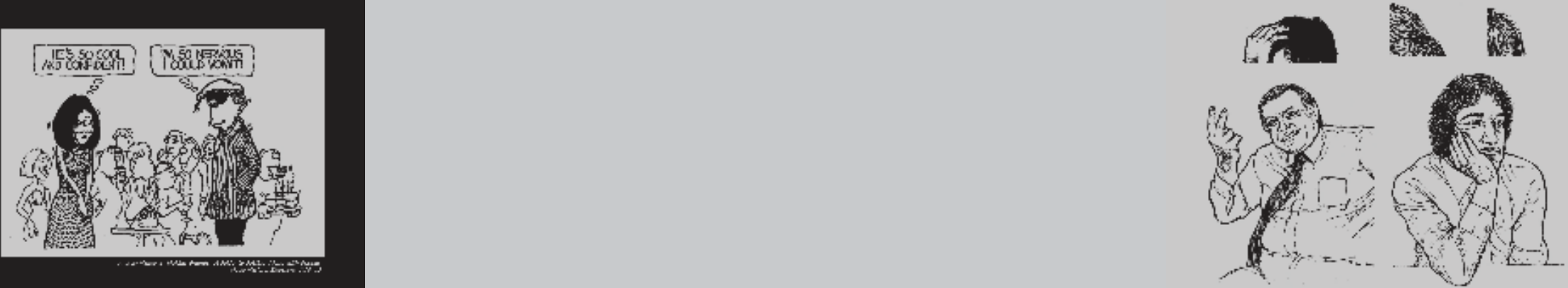
All of these skills are called ‘attending.’



Cues and Messages

Effective helpers are mindful of the cues and messages they are constantly sending through their bodies as they interact with others.

Reading your own bodily reactions is an important first step. For instance, if you feel your muscles tensing as the person talks to you, you can say to yourself, "I'm getting anxious here. What's causing my anxiety? And what cues am I sending this person?"



Body Language Messages

ACTIVITY: In this slide you will see images representing different messages sent by body language. What does each one mean?

As you look at each image, jot down a word or two that reminds you of a story when you used this body gesture yourself. After you've seen all the images, share with your partner about one of these stories.



Attending Micro-Skills

- S: Face the Client **SQUARELY**
- O: Adopt an **OPEN** posture
- L: **LEAN** toward the other
- E: Maintain good **EYE** contact
- R: Try to **RELAX**

Attending Micro-Skills

There are some basic attending skills that a good listener should be aware of in order to be a more effective listener.

These are often referred to as ‘micro-skills’ and can be summarized in the acronym **S-O-L-E-R**:

S: Face the other person **Squarely**; that is, adopt a posture that indicates involvement. This usually says: “I’m available to you; I choose to be with you.” Turning your body away from another person while you talk to him or her can lessen your degree of contact with that person. Even when people are seated in a circle, they usually try in some way to turn toward the individuals to whom they are speaking. What is important is that the bodily orientation you adopt conveys the message that you are involved with the person. Sometimes facing the person squarely is too threatening and an angled position may be called for. The point is the quality of your attention.

O: Adopt an **Open** posture. Crossed arms and crossed legs can be signs of lessened involvement with or availability to others. An open posture can be a sign that you’re open to the other person and to what he or she has to say. If your legs are crossed, this does not mean that you are not involved with the person. But it is important to ask yourself: “To what degree does my present posture communicate openness and availability to the this person?”

L: It is possible at times to **Lean** toward the other. The main thing is to remember that the upper part of your body is on a hinge. It can move toward a person and back away. A slight inclination toward a person is often seen as saying, “I’m with you, I’m interested in you and what you have to say.” Leaning back (the severest form of which is a slouch) can be a way of saying, “I’m not entirely with you” or “I’m bored.” Leaning too far forward, however, or doing so too soon, may frighten them. It can be seen as a way of placing a demand on the other for some kind of closeness or intimacy. In a wider sense, the word ‘lean’ can refer to a kind of bodily flexibility or responsiveness that enhances your communication with another.

E: Maintain good **Eye** contact. Maintaining good eye contact with someone is another way of saying, “I’m with you; I want to hear what you have to say.” Obviously this principle is not violated if you occasionally look away. But if you catch yourself looking away frequently, your behaviour may give you a hint about some kind of reluctance to be with this person or to get involved with him or her. Or it may say something about your own discomfort.

R: Try to be relatively **Relaxed** or natural in these behaviours. Being relaxed means two things. *First*, it means not fidgeting nervously or engaging in distracting facial expressions. The person may wonder what’s making you nervous. *Second*, it means becoming comfortable with using your body as a vehicle of contact and expression. Being natural in the use of skills helps put the person at ease.



Be Careful

- Attending micro-skills are only a guide
 - People differ individually
 - People differ culturally
- Internal attitude should be matched with appropriate non-verbal messages

Be Careful

These ‘skills’ should be practiced cautiously. People differ both individually and culturally in how they show attentiveness. The main point is that an internal “being with” someone might well lose its impact if the person does not see this internal attitude reflected in the helper’s nonverbal communication.

ACTIVITY: Divide into pairs again and practice the attending micro-skills. Encourage each pair to first act in the opposite way of all the micro-skills, and then practice SOLER.

Body Placement and Orientation

- Pay attention to culture
- Realise there are things you don't know
- Notice subtle responses
- Mirror positions

Body Placement and Orientation

There are two general principles for the physical aspect of attending:

Body placement refers to the physical proximity and orientation of the people in conversation. If the listener comes too close to a person, they will invade personal space and the speaker will become uncomfortable or even threatened. If the listener is too far away, the speaker can feel a lack of interest and intimacy.

The placement angle or orientation of the listener in relationship to the speaker is also important. Two people can be side to side or back to back and be much closer to each other than if they were face to face.

ACTIVITY: Divide into pairs again (this time it would be better if they could pair up with a stranger) and first ask the pairs to sit ‘too close for comfort’ — and then freeze in that position. Look around the room and draw attention to some of the positions of the pairs. Note that if the partners are already friends, they are likely to be comfortable much closer to each other.

Then ask the pairs to get ‘too far away for conversation’, and again freeze the group and make comment on the positions. Then allow them to find an ideal position for communication and ask for comments from the group as to what they’ve learned about body placement.

Pay attention to culture. Realise that a person’s culture will be a determining factor as to the comfort level of body placement. This not only includes nationality, but also more personal cultural considerations such as religious or family background.

Realise there are things you don’t know. As a listener, you may not be aware of the recent personal circumstances of the other person. Events or circumstances may have taken place which will have an affect on the attitude and comfort level of the speaker. Tread carefully.



Active Listening

Listening by Talking

Body Placement and Orientation *(continued)*

Watch closely for subtle responses to body placement by the speaker. If a listener gets too close, the speaker may shift to turn sideways, or fold arms or put something in their lap to try to gain some more ‘safety’. The astute listener will notice subtle signs such as these and adjust body placement to allow a person to be more comfortable.

A listener can often make a speaker feel more comfortable by ‘mirroring’ the speaker’s own body orientation. For instance, if the speaker is leaning back and relaxed, the listener should relax and lean back a little... even if according to the SOLER micro-skills you should be leaning forward. Remember that the role of a good listener is remove as many barriers to communication as possible, making the speaker feel as comfortable as possible. This creates an environment of invitation for the speaker to communicate.

Active Listening

So far we’ve been learning about listening skills that encourage the speaker and increase understanding without using many words on the part of the listener. Now we are going to move on to some skills of listening that involve commenting and questioning in order to listen better. The term ‘active listening’ could be applied to this whole presentation, but we’ll use it here to describe the verbal process of actively seeking deeper understanding of the other person.



The Process of Verbal Communication

1. What you meant to say	6. What the other person means to say about what you said
2. What you actually said	7. What the other person actually says about what you said
3. What the other person hears	8. What you actually hear the other person saying about what you said
4. What the other person thinks they hear	
	5. What you think the other person said about what you said

The Process of Verbal Communication

There are eight possible messages in the verbal communication process:

- What you meant to say
- What you actually said
- What the other person hears
- What the other person thinks they hear
- What the other person means to say about what you said
- What the other person actually says about what you said
- What you actually hear the other person saying about what you said
- What you think the other person said about what you said

ACTIVITY: Divide into pairs again, person ‘A’ and person ‘B’. Ask person ‘B’ to make a comment about something that happened to him/her this morning, and ask person ‘A’ to respond to the comment.

Then have them as a pair go through the eight possible messages and try to label each one.

Listen

When I ask you to listen to me
you aren't giving advice you have not
come when I asked

When I ask you to listen to me
you begin to tell me why I should not
that's what you are bringing on my
headings

When I ask you to listen to me and
you feel you have to do something to
solve my problems you have failed
you are not listening to me

When I ask you to listen to me and
you think you have to tell me how
you feel about it you have failed
you are not listening to me

When I ask you to listen to me and
you think you have to tell me how
you feel about it you have failed
you are not listening to me

When I ask you to listen to me and
you think you have to tell me how
you feel about it you have failed
you are not listening to me

When I ask you to listen to me and
you think you have to tell me how
you feel about it you have failed
you are not listening to me

Listen

This poem illustrates the power and some of the pitfalls of listening.

ACTIVITY: Get into a group of 2 or 3 and in one minute outline as many benefits to the act of listening as possible. Jot down your answers and share a few of the answers with the whole group.

Then outline as many potential pitfalls to listening as you can see in the poem, and share some of those with the group.

As you read the poem again to the group (or have some group members read it out loud) consider from this segment of training how the skills of attending allow for much of what is required in this poem to happen.



Listen for Themes

- What are the core issues?
- Are there any repeated phrases or concepts?
- What seems to be most important to this person?
- What attitudes or emotions seem to be evident is the 'way' the person is speaking, aside from the content of what they are saying?

Listen for Themes

People can listen better if they strive to understand in terms of specific experiences, behaviours, and specific feelings and emotions. By trying to listen to the 'themes' of the speaker, a good listener can sometimes understand much better.

Constantly ask yourself:

- What are the core messages?
- Are there any repeated phrases or concepts?
- What seems to be most important to this person?
- What attitudes or emotions seem to be evident is the 'way' the person is speaking, aside from the content of what they are saying?

Your first job is not to formulate responses, but just to listen. This is called 'active' listening. However, if you can identify some of the themes that seem to be apparent in the conversation, you can ask about those to the speaker and often reach a deeper level of communication.



Listen intuitively to understand beyond words

Listen Intuitively

People are more than the sum of their verbal and nonverbal messages.

Listening in its deepest sense means listening to people as influenced by the context in which they 'live, move and have their being.' In other words, listen with your intuition or 'sixth sense'. This is not spooky — you are just allowing yourself to pick up the smallest cues to understand what a person is saying.

When you have paid attention to the attending skills and listened for themes in the conversation, there are some 'talking' skills that become a part of active listening. It is called 'active' listening because you (as the listener) now take an active role in seeking out a deeper understanding of the person speaking.



Probing

- Interventions designed to encourage the other person to continue to speak
 - Requesting more information
 - Open questions to invite information
 - Closed questions to confirm details
 - Silence

Probing

Following Skills, otherwise called ‘Probing’ are verbal tactics for helping people talk about themselves and define their problems more concretely in terms of specific experiences, behaviours, and feelings. As such, they can be used in all the stages of the helping process. Prompts and probes can take the form of questions, statements, or interjections. Of their very nature, probing makes some demand on the person either to talk or to become more specific. They are indirect requests of people to elaborate on their experiences, behaviours, or feelings.

Some examples include:

Requesting more information

This means simply being interested and asking for more information on a topic. This especially useful when there is some emotion attached to the original statement about that topic.

Open questions to invite information

Open questions invite more than a one word response. Examples could include: “Tell me about your day?” “What happened next?” or “What is going on in your life?”

Closed questions to confirm details

Closed questions invite a one word response and are often good for clarifying a position or a detail: “So did you write back to him?” or “How many dogs attacked you?”

Silence

Silence is an often underused listening skill. By focussing on attending skills (body language, etc.) and remain quiet, a speaker will often feel a greater invitation to speak.

Realise that if you extort information with a constant barrage of probes and prompts, people are unlikely to take more and more responsibility for problem solving and opportunity development. Therefore, after using a probe use basic empathy rather than another probe or series of probes as a way of encouraging further exploration.

Reflecting

- Reflecting content
 - what happened
- Reflecting feelings
 - emotions
- Paraphrases
 - their thoughts in your words
- Always check for accuracy

Reflecting

Reflecting is a powerful method of letting a person that you are actively listening and understanding what the person is saying. In doing so, you encourage them to go deeper in the conversation.

A primary skill of a good listener is to be able to separate content from feelings. Content is the ‘what happened’ of what the speaker says. It is ‘just the facts’. Not only does listening for content help the listener understand the story better, if the listener can tell that back to the speaker, it can help the speaker sort out the issues related to the story with more clarity. Saying back what you heard as the facts of the story is called reflecting content.

Associated with reflecting content is reflecting the feeling and emotions of the speaker. When the feelings are separated from the content, they can be dealt with by the speaker on their own, without all the associated ‘facts’ that often confuse the issue. A good listener will listen carefully and reflect back both feeling and content to the speaker.

ACTIVITY: Ask person ‘A’ to tell a 30 second story to person ‘B’ with as much detail as possible. Either tell a true story or make one up using as many names, twists and turns in plot as possible. Then get person ‘B’ to see if he/she can repeat them back. Tell person ‘A’ to correct person ‘B’ if there any mistakes.

Ask the group to consider how it made person ‘A’ feel to hear that person ‘B’ listened for the smallest details of the story.

The next part of reflecting is to focus on the feelings and emotions of the story. This time ask person ‘B’ to tell a story, again with a number of facts, names and changes in the story so that person ‘A’ must really concentrate to get it. Person ‘A’ will then reflect the content as before, but after that, will reflect the feelings or emotions that the speaker indicated.

Tell the group to be aware that feelings will rarely come with labels attached. The listener will need to pay careful attention and tentatively suggest what the feeling might be and allow person ‘B’ to either confirm or correct it. (i.e., it sounds like you were angry when he stole your donut?)



Reflecting *(continued)*

There are times when it may take too long and become distracting to reflect both feeling and content, and the listener may opt to paraphrase both in a brief statement back to the speaker about what was just said. This combines reflecting both content and feelings and can keep the speaker talking with minimum interruption. Paraphrasing is very helpful to the listener when a lot of information is coming quickly; it helps the listener to ensure he/she is getting the story.

With all reflecting, it is imperative to keep checking with the speaker to see if you are getting it right. Sometimes a speaker will not want to confront you by saying that you don't have the facts or the feelings just right... they may be too polite, or just think to themselves that you're not listening carefully enough or just don't understand.

Always ask: "Am I understanding you?"; "Is that right?" etc...



Summarising

- **It can:**
 - Focus a person's thoughts and feelings
 - Close a discussion
 - Prompt a person to explore something more fully
 - Help a person see a bigger picture
- **It can be used:**
 - To resume a conversation following a break
 - To focus a speaker back on a specific topic
 - When a person seems to have exhausted their thoughts on a matter
- **Warning**
 - Your summary may not be theirs
 - ALWAYS check for accuracy!

Summarising

A slightly different kind of paraphrase is the summary statement. This is a statement of content and associated feelings that summarise the whole topic of a conversation in a short space. Where a paraphrase is a short re-statement of everything that has been said, a summary is a brief synopsis of what has been said with the purpose to focus and move forward.

SUMMARISING CAN:

- Focus a person's thoughts or feelings by hearing them in a short statement
- Close a discussion on a topic. It can be useful to summarise and ask if there is anything else to be dealt with on that topic.
- Prompt a person to explore something more fully. If you miss something in the summary, or invite more information, the speaker can realise that you need more detail.
- Help a person get a handle on the bigger picture. A summary can help speakers organise their thoughts internally, helping them deal with the issues involved.

IT CAN BE USED:

- To resume a conversation following a break
- To prevent a person rambling on
- When a person seems to have exhausted their thoughts on a matter

WARNING!

Summarising can be a convenient way to end a conversation. If not done tentatively, it can convey a message that you aren't really listening and are impatient to just move on to something else. ALWAYS ask the speaker as to the accuracy of your summary. They know their mind better than you do.



Review Time

- SOLER
- Attending Skills
- Act Interested
- Ask Questions
- Reflect
- Listen Just a Little Longer
- Summarise Sparingly

Review Time

TO SUM UP:
If you have been a poor listener, merely deciding to try to listen harder will not work. You must discipline yourself and make a firm commitment if you wish to improve your skills. Here are six ways you can practice listening with feeling on a daily basis.

Use SOLER. Maintain good eye contact. Focus your full attention on your friend. Pay attention to your body placement and orientation. Sit attentively. For a few minutes act as if nothing else in the world matters except hearing your friend out. Block all other distractions from your mind.

Act interested in what you are about to hear. Raise your eyebrows, nod your head, smile, or laugh when appropriate.

Sprinkle your attentive listening with appropriate phrases to show agreement, interest, and understanding. Your friend wants to know that you understand the ideas he’s presenting. Try to think through what he is saying and fit it into your own experience.

Ask questions. Give encouragement by asking questions that illustrate your interest.

Reflect back what you are told and ask them to see if you are understanding what they’re saying.

Don’t be afraid of silence. Listen a little longer. Just when you think you are through listening, listen thirty seconds longer.

Use summaries tentatively and sparingly.

Types of Ineffective Listeners

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ■ The Bored listener | ■ The Evaluative listener |
| ■ The Selective listener | ■ The Inadequate listener |
| ■ The Defensive listener | ■ The Filtered listener |
| ■ The Interrupting listener | ■ The Egocentred (rather than person-centred) listener |
| ■ The Insensitive listener | |

Types of Ineffective Listeners

We’ve been speaking about to be a good listener; when you are, you will almost always be a help to others. However, it is possible to engage in what ‘looks like’ listening and actually be ineffective; in fact, falling into some of the traps listed below could actually harm rather than help:

The **‘bored listener’** has heard it all before. When someone rehashes complaints about his job, you may say to yourself, “Here we go again,” and put your brain in neutral. Yet on occasion when they say something new and look for support and encouragement from you, they aren’t likely to get it.

A **‘selective listener’** picks out bits and pieces of conversation that interest him and rejects the rest. For instance, you may be doing something while your friend is talking. Most of what they say goes in one ear and out the other, but when they mention something that vitally affects you, suddenly you become all ears. Other people do not want to hear anything disagreeable, upsetting, or different. We do not gain anything by rejecting what we do not wish to hear. In many situations we need all the facts in order to make a decision.

A **‘defensive listener’** twists everything said into a personal attack on self. One wife casually remarked to her husband that the new dress lengths left her with nothing to wear. Although she never mentioned purchasing a new wardrobe, he flew into a rage because he felt that her remarks were directed toward a lack of his ability to earn a living. A hurt wife gave her husband the ‘silent treatment’ all evening because she felt that his disgust with the children’s table manners was a personal attack on her ability to train them properly.

‘Interrupters’ spend their time not listening to what is being said, but forming a reply. Interested only in their own ideas, they pay little attention to the words of others and wait only for a split second when they can break in with, “Oh that’s nothing, you should hear what happened to me.” Or, “That reminds me of...”



Types of Ineffective Listeners *(continued)*

Another hazard is the **‘insensitive listener’** — one who cannot catch the feeling or emotion behind words. One young wife asks her husband to take her out to dinner. She does not need to be taken out to dinner as much as she needs reassurance that he still loves her and is willing to make the effort to please her. If he tells her bluntly that they can’t afford it or he is too tired, he hasn’t listened to the meaning behind her request.

‘The evaluative listener’ — Most people, even when they listen attentively, listen evaluative. That is, as they listen, they are judging the merits of what the other person is saying in terms of good-bad, right-wrong, acceptable-unacceptable, like-dislike, relevant-irrelevant, and so forth. Helpers are not exempt from this universal tendency.

People should first be understood, then challenged. Evaluative listening, translated into advice giving, will just put clients off. There are productive forms of evaluative listening. It is practically impossible to suspend judgment completely. Nevertheless, it is possible to set one’s judgment aside for the time being at the service of understanding people, their worlds, and their points of view.

‘The inadequate listener’ — In conversations it is easy for us to be distracted from what other people are saying. We get involved in our own thoughts, or we begin to think about what we are going to say in reply. At such times we may get the ‘You’re not listening to me!’ exclamation. Helpers, too, can become pre-occupied with themselves and their own needs in such a way that they are kept from listening fully to others. They are attracted to the other person, they are tired or sick, they are pre-occupied with their own problems, they are too eager to help, they are distracted because the other person has problems similar to their own, or the social and cultural differences between them and the other person makes listening and understanding difficult. The number of ways in which helpers can be distracted from listening to their clients is without end.

‘The filtered listener’ — It is impossible to listen to other people in a completely unbiased way. Through socialization we develop a variety of filters through which we listen to ourselves, others, and the world around us. As Hall (1977) notes: ‘One of the functions of culture is to provide a highly selec-

tive screen between man and the outside world. In its many forms, culture therefore designates what we pay attention to and what we ignore. This screening provides structure for the world’ (p. 85). We need filters to provide structure for ourselves, as we interact with the world. But personal, familial, sociological, and cultural filters introduce various forms of bias into our listening and do so without our being aware of it.

The stronger the cultural filters, the greater the likelihood of bias. For instance, a white, middle-class helper probably tends to use white, middle-class filters in listening to others. Perhaps this makes little difference if the person is also white and middle-class, but if the helper is listening to an Oriental person who is well-to-do and has high social status in his community, to a black mother from an urban ghetto, or to a poor white subsistence farmer, then the helper’s cultural filters might introduce bias. Prejudices, whether conscious or not, distort understanding. Like everyone else, helpers are tempted to pigeonhole others because of gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, social status, religious persuasion, political preferences, lifestyle, and the like. In Chapter 1 the importance of self-knowledge was noted. This includes ferreting out the biases and prejudices that distort our listening.

The fact-centred listener’ — Some helpers ask a lot of informational questions, as if the person would be cured if enough facts about him or her were known. It’s entirely possible to collect facts but miss the person. The antidote is to listen to others contextually, trying to focus on themes and key messages. Denise, as she listens to Jennie, picks up what is called the ‘pessimistic explanatory style’ theme (Peterson, Seligman, & Vaillant, 1988). This is the tendency to attribute causes to negative events that are stable. (‘It will never go away’), global (‘It affects everything I do’), and internal (‘It is my fault’). Denise knows that the research indicates that people who fall victim to this style tend to end up with poorer health than those who do not. There may be a link, she hypothesizes, between Jennie’s somatic complaints (headaches, gastric problems) and this explanatory style. This is a theme worth exploring.



Other Barriers to Communication

- Sending Solutions
- Judging
- Giving Advice

Other Barriers to Communication

Since there is in most of us a strong desire for effective communication, why is it so rare and difficult to establish? One of the prime reasons is that, without realizing it, people typically inject communication barriers into their conversations. It has been estimated that these barriers are used over 90 percent of the time when one or both parties to a conversation has a problem to be dealt with or a need to be fulfilled.

Communication barriers are high-risk responses — that is, responses whose impact on communication is frequently (though not inevitably) negative. These roadblocks are more likely to be destructive when one or more persons who are interacting are under stress. The unfortunate effects of communication blocks are many and varied. They frequently diminish the other’s self-esteem. They tend to trigger defensiveness, resistance, and resentment. They can lead to dependency, withdrawal, feelings of defeat or of inadequacy. They decrease the likelihood that the other will find her own solution to her problem. Each roadblock is a “feeling-blocker”; it reduces the likelihood that the other will constructively express her true feelings. Because communication roadblocks carry a high risk of fostering these negative results, their repeated use can cause permanent damage to a relationship.

What specific barriers are apt to hinder a conversation? Experts in interpersonal communication have pinpointed responses that tend to block conversation. The various barriers to communication can be divided into three major categories: judging, sending solutions, and avoiding the other’s concerns.

JUDGING:

When the listener analyses, diagnoses, criticises or blames the speaker — effective communication will probably stop. It is not the job of the listener to judge, as much as we may think it is vital! The role of the listener is to empower the speaker make their own decisions.

SENDING SOLUTIONS:

This happens when the listener tries to fix the problem by controlling the speaker. It can be by giving orders, directions, threatening or even ‘preaching’ (making a moral judgement with solutions attached).

ADVICE:

Often a speaker will ask you for advice concerning some issue. In fact, it will be easy for you to believe that giving advice is the main reason for your conversation. However, your job as a listener is to empower your partner to make their own decisions, form their own values and take responsibility for their lives. Even if you are asked for advice, it is best if you can first ask for them to tell you all about the problem and the options they can see for action or a decision. Then give principles for making decisions and let them make their own. Realise that if you give advice and it turns out wrong, then potentially you are the one to blame. Be careful with advice. It is a good idea to imagine the implications of any situation in five years from now. What you would want your mentor partner to remember you saying — especially if the situation turns out different from what you expect?



Practice Being Bad

- Review the past 3 slides and choose some of the types of ineffective listening – or one of the other barriers to communication
- Practice being an ineffective listener... it may be easier than you think

Practice Being Bad

ACTIVITY: Ask the group to again divide into pairs. If you want a more social activity, let them choose to be in groups of 3 or 4 so that some can be spectators and comment on the interaction between two people.

As you review the slides showing ineffective listening, ask them to choose a couple and make a role play where one person is trying to talk and the other person is acting like an ineffective listener.

Watch the group as they practice. If there are one or two who have a realistic role play, ask them to do it again in front of the group. As a group analyse all the things that the listener did as a barrier to good communication.

When You Need to Confront

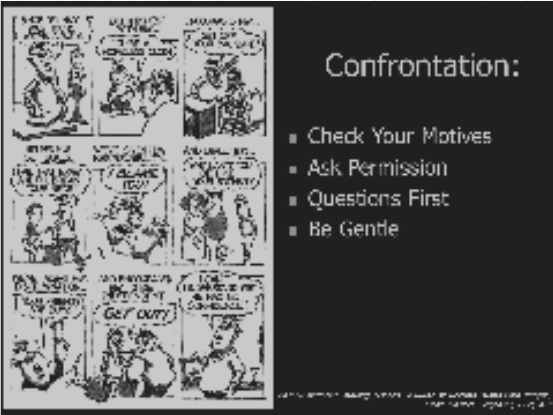
Sometimes people's vision of and feelings about themselves, others, and their world is distorted.



When You Need to Confront

Confronting
People's visions of and feelings about themselves, others, and the world are real and need to be understood. However, their perceptions of themselves and their worlds are sometimes distorted. For instance, if a client sees herself as ugly when in reality she is beautiful, her experience of herself as ugly is real and needs to be listened to and understood. But her experience of herself does not square with what is. This too, must be listened to and understood.





Confrontation

However, confrontation under the guise of attitudes like “tell it like it is” or “speak the truth, even if the truth hurts” can often be tool to tear down another person.

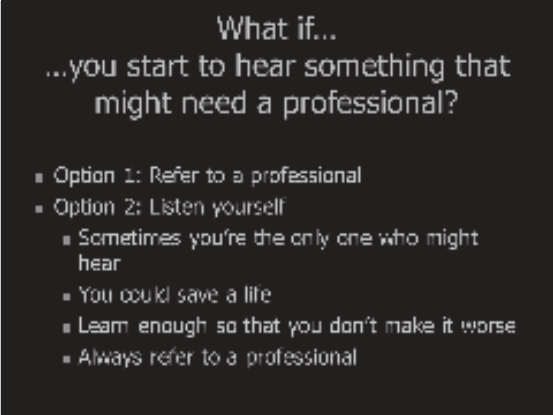
Some guidelines for confrontation:

Check your motives. Do you really need to deal negatively with this person right now? Is this something that could or will change? What is the worst thing that could happen if you DON'T confront?

Ask for permission to confront. It may not be your place in that person's mind, to challenge on a particular issue. If it isn't (in their mind), then your words could harm rather than help.

Confront with questions first. Test your perceptions. You may have the situation all wrong in your own mind. Ask first, then comment.

Confront gently. If you are going to challenge, then tread cautiously. Negative words stay longer, often forever. Make sure that the words you speak are words that you want them to remember for the rest of the their life.



What If...

If you practice and develop your listening skills, it will only be a matter of time before someone begins to tell you something that could be termed a ‘counselling situation’. That is, someone will have a problem or tell you something that could need a professional counsellor or psychologist to deal with.

The issue could be anything: it could be about relationships, depression, an addiction, past abuse, rape, suicide or any other number of issues. It is important first to recognise that any problem could be serious. If you have a ‘gut feeling’ that is something big, then it probably is. As in physical injuries, it is better to treat for the worst rather than assume something will be OK.

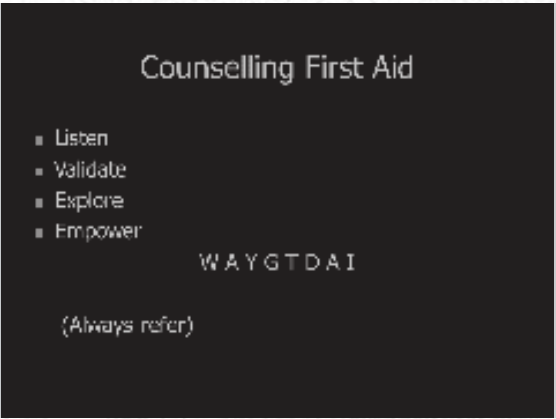
Your first response should be to ask whether the person has seen a professional about the problem. If they have, ask what the professional said to do about it, and check to see if they are following professional advice. If they have not, recommend that they do — and if possible, take steps (get a phone number, help them make an appointment) to ensure that they get to some help.

The reality in many situations, however, is that people talk to those whom they trust. If you are a person they trust, they will want to talk to you about the problem first — then possibly to a professional.

So realise that:

- Sometimes you're the only one who might hear the problem, so take the time to listen
- You could save a life. Take the time.
- Learn enough so that you don't make it worse. Pay attention to the ‘counselling first aid’ guidelines on the next slide so that, even if you can't do anything to make the problem better, you won't make it worse.
- Always refer to a professional. How many times should we say this? If you tell someone that a situation or problem is ok, and then the situation worsens — you have added to the harm. It's better to refer.





Counselling First Aid

Counselling First Aid

“when I stop thinking about myself in order
to pay attention to someone who needs me”

Think of a way to remember the following four words, and you will have a good basic structure for listening to a person who presents to you with a problem that could or should be dealt with by a professional. Remember the first and last things to do are to refer to someone more qualified than you!

LISTEN You’ve been learning about listening. Now put your best skills into practice. Don’t give advice or be tempted to solve the problem for them. Just listen. Get the facts and restate them to make sure you’ve got THE FACTS correct. Also listen for the feelings and reflect those back as well.

VALIDATE Validation means to let the person know that their problem is genuine and that what they are feeling is important. Often people in a crisis think they must be stupid for feeling the way they do. Ask: If someone else you know was in this situation, what do you think they would be feeling? Probably the same as you.

EXPLORE Be interested in the details of what is happening. Ask about the ‘other side’ (there is almost always an ‘other side’) of the story. Ask how the situation is impacting work, home, and other relationships. Try to ask questions that will give you (and more importantly, help the person see for themselves) a big picture of how this situation is affecting all areas of the person’s life.

EMPOWER So far you have listened well and not offered advice or direction. Hopefully you haven’t judged the person for the situation or expressed your own opinions on what action should be taken. You have been an empathetic (caring), but neutral listener and have at least done no harm; in fact you have helped greatly just by being there and interested. However, if you leave the person without any direction, you have missed an opportunity to help. There are eight words that are good to remember to end any ‘counselling first aid’ session: “What Are You Going To Do About It?”

By asking these words, you are giving the responsibility for the problem back to the person who owns it. You are empowering them to take action to deal with the problem in their life and in doing so letting them know that you believe in their ability to take a step on their own.

AND... remember to refer.

ACTIVITY: *It will not be a realistic situation, BUT... ask one person ‘A’ to think of a problem that might fit this category and have them (in their mind) make up some details to go along with the problem. Give them 30 sec to do this.*

Then role play a talk with a friend who is a good listener and realises that this is a situation that needs help. Have person ‘B’ go through the four steps outlined on this slide in a ‘summarised’ conversation. In other words, don’t make it realistic — as a pair working together see if you can go through the four steps of counselling first aid in under five minutes.



Confidentiality ...and when to break it

- You are the best helper when you remain confidential
- Confidentiality should be broken only when:
 - A life is in danger
 - There is suspected child abuse
- Remember you can ask for advice without breaking confidentiality

Confidentiality... and When to Break It

Confidentiality

The best way to betray a friend and ruin your reputation as a listener is to tell other people what someone has told you in confidence.

Here are some guidelines for any good listener concerning confidentiality:

1. Anything that a person says to you should be considered confidential unless they give you permission to tell others. If only we could live by this statement! Gossip destroys friendships and feeds envy and conflict.
2. A good listener (as a friend) should be morally bound to report, breaking confidentiality if necessary in the following circumstances (these are the same guidelines that teachers and counselling professionals abide by):
 - a. Suspected child abuse. If a person under the age of 17 is, or has been a victim of child abuse, and the listener becomes aware, or suspects it, then they must report.
 - b. Life endangerment. If a listener has reason to believe that a life may be in danger in the near future, either through harm from another person or from self, then they must report.
 - c. For any other situations which may arise in which the listener feels unsure as to the need for mandatory reporting, they (the listener) should seek advice from a counselling professional.
3. When a situation for mandatory reporting arises (for Child Abuse or Life in Danger), a listener should report to either/both:
 - a. Police — Department of Juvenile Aid
 - b. Dept of Youth and Family Services

In other situations where you may feel that reporting is necessary (danger from self harm or eating disorders for instance), other options may include:

 - c. Ambulance or Hospital
 - d. Parents
 - e. A Teacher

4. Again, if there is any question or doubt as to when to report or who to report to — call a professional counsellor or psychologist for advice, or call a community help line. You don't need to give names or details, but you will be a better help to someone when you are consulting with someone more qualified than you.

ACTIVITY: Discussion: spend some time as a group discussing what types of situations would require mandatory reporting. Be specific in discussing who you would tell, how you would tell and how it might affect the relationship with the listener.



Supervision

- Every good listener needs someone to 'debrief' with
- You can maintain confidentiality and still talk about an issue
- Get in the habit of asking for advice – by learning from professionals, you will become a better listener

Supervision

Every professional counsellor must have 'supervision'. This is the term used to describe a person whom the counsellor 'debriefs' with. The counsellor will tell about a particular situation, how he/she dealt with it and how the counsellor felt about the whole process. The supervisor (who is someone more experienced and often more qualified) then asks questions to help the counsellor learn from their work and encourage the counsellor not to 'own' the problem and remain worried or stressed about the person.

Every good listener needs to one or more 'supervisors' as well. For the listener, this could be a friend who is a professional, or a contact at a community counselling service, or if no other option is available, an older experienced person who is not involved with the person or situation.

When talking to a supervisor, you as a listener are not breaking confidentiality because:

1. You need not divulge names or specific information
2. You are speaking to a professional who is bound to confidentiality

If you can find a person who is willing to 'debrief' with you regarding the listening you have been engaged with, take advantage and be grateful for it. Learn from your 'supervisor' and strive to be the best listener (and therefore the best helper) that you can be.



"People will sit up and take notice of you if you will sit up and take notice of what makes them sit up and take notice."

Frank Bunker

Take Notice

Listening is a vital skill to all of our relationships. You have been given much information in this presentation and hopefully spent some time interacting with each other and practicing some of the skills.

Allow this presentation to be only a starter for you in your journey to become a better listener.



Acknowledgements

- Matthews, Andrew, *Making Friends, A Guide to Getting Along With People*, (Media Masters, Singapore, 1990), ISBN 981-00-1953-X
- Pease, Allan, *Body Language*, (Camel Publishing Company, 1979), ISBN 10-0-9593-6580-X
- Powell, John, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am*, (Thomas Moore Association: 1995), ISBN 0006281052
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Content on p. 13 –17 **Attending Micro-Skills** from Egan p.106–110

Content on p. 21 **Listen for Themes** based on Egan p.130–1

Content on p. 23 **Probing** based on Egan, p.141

Content on p. 31 **The Evaluative Listener** from Egan, p.117

Content on p. 32 **The Filtered Listener** from Egan, p.118

Content on p. 32 **The Fact-Centered Listener** from Egan, p.119

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