

FACT SHEET

HOW TO LISTEN WITH CARE & COMPASSION

Listening is not an easy task! However, the benefits of listening to a student fully when they are trying to share something can reap valuable benefits, for you and the student. Effective listening can help you decode what a student is attempting to share and assist her in processing and resolving the feelings she is experiencing. To be the best listener you simply have to choose to listen. Once you have committed to that choice, you can use these principles to be most effective.

Be There—Give your fullest attention, in mind and body! Students know when they have an adult’s attention, and when they don’t. Use responses such as head nods and verbal affirmations to show your interest in what is being shared.

Shhhhh—Don’t speak, interrupt or answer students until they have completed their thoughts. Once a student is done, allow a few seconds to pass before you respond. This break also allows you time to form your own response without trying to develop it as you are listening.

Mirror, Mirror—Provide feedback by paraphrasing what you heard. This assures the student that you were listening and allows the opportunity for clarification of any misinterpretations.

Open Door—Display an open forum for students to share their thoughts and feelings. Create a safety zone for thoughts to be shared without the fear of being judged or criticized. Feel what they feel by listening with empathy.

“Listening means trying to see the problem the way the speaker sees it – which means not sympathy, which is feeling for him, but empathy, which is feeling with him.”

~ S. I. Hayakawa

Encourage Reflection and Processing—

Help students reflect on their own feelings and thoughts by asking questions that will help them determine the best course of action. Don’t resolve their feelings or conflicts for them; help them figure it out on their own so they will build confidence and trust in their own abilities.

Watch Body Language —Listen, beyond words, to the emotion and feeling behind the words. Make note of body language that is not congruent with the words that are being spoken. Sometimes body language is more telling than what is actually being said.

Material adapted from Joe Wilmot’s “Listen up: Helping children deal with difficult emotions,” <http://www.gordon-training.com/listenup.html>

Do You Hear Me Now?

Additional things to consider:

- ▲ Resist assuming what you think is going to be said.
- ▲ Keep eye contact with the individual speaking.
- ▲ Use positive and affirming body language.
- ▲ Avoid emotional involvement and stay objective.
- ▲ Avoid distractions, be there fully for the person speaking.
- ▲ Give advice only when asked for it.

Words of Caution

- ▲ Trust your instincts to make a referral or seek further professional assistance when appropriate.
- ▲ Never “promise not to share with anyone” before hearing what a student has to say. You may have to share information if that student, or another person, could potentially be harmed.