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# AGING I&R/A TIPS

## Tip Sheet 1

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National Aging Information & Referral Support Center

## THE ART OF ACTIVE LISTENING

**A**ctive listening is all about building rapport, understanding, and trust. Are you a good listener?

### Active Listening Skills

#### 1. Restating

To show you are listening, repeat every so often what you think the person said – not by parroting, but by paraphrasing what you heard in your own words. For example, “Let’s see if I’m clear about this. . .”

#### 2. Summarizing

Bring together the facts and pieces of the problem to check understanding – for example, “So it sounds to me as if . . .” Or, “Is that it?”

#### 3. Minimal encouragers

Use brief, positive prompts to keep the conversation going and show you are listening – for example, “umm-hmmm,” “Oh?” “I understand,” “Then?” “And?”

#### 4. Reflecting

Instead of just repeating, reflect the speaker’s words in terms of feelings – for example, “This seems really important to you. . .”

#### 5. Giving feedback

Let the person know what your initial thoughts are on the situation. Share pertinent information, observations, insights, and experiences. Then listen carefully to confirm.

#### 6. Emotion labeling

Putting feelings into words will often help a person to see things more objectively. To help

the person begin, use “door openers” – for example, “I’m sensing that you’re feeling frustrated. . . worried. . . anxious. . .”

#### 7. Probing

Ask questions to draw the person out and get deeper and more meaningful information – for example, “What do you think would happen if you. . .?”

#### 8. Validation

Acknowledge the individual’s problems, issues, and feelings. Listen openly and with empathy, and respond in an interested way – for example, “I appreciate your willingness to talk about such a difficult issue. . .”

#### 9. Effective pause

Deliberately pause at key points for emphasis. This will tell the person you are saying something that is very important to them.

#### 10. Silence

Allow for comfortable silences to slow down the exchange. Give a person time to think as well as talk. Silence can also be very helpful in diffusing an unproductive interaction.

#### 11. “I” messages

By using “I” in your statements, you focus on the problem not the person. An I-message lets the person know what you feel and why – for example, “I know you have a lot to say, but I need to. . .”

#### 12. Redirecting

If someone is showing signs of being overly aggressive, agitated, or angry, this is the time to shift the discussion to another topic.

## The Art of Active Listening

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### 13. Consequences

Part of the feedback may involve talking about the possible consequences of inaction. Take your cues from what the person is saying – for example, “What happened the last time you stopped taking the medicine your doctor prescribed?”

### Communication Blockers

These roadblocks to communication can stop communication dead in its tracks:

- **“Why” questions.** They tend to make people defensive.
- **Quick reassurance,** saying things like, “Don’t worry about that.”
- **Advising** – “I think the best thing for you is to move to assisted living.”
- **Digging for information** and forcing someone to talk about something they would rather not talk about.
- **Patronizing** – “You poor thing, I know just how you feel.”
- **Preaching** – “You should. . .” Or, “You shouldn’t. . .”
- **Interrupting** – Shows you aren’t interested in what someone is saying.

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SOURCE: Excerpted and adapted from Lee Scheingold, “Active Listening,” McKesson Health Solutions LLC, 2003.

### 6 Simple Conversation Courtesies

“Excuse me...”

“Pardon me....”

“One moment please...”

“Let’s talk about solutions.”

“May I suggest something?”

### The Art of Questioning

The four main types of questions are:

#### LEADING

For example, “Would you like to talk about it?” “What happened then?” Could you tell me more?”

#### OPEN-ENDED

Use open-ended questions to expand the discussion – for example, lead with: “How? What? Where? Who? Which?”

#### CLOSED-ENDED

Use closed ended questions to prompt for specifics – for example, lead with: “Is? Are? Do? Did? Can? Could? Would?”

#### REFLECTIVE

Can help people understand more about what they said – for example, someone tells you, “I’m worried I won’t remember. . .” *Reflective Q:* “It sounds like you would like some help remembering?”

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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