



National Healthcare  
Communication  
Programme

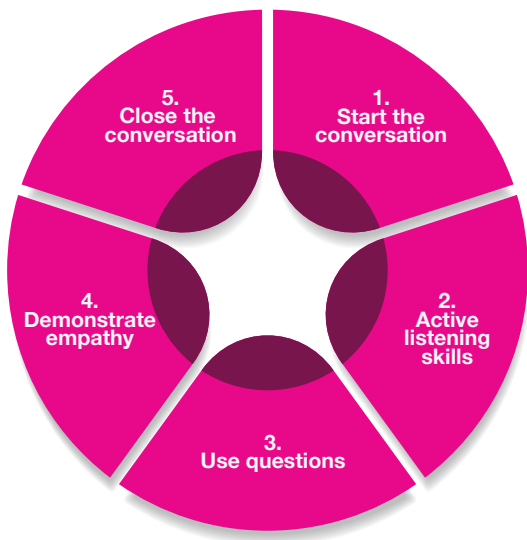
# Listening

A leaflet for healthcare staff



*Making conversations easier*

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# Listening

“

*There is an art to participating in conversations about matters that touch on strong emotions. There are skills we can use and habits we can develop so that we offer support without overwhelming the other person, we show our willingness to listen without being intrusive, and we hold a space in which they feel able to discuss their distress if they wish to do so. We offer, and they choose.*

Kathryn Mannix, Listen, 2021



# Listening

## 1. Start the conversation

Create an environment of respect and positive regard by asking permission before starting a conversation.

### Ask permission

*It looks like there is something on your mind. Would you like to talk about it?*

### Communication skills

☐ Ask permission



### TIP

People are generally more receptive to sharing important information when we build a good relationship with them. For this reason an important listening skill is to begin the conversation by asking permission.



# Listening

## 2. Active listening skills

Don't be afraid to use **silence** during a conversation. Silence offers you and the patient time to reflect on what has been said.

### Effective pauses

*You sound sad about the loss of your father (pause)... tell me more about that*



### Communication skills

- ☐ Silence
- ☐ Effective pauses
- ☐ Minimal encouragers
- ☐ Summarising
- ☐ Non-verbals (*face the patient, open body posture, leaning, nodding, appropriate eye contact*)



# Listening

## 2. Active listening skills

### Minimal encouragers

*Uh-huh/Yes/Right/  
Ok/Mmm-mm*

Brief responses to let the patient know you are listening and keeps them talking.

### Summarising

*What you have told me so far is... Have I got that right?*



### TIP

Listening to understand helps you to hear the words that are spoken **and** any underlying messages from the patient. Summarising what the patient has said and repeating it back to them shows that you have listened. This also gives the patient an opportunity to **hear** what they have said, reflect on it and correct any misunderstandings.



# Listening

## 3. Use questions

Helpful questions usually require more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer, typically beginning with 'who,' 'what,' 'when,' 'where,' and 'how'.

### Open questions

*Tell me more about..? How do you feel about?... What have you considered so far?*

Ask open questions that show you've been paying attention and that move the discussion forward.



### Communication skills

- ☐ Open questions
- ☐ Screening
- ☐ Closed questions
- ☐ Silence



# Listening

## 3. Use questions

### Screening

*So that's the headache, the chest pains and your repeat prescriptions – anything else?*

### Closed questions

*Have you ever had this feeling in your chest before?*

Screen at a natural pause to encourage the patient to continue their story.



### TIP

Open questions are broad in nature, do not suggest a 'right' answer and show the patient that you are interested in their story. Closed questions do not promote discussion and are only used when you want specific information or to bring closure to an issue. Closed questions usually begin with words like: *Do, Can, How many*, and so on.





# Listening

## 4. Demonstrate empathy

Identify the feeling or emotion. Even if you initially get the emotion wrong, this effort demonstrates to the person that you are trying to understand where they are coming from. Sit with the emotion, don't try to 'fix' it.

### Mirroring

*I am sick and tired  
of feeling ignored...*

*Feeling ignored, ok...  
tell me more about that...*



### Communication skills

- ☐ Mirroring
- ☐ Paraphrasing
- ☐ Emotional labelling
- ☐ Summarising
- ☐ Silence



# Listening

## 4. Demonstrate empathy

### Para-phrasing

*If I understand correctly,  
you are feeling angry about  
being told...*

### Summarising

*Let me check if I  
have this right....?*

### Emotional labelling

*You sound pretty upset about... You seem...  
I hear... I can see that you are worried*

### TIP

Listening enables us not only to hear the words that people are saying but to understand the feelings and emotions behind the words.

Empathy is a natural by-product of listening and demonstrating empathy can help to absorb some of the tension in healthcare conversations. As empathy is shown, rapport and trust can develop. This rapport makes it easier for patients to share their concerns and for staff and patients to work together.



# Listening

## 5. Close the conversation

Agree next steps for you and for the patient. Emphasise support.

### Summarise

*So, just to recap before we finish, we talked about...*

### Final check

*What questions do you have for me?*



## Communication skills

- ☐ Summarise
- ☐ Final check
- ☐ Emphasise support
- ☐ Mutual agreement
- ☐ Show appreciation



# Listening

## 5. Close the conversation

### Emphasise support

*We are here to support you if you want to talk some more*

### Mutual agreement

*Would it be alright to leave this for now?*

### Show appreciation

*Thank you for sharing your story with me*



### TIP

Closing well, we reach a shared understanding and agreement that we can leave the conversation and pick it up again together at another time.

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