Active Listening Techniques

The Spirit of Active Listening: Good listening requires that the listener be **curious**- know that you don't know everything. Resist assumptions. People and situations are unique and complex. Expect to be surprised. It also requires **genuine interest** –real listening is impossible without a genuine interest in what's important to someone else.

	Technique	Purpose	How to Do This
Acknowledging Information	**Restating Key Points** *"So you've been trying to get this problem resolved for several weeks."* *"So you think I'm singling you out because you're a woman. Is that right?"* *"You find the process too complicated. Is that right?"*	1. To show that you're listening and understand the speaker's key points 2. To check your meaning and interpretation	• Repeat the speaker's key points or paraphrase in your own words
	Reflecting Feelings *"You seem upset about..."* *"You're really frustrated at the length of time this process is taking."* *"You were embarrassed when he made that comment in front of everybody. Is that right?"*	1. To show that you understand how the other person feels 2. To help the other person consider his/her own feelings after hearing them expressed by someone else	• Identify the speaker's emotions • It is often helpful to include the **reason why** the speaker feels this way, to avoid sounding patronizing
	Reflecting Values and Positive Intentions *"Being treated fairly is important to you."* *"You raised your voice to get my attention. Is that right?"* *"So you've done everything you can think of to resolve this."*	1. To acknowledge the speaker's values and how they affect the conflict 2. To recognize the speaker's positive intentions and efforts	• Identify the speaker's values, positive intentions or positive efforts
Inviting Information	**Encouraging** *"Mmm"*	1. To convey interest and connectedness 2. To give space to the speaker 3. To encourage the speaker to keep talking	• Be attentive • Minimize distractions • Be aware of your body language • Pause & allow for silence • Self monitor before speaking
	Clarifying Questions "Can you say more about that?" "What happens when....?" "What is it that I'm doing that bothers you?"	1. To clarify what is said 2. To get more information 3. To help the speaker be concrete & specific	• Ask open-ended questions • Ask questions that follow the speaker's thoughts

Communication Blockers

The following approaches tend to discourage people from telling you about their interests, feelings, needs, and experiences. We are not saying these approaches are never appropriate; for instance, in some situations it may be helpful to reassure someone or give them advice. Before doing so, however, it is good to ask yourself if you have really taken the time to hear the person out and acknowledge what they have told you.

COMMUNICATION BLOCKER	EXAMPLE
Advising	*"What you should do is..."*
Analysing / Diagnosing	*"The problem as I see it is..."* *"You're only worried about this because you are an uptight kind of person'*
Blaming	*"This would never have happened if you hadn't..."* *'You always' 'You never'*
Cross-Examining	*Fast paced, close-ended questions eg 'what did you do that for' but not really asking*
Diverting/ Changing the Topic	*"What I did is not the issue. What about when you...?"*
Judging/Evaluating	*"What you're doing wrong is..."* *"The only good thing about this is..."*
Using Non-Verbal Blockers	*Negative body language: crossed arms, frowning* *Negative noises: huffing, sighing, tsking* *Distracting movements: pacing, tapping, leg-shaking*
Reassuring/Minimizing	*"Don't worry, it's no big deal."* *"That's just how Bob is."*
Denying other people's feelings	*'You shouldn't feel like that'*
Interrupting	*Shows your main interest is what you want to say*
Using 'BUT' instead of "AND"	*'I know that's what you think, BUT'* *(remember: Never put a "BUT" in the face of an angry person!)*
Defending the other	*'I know why she acts like that, it's because, and she's just trying to...'*
Being philosophical	*'There's nothing you can do about this anyway, it'll never change"*

Raising a Concern

Purpose: To approach someone about a problem in a way that does not make it worse, and makes them more likely to move to problem solving.

Method: Talk about how the person's behaviour or the situation is affecting what is important to you or your organization (i.e. your interests)
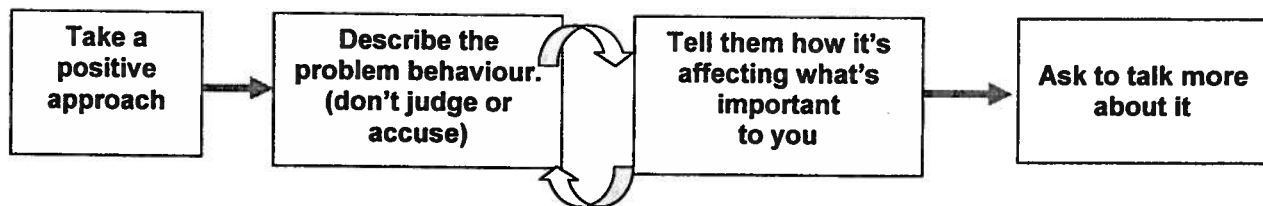
1. How to Approach

- Separate the person from the problem
- Focus on how your interests are being affected by the person or situation
- Get emotionally ready, use strategies to remain calm

2. Raising the issue

- **Take a positive approach** (e.g. addressing the other person by their name, and saying something positive)
- **Use neutral language** (i.e. concern vs. complaint) so that the other person feels respected and can "save face" (see "Communication Blockers" pg.22)
- **Describe the specific problem behaviour** (describe don't judge)
  "It's a problem for me when you ask questions while I'm speaking."
- **Describe the impact on what is important to you or your organization**
  "It makes it difficult for me to focus on what I'm saying."
- **Request further discussion or more information**
  "Could we discuss this?"
- **State your preference for the future**
  "I'd like to finish giving you information before you ask questions,"

The Basic Idea

| Take a positive approach | → | Describe the problem behaviour. (don't judge or accuse) | Tell them how it's affecting what's important to you | → | Ask to talk more about it |

Example:
"Sula, I really appreciate your ideas and questions AND I need to let you know that it's a problem for me when you ask questions while I'm speaking. It makes it difficult for me to focus on what I'm saying. I'd like to finish giving you information before you ask questions, which will make this process less frustrating for me. Can we discuss this?"

There are many ways to convey these main elements. Below are two possible formats.

> Chan, there's something I'd like to talk to you about. I really value your friendship, AND I have to let you know that....
>
> I feel _____(state feelings/emotion)
> when _____(specify problem behaviour)
> because _____(describe impact on me)
>
> Could we discuss this? OR I'd like to work out a solution with you. OR What are your thoughts about it? (OR invite further information in another way).

> Karim, your participation in our programme is very important for us. I have to let you know that...
>
> It's about what happens_____(specify area of concern in a neutral way)
> _____. (describe impact.)
> Because of this I feel _____. (state feeling or emotion) [optional]
>
> Invite further discussion.

3. Respond don't react and use Active Listening
- Avoid becoming defensive
  - ➤ Remember it is natural for the other person to escalate
- Use Active Listening
  - ➤ If they talk about their reasons or justify their behaviour, listen to their concerns and ask more about it.

4. Move to Problem Solving
- Invite other person's ideas (What if... What do you suggest? What do you think is a fair solution?)
- Continue to focus on the problem if the other person stonewalls or makes attacks
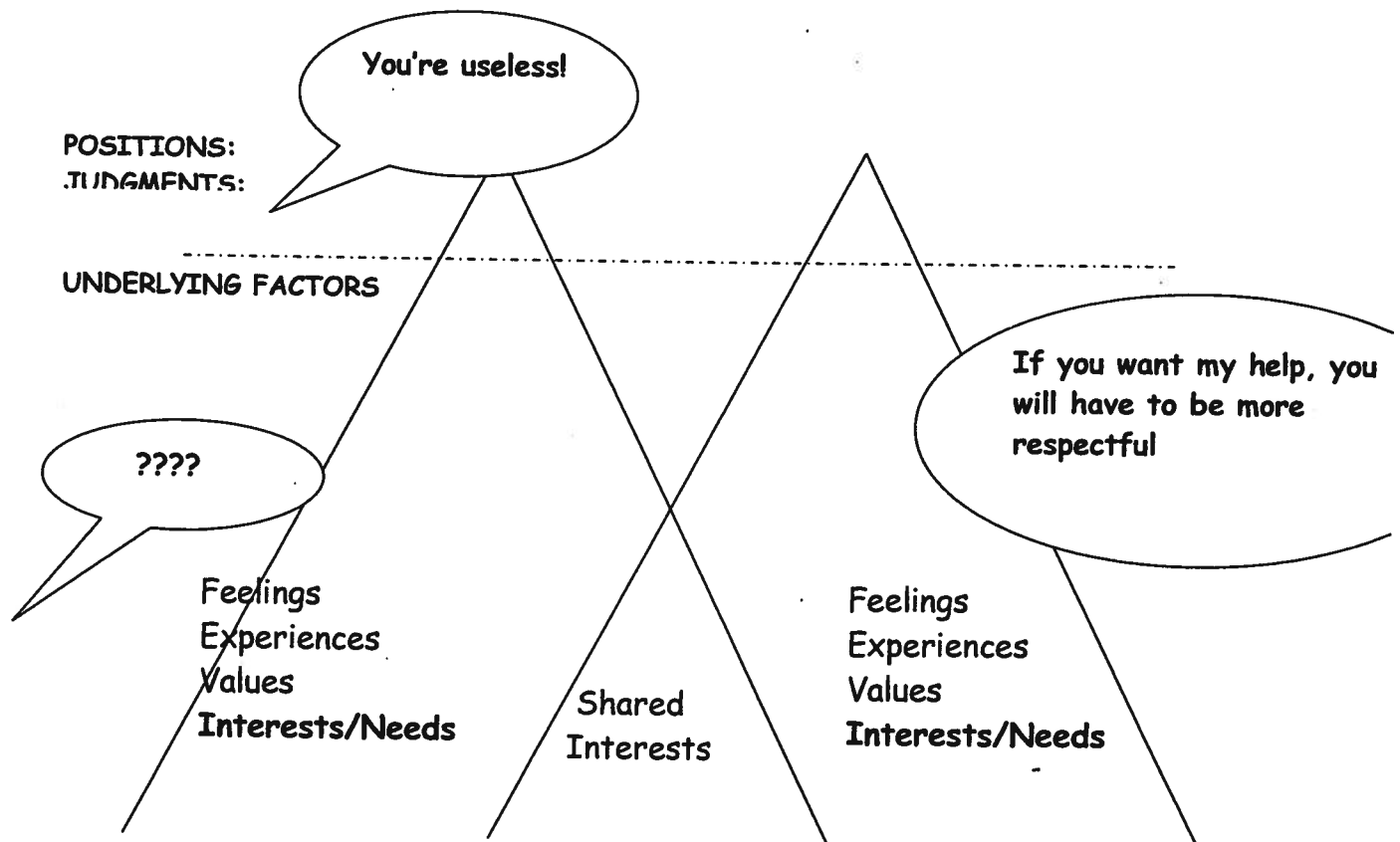- Offer the other person a choice

So what's challenging about this?
- Describing behaviour using neutral language (no judgement or aggressiveness).
- Differences in cultural and personal communication styles may make it more appropriate to use more indirect approaches so that the other can "save face"; if you have an on-going relationship with the person you are dealing with (e.g. colleague, family member, etc.) you may want to ask them what kind of approach they prefer.
- Sharing personal information about how their behaviour affects you. In a conflict we are resistant to doing this. It takes some trust and is a bit of a risk. We need to decide that we want to do it.
- Being patient and remaining calm when they don't immediately respond the way you would like.

Raising Concerns:
Telling Others What Is Important to You

Raising a Concern: To approach someone about a problem by telling them what is important to you

Why raise concerns?
- To avoid letting the problem get worse
- To increase opportunities for problem-solving.
- To improve communication and co-operation.

POSITIONS:
JUDGMENTS:

You're useless!

UNDERLYING FACTORS

????

If you want my help, you will have to be more respectful

Feelings
Experiences
Values
Interests/Needs

Shared
Interests

Feelings
Experiences
Values
Interests/Needs

Different types of Needs/Interests

Substantive (result) "What"	Psychological (emotional)	Procedural (process) "How"
Things Resources Time Money Food	Respect Having a voice Feeling included Saving face Feeling cared about	When How long How transparent Fairness Confidentiality