



RESPONSIVE LISTENING

LISTENING

There are three types of listening: listening casually, actively listening, and responsively listening. By reading on, you will find out which group you fall into, and how to reach the final group – a kind of listening will help you be someone who can help your friends if you believe they are in need.

This pamphlet has a large tilt on listening to people suffering from mental health issues. You may listen differently in different situations, but when it comes to mental health issues, you should aim for the latter category.

CASUAL LISTENING

A simple definition of this would be listening to someone, however not fully absorbing what they are saying, perhaps more focused on your own thoughts. This contributes to a feeling of isolation for the victim, leading to bigger, more serious issues. You might not be listening to your friends, because your phone is buzzing. Or you might be multitasking by texting someone or checking your social media. But when in a conversation, that should be your one focus, nothing else.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Once you have escaped from distractions, you may listen and attempt to understand what the person is saying, but not fully think through your response. It is often paired with appreciative listening, as you appreciate their words before giving an unthoughtful reaction. You may be told by the victim that they are going through a hard time. In response, you may give a shocked reaction, and reply with the cliched, 'I am here for you.' This is very well, but you must go further.

RESPONSIVE LISTENING

Responsive listening is listening to someone, not only vocally, but also by their actions, and responding in an empathetic way, providing help to the speaker. This help is often long term, and not a one off phrase. As was said before, you may not reply immediately, but you may go away, think and come back with a more thoughtful response. This must however not be done in a way that feels as if they are being ignored but rather the opposite, they must feel a sense of being wanted, and needed. Hence, your initial response may be something such as, 'We are all here for you', this gives you time to think, and it makes them feel wanted amongst a community.

This is often confused with critical listening; you listen carefully to what the person has to say, however then reply in a productive manner which is often critical of the person and their actions. In a scenario of people with mental health issues, this makes people feel left out. Hence, this form of responsive listening should be a form of relationship listening, building relationships through positive, empathetic comments.

ARE YOU A GOOD LISTENER?

TAKE THE QUIZ

Ask yourself these questions and answer **Yes, No, Sometimes**. This will help you identify areas for you to improve.

1. Do I judge people based on the way they speak?
2. Do I have biases towards some people when they come to talk to me?
3. Does my mind wander when people talk to me?
4. Do I check my phone when someone talks to me?
5. Do I interrupt people when they talk?
6. Do I try to focus the conversation in what I have to say?
7. Do I need to have the last word?
8. Do I end the conversation when I have had enough with it or because I feel bored with what someone tells me?
9. Do I try to help people when they tell me something which has upset them?
10. Do I only listen to what people have to say if they are my friends?

HOW TO BE A RESPONSIVE LISTENER

1. Set time aside with no distractions to talk to friends

It is important to provide an open and non-judgemental space with no distractions.

2. Let them share as much or as little as they want to

Let them lead the discussion at their own pace. Don't put pressure on them to tell you anything they aren't ready to talk about. Talking can take a lot of trust and courage. You might be the first person they have been able to talk to about this.

3. Don't try to diagnose or second guess their feelings

You probably aren't a medical expert and, while you may be happy to talk and offer support, you aren't a trained counsellor. Try not to make assumptions about what is wrong or jump in too quickly with your own diagnosis or solutions.

4. Keep questions open ended

Say "Why don't you tell me how you are feeling?" rather than "I can see you are feeling very low". Try to keep your language neutral. Give the person time to answer and try not to grill them with too many questions.

5. Talk about wellbeing

Exercise, having a healthy diet and taking a break can help protect mental health and sustain wellbeing. Talk about ways of de-stressing and ask if they find anything helpful.

6. Listen carefully to what they tell you

Repeat what they have said back to them to ensure you have understood it. You don't have to agree with what they are saying, but by showing you understand how they feel, you are letting them know you respect their feelings.

7. Offer them help in seeking professional support and provide information on ways to do this

You might want to offer to go the Stevenson Centre with them, or help them talk to a friend or family member. Try not to take control and allow them to make decisions.

8. Know your limits

Ask for help or signpost if the problem is serious. If you believe they are in immediate danger or they have injuries that need medical attention, you need to take action to make sure they are safe.

People with mental health problems sometimes experience a crisis, such as breaking down in tears, having a panic attack, feeling suicidal, or experiencing their own or a different reality. You may feel a sense of crisis too, but it's important to stay calm yourself.

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