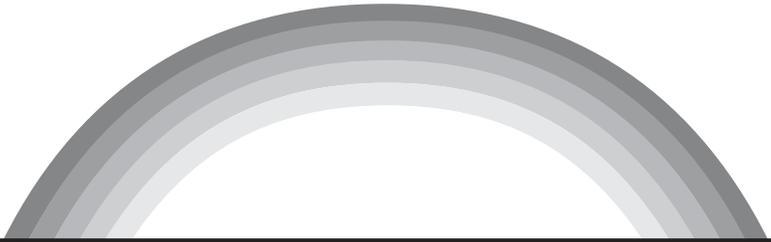


Disaster Recovery



Show You Care By Listening

Most people think listening is easy. However, really listening—not only to the words but also to the meaning behind the words—is hard work. The hard work of listening often is the best help we can offer to a person in trouble or under mental strain. The following ideas can help you sharpen your listening skills and offer support to others.

1. Listening is an active process. It is not only hearing; it is actively trying to understand and feel another person's concerns.

2. Listeners should talk less than the speaker. When you're actively listening, give the speaker your full attention. Keep the focus on what you hear and what you see. If you don't know what to say, don't say anything. Silence is a response in itself. It gives the speaker an open door to elaborate, clarify, or reflect.

3. When you respond, focus on the speaker. You can paraphrase what you've heard, identify the feelings you've heard, or state the feelings you experienced while listening. Even though you may have had a similar experience, it's better not to spend time telling your story. Keep the talk and the attention focused on the speaker, not the listener.

4. Avoid trying to cheer up the person. Phrases like "things could be worse" or "there's a silver lining in every cloud" are apt to make the person think you don't understand.

5. Even if you have had a similar experience, you never can fully know how another person is feeling. Saying "I know how you feel" is not accurate and may make another person less likely to share.

6. Don't make promises you can't keep. "Things will get better" is a promise you have no control over. It's unfair to promise what you can't control.

You can, however, briefly share a time when hope returned to you even after the situation looked hopeless. You also can share your confidence that the person has the power to make it through the difficult situation with the help of others.

7. Use open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer. "How" questions are better than "why" questions.

8. Avoid advice. What is important is that the speaker tell his or her story and identify personal feelings. Do not make suggestions or do problem solving unless the person asks for your ideas. If your suggestions are requested, help the person identify options, rather than give advice.

9. Avoid judgment. Even praise can be viewed as judgment. It may seem that if you have the right to praise, you also have the right to criticize. Good communication ends when judgment begins.

10. Don't feel you need to solve the problem—you may not be able to do anything to solve it. Listening often is all we can do, and sometimes, it is the most important thing we should do.

Prepared by extension specialists at Iowa State University.

... and justice for all

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