

## SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

### LISTENING

Good listening involves all of the following:

- \_ Eye contact (culturally appropriate)
- \_ Demonstrate attention, e.g. nodding
- \_ Encouragement, e.g. “*Mm-hmm*”, “*Yes*”
- \_ Minimize distractions, e.g. TV, telephone, noise
- \_ Do not do other tasks at the same time
- \_ Acknowledge the client’s feeling, e.g. “*I can see you feel very sad*”
- \_ Do not interrupt the client unnecessarily
- \_ Ask questions if you do not understand
- \_ Do not take over and tell your own ‘story’
- \_ Repeat back the main points of the discussion in similar but fewer words to check you have understood the client correctly (this is known as paraphrasing, reflection, clarification, summarizing)

*“You seem to be saying .....*”

*“In other words, .....*”

*“You feel ..... because .....*”

*“You seem ..... What’s happening for you? What are you thinking about?”*

*“I wonder if you are feeling ..... because .....?”*

*“Correct me if I am wrong, but .....*”

*“Let me check if I have understood you correctly. You ....., is that correct?”*

*“What I hear you saying is .....*”

An important component of good listening skills is the ability to convey empathy.

Empathy involves trying to understand how individuals view themselves or their world.

**Paraphrasing** involves restating, in your own words, the essence of what the other has said. Paraphrasing assures the other that you are listening and it assists her/him in focusing on her/his situation more clearly.

## QUESTIONING

Questioning is an important to communication. It helps us understand another's situation and it helps us assess their experiences, concerns, etc..

When asking questions:

- \_ **DO** ask one question at a time
- \_ **DO** look at the person
- \_ **DO** be brief and clear
- \_ **DO** ask questions that serve a purpose
- \_ **DO** use questions to help the person to talk about her/his experiences and behaviors
- \_ **DO** use questions to explore and understand issues and to heighten awareness
- \_ **DO NOT** ask questions simply to satisfy curiosity — irrelevant questions may cause people to feel pushed or reluctant to answer. Too much time may be spent thinking of questions rather than actively listening. Too many questions will be experienced as intrusive and similar to an interrogation

There are essentially three styles of questions:

### 1. Closed questions

A closed question limits the response of the person to a one-word answer.

e.g. *“Do you feel supported in your department?”*

Closed questions do not require others to think about what they are saying. Answers can be brief and often result in the need to ask more questions.

### 2. Open questions

An open question requires more than a one-word answer.

e.g. *“How have you experienced support in your department?”*

Open questions generally begin with ”what”, “where”, “how” or “when”. They invite others to continue talking and to decide what direction they want the conversation to take.

### 3. Leading questions

Leading questions are questions where the one person guides the other to give the answer they desire.

These questions are usually judgmental.

e.g. *“You do have support in your department, don't you?”*

\*Adapted from World Health Organization Counselling Microskills training materials, Module 2, submodule 3:  
[http://www.searo.who.int/LinkFiles/Training\\_Materials\\_voluntary-module2-3.pdf](http://www.searo.who.int/LinkFiles/Training_Materials_voluntary-module2-3.pdf)

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Supportive Communication Skills Activity taken from *TEAM-Science* Program (NIH R25 grant) Training Session for Career Coaches, developed by Dr. Angela Byars-Winston, University of Wisconsin-Madison, July 25, 2008.  
Retrievable at: <http://videos.med.wisc.edu/presenters/846>

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