

Communication skills

1. Active Listening

Active listening is an attempt to truly understand the content and emotion of what the other person is saying by paying attention to the verbal and non-verbal messages. To actively listen, you must focus, hear, respect, and communicate your desire to understand. It is *not* a time to be planning a response or conveying how *you* feel.

- **Skills to use:**
 - ✓ Eye contact
 - ✓ Body language, e.g. open and relaxed posture, forward lean, appropriate facial expressions, positive use of gestures, etc.
 - ✓ Verbal cues, such as “um-hmmm”, “sure”, “ah”, “yes”, etc.
- **Verbal and non-verbal cues to avoid:**
 - ✓ Body language – slouching, turning away, or pointing a finger
 - ✓ Timing – speaking too fast or too slow
 - ✓ Facial expression – smiling, squirming, raising eyebrows, gritting teeth
 - ✓ Tone of voice – shouting, whispering, sneering, whining
 - ✓ Choice of words – speaking sharply, accusatively, pretentiously, over-emotionally

Be sure to understand what may be more or less culturally appropriate in regards to non-verbal cues.

2. “I” Messages

“I” messages keep the focus on you and explain your feelings in response to someone else’s behavior.

- **“I” messages do:**
 - ✓ avoid judgments
 - ✓ help keep communication open
 - ✓ communicate information and respect for both people’s positions
- **“I” messages do not**
 - ✓ accuse
 - ✓ point a finger at the other person
 - ✓ place blame

Example: “I was really sad when you didn’t show up for our meeting last week. I look forward to our meetings, and I was disappointed not to see you. In the future, I would appreciate it if you could call me and let me know if you will not be able to make it.”

3. Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a good way to make sure you heard correctly what your mentee said and lets your mentee know that you hear, understand, and care about his/her thoughts and feelings. Paraphrasing enables you to gather information and be able to simply report back what you heard in the message—the facts and the attitudes/feelings that s/he expressed. *This communication skill is particularly helpful with youth, since youth culture/language is constantly changing.*

- **Phrases to use for deciphering fact**
 - ✓ “So you’re saying that . . .”
 - ✓ “What I heard you say is... do I have that right?”
 - ✓ “The problem is . . .”

- **Phrases to use for deciphering *feeling***

- ✓ “You feel that . . .”
- ✓ “Your reaction is . . .”
- ✓ “And that made you feel . . .”

Remember, paraphrasing does not mean evaluating, sympathizing, stating an opinion, offering advice, analyzing or questioning.

4. **Open-Ended Questions**

Open-ended questions are intended to collect information by exploring feelings, attitudes and views. They are extremely helpful when dealing with young people, who often answer questions with as few words as possible.

- **Examples of open-ended questions:**

- ✓ “How do you see this situation?”
- ✓ “What are your reasons for . . .?”
- ✓ “Can you give me an example?”
- ✓ “How does this affect you?”
- ✓ “How did you decide that?”
- ✓ “What would you like to do about it?”
- ✓ “What part did you play?”