



## Appendix 6.5

### Effective Communication Skills for meaningful Patient Engagement

Reference: Adapted from Professional Supervision Training Programme for HSCP Supervisor Resource Pack (HSE National HSCP Office and Eileen O'Neill, Independent Trainer and Consultant)

#### Listening

Listening is a basic skill of all interpersonal work and indeed a requirement in relationships. There is frequently a presumption that everyone knows how to listen and therefore listens well – this is a myth with which anyone who has ever tried to speak to a person who is distracted or preoccupied will identify.

Being well listened to shows respect for the speaker, displays interest in the content being communicated and in the person speaking, it encourages reflection in the speaker and frequently allows them to come to their own conclusions about the topic under discussion or to a new awareness about themselves.

Active listening involves ears for hearing, eyes for observation and objective awareness with attention to feelings. Both participants in the communication need to be receptive and open to each other and to what they say and how it is said (whether agreed with or not) and to what is not said.

Listening is a two-way process and needs to be evident in both parties. There needs to be openness to consider what is being said to them in the same way there needs to be objective listening the other person's point of view or experience and consider it. It can be challenging to listen openly and with respect when what is being said is not what was expected, is not agreed with or is not liked. This is where the skills and professionalism need to be used objectively.

Never underestimate the value of giving your attention to another through listening. When thanked for helping, at times people have been known to respond with "I didn't do anything, I only listened" – sometimes just listening (with awareness and for a purpose) is the most valuable and worthwhile thing one person can do for another.

Both are responsible for the quality of listening in a conversation / consultation which has a direct impact on the quality of the experience.

The following words are frequently associated with effective listening;

**Open, curious, genuine, objective, respectful, interested, focused and active.**

#### Blocks to effective listening include

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The listener rushing, both mentally and physically and not being present in the moment.</li> <li>• Distractions in the environment (Outside noise, room too hot/cold, phone not turned off) or preoccupations (Did I remember to tell her that I would not be at the meeting? Am I going to be finished here in time for my next appointment? I hope that X returns my call before I finish).</li> <li>• Making judgements about what is being said or judging the person and having my mind made up before I hear the full story.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having heard it before.</li> <li>• Not being interested in what is being said or in the speaker.</li> <li>• Being so interested that objectivity is lost.</li> <li>• The listener's emotional response or triggers to what is being said.</li> <li>• Wanting to tell my own story because something similar happened to me known as "Hi-jacking" or "me too-ing".</li> </ul> |
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**Points to remember when listening...**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen to understand – not just to reply.</li><li>• Give your complete attention to the speaker (rather than to yourself) and don't interrupt unnecessarily.</li><li>• Listen for what is said and for what is not said (including feelings, values, tone of voice, silence, hesitations, energy), be aware of your own body language in this.</li><li>• Ask open-ended questions to encourage further comment from the speaker, this shows you are interested and listening to understand.</li><li>• Reframe concisely and summarise occasionally what you have heard/picked up to allow the supervisee to hear another perspective.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure your input has a purpose, no idle curiosity questions which could be more to do with your area of interest than to do with what is relevant to the person speaking.</li><li>• Effective listeners speak very little – when they do it is with a purpose.</li><li>• Listening is a two-way process, both participants in the dialogue need to commit to effective listening otherwise it becomes nothing more than a monologue.</li></ul> |
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## Open-Minded and Openness

Most people like to see themselves as open-minded. However being open-minded is not always as simple as it sounds. It can pose challenges to our sense of self and to our sense of the world.

Being open-minded involves being open to hearing how they are being experienced by others; open to hearing the unexpected; open to looking at things from a different perspective; open to change; open to changing both behaviour and attitudes; open to being challenged; open to learning and to doing something different with the learning; open to opportunity; open to difference; open to trying new things; open to “not knowing”; open to the unexpected; open to admitting vulnerability; open to being honest. In other words there needs to be an absence of defensiveness, presumptions and judgements.

Displaying a high degree of openness in their dealings with others, shows they are interested and curious about different perspectives and experiences. This contributes to more effective listening, problem-solving, analysis and creative thinking.

Negative experiences which have not been worked through can block open-mindedness. At times it can present as concern/fear/anger/rigidity/reluctance which is based on their own experience without the ability to consider other views or needs. In such circumstances there can be an over focus and constant reiteration of the reasons why no change (or lots of change without grounded rationale) is required. The negative experience is carried as the defining experience and all others are filtered through it, expecting the same negative outcome.

Feedback, when provided in a natural and respectful manner as part of engaging with each other encourages the development of open-mindedness, valuing it from the outset. Being closed and defensive blocks the opportunities for open, honest and connected conversations. Honest reflection on what has gone well and not so well in our engagement with others, allows for reflection on our habits, attitudes and potential bias. This requires an open mind at all times to ensure we learn from the everyday experiences.

Open-mindedness requires curiosity, to be willing to get to know themselves better and to try something new, to welcome difference and informed change and to eliminate defensiveness and “but” from their thinking.

## Attitudes, Attributes and Values

### Empathy and Compassion

Empathy has been described as “the ability to enter into and understand the world of another person and to communicate this understanding to him or her” (Egan 1986:95).

The Royal College of Psychiatrists in the Faculty Report GAP/02 (2015: 3) identify empathy as “our ability to understand and emotionally recognise the feelings, motivations and intentions of another human being. Empathy allows us to make sense of feelings and to be able to predict the effects of behaviour on others”.

The HSE (2015) identifies Compassion as one of its four Values. Compassion has been described as “A sensitivity to distress together with the commitment, courage and wisdom to do something about it” (Cole-King and Gilbert, 2011).

Central to both empathy and compassion are active listening skills. Empathy and compassion when displayed can create a secure and collaborative environment which supports the development of trust where another can feel secure in exploring their feelings, taking risks and being challenged. (Adapted CWDC, 2009).

The use of empathy and compassion are central to all good health care practice.

### Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is more than the ability to identify one’s skills and strengths and being able to name one’s limitations, it includes:

- Alertness to and challenging of personal bias, prejudice and judgments.
- Questioning of oneself and an openness to being questioned by others.
- Curiosity about what experiences and people mean to us and how these influence our practice and development.
- Conscious consideration of the messages and feedback we get from others – both formally and informally.
- Ongoing reflection on the impact of personal values and potential tensions between personal and professional values.

## Values

Care, Compassion, Trust and Learning have been clearly identified by the Health Service Executive as its core values (2015). Values underpin everything we do and need to be reflected in our day to day attitudes, interactions and professional practice.

O'Neill, 2015

