

Tips on listening

Listening competence is essential in your work with health promotion and health education. And it is important for coordinators, facilitators and health ambassadors to improve their skills.

Listening is one of the great skills: underestimated and under-practised. One of a facilitator's primary jobs is to break the cycle of communication failure, and you begin to do this by listening and teaching others to listen.

In this document you find ways to improve your listening. You can also use the ideas in a training programme for pupils, facilitators and health ambassadors.

1. Why is just listening so important?

Listening properly to other people:

- Creates rapport;
- Builds trust, influence and understanding;
- Encourages flow of information and reduces misunderstanding;
- Helps people to talk and express their feelings;
- Helps people to accept responsibility for their own problems.

2. Basic approaches

Most people are never listened to properly, and you should not underestimate the significance of simply giving people your entire attention. Here are some ways you can emphasise the fact that you are actually doing so:

- Give each speaker your full attention: allow no interruptions;
- Give them plenty of eye contact;
- Relax, lean slightly forward, and nod your head from time to time;
- Use encouraging sounds and phrases, such as: 'Ah', 'Yes', 'I see', 'Really', 'OK', 'Tell me more', etc.;
- Use reflective questions to encourage them.

Doing these things will encourage people to be open with you. You also need to show them and let them feel that you have understood not only their experience, but also the feelings it has evoked in them. So your listening responses need to reflect not only your intellectual understanding of what has happened, but your ability to empathise with them: *to feel what they have felt*.



Here are **some additional tips** for making your listening effective:

- Let people tell their story in their own way: resist the temptation to put words into their mouths;
- Accept feelings and perceptions at face value: there is no such thing as a misperception;
- Do not humour people or hide behind a professional facade: that may be part of what caused the problem originally.

Some examples of **active listening - use questions/comments like this:**

- **Affirming:** *"You have really helped me to understand this situation."*
- **Clarifying:** *"When did this happen?", or "How did it affect you?"*
- **Eliciting:** *"How do you think this can be resolved?"*
- **Empathising:** *"I want to see this situation through your eyes."*
- **Encouraging:** *"Can you tell us more? What else needs to be said?"*
- **Normalising:** *"It seems that many people feel the way you do."*
- **Reflecting (interpreting):** *"Let me see if I have understood you correctly."*
- **Responding (sharing):** *"Thank you."* [Then ask someone else:] *"How do **you** see it?"*
- **Summarising:** *"Can I just make sure I've got this right?"*
- **Validating:** *"I appreciate your willingness to be so open."*