

# Styles of Conversing

- When a caller uses the names of their partner, children, etc. write them down so you can use them in the conversation
- Don't assume the caller has the same definitions for words that you do. (domestic abuse, batter, assault, advocate, weapons, severe, beat, hit) You may want to clarify these words with the caller
- You need to be able to keep calm and have your emotions under control because the caller is probably going to be under a lot of stress.

**Empathy** – The ability to imagine oneself in another's place and understand the other's feelings, desires, ideas and actions.

**First Step** – Listen Carefully

**Second Step** – Think of words that represent the client's feelings

**Third Step** – Use those words to tell the client that you understand them

## Attitude

- You need to communicate a feeling of calm to your caller, especially if they are in crisis at the time or are upset
- Keep your focus on him or her and not about thinking of what your next response is going to be.
- Listen with an open mind, without judgment, with empathy and without preconceived notions about what he/she is going to say or how they feel. She/he is a person.

## Listen for feelings

- Be aware of feelings the victim mentions as well as the feelings behind what he/she says
- Reflect what you hear and see like "it sounds to me like you are frightened" or "I hear some anger in what you are saying" or "you sound scared"

## Use Empathy/Supportive Statements

- That sounds scary/awful/disappointing/frustrating/confusing
- That must be hard for you
- It's hard to make big decisions at times like this
- It is always hard when children are involved

## Use Softening Statements

- I think everyone had these doubts (feelings, reactions, concerns . . .)
- Don't you think you are expecting too much of yourself?
- It is not your fault that he can't or won't control his temper

## Building Confidence

- It took a lot of courage to call here today
- It is not disloyal to ask for help and information
- I think you are making good decisions
- Be patient with your self – these are hard issues to deal with
- I think anyone would feel the way that you do

## Verification & Feedback

- Repeat what they are telling you so you understand and they know that you are listening
- Let me see if I have the facts straight
- Clarify the messages from him/her that are vague or unclear
- If you are confused about details ask for reassurance
- Say, "now tell me if I have this correct . . ."
- You want to do something but you're not sure what
- Summarize what they say

### When Peer Counseling

- Use open-ended questions, “How did that make you feel?”, “Can you tell me more about that?”
- Use silence – sometimes silence can be reassuring just knowing someone is there. An occasional, “I’m here” or “start whenever you are ready” or “take your time” can be very helpful. Silence can be very valuable and gives the client time to formulate thoughts.
- Do not rush the client.

## **Active Listening Starters**

The following are examples of ways to start an active listening response. These are ideas for you to use in your work so you don’t sound stifled or repetitive. Active listening is a skill that develops with practice. The underlined word in each of the following examples should be changed to fit the message you wish to convey.

- I see, you mean that you hoped she would...
- It sounds to me as though you are sad about...
- You mean you’re afraid of...
- You look/seem worried about...
- It sounds like you feel anxious about...
- I’m not sure I understand. Do you mean you’re disappointed that...
- You’re really clear about...
- I think I understand. (Restate content.) Is that it?
- I get the idea; you want to...
- Are you saying you’re so frustrated you...?
- Seems you’re sure that...
- I hear you saying you’re...
- That seems unfair to you that...
- It must be frightening...
- It sounds like that’s really important to you.
- Wow! You must feel proud that...

## **Barriers to Active Listening and Distraught Comments**

~What NOT to do~

- Constantly compare yourself to the speaker
- Trying to mind read what the caller really thinks
- Planning an argument or story to give next
- Filtering so that one hears only certain topics or doesn’t hear critical remarks
- Judging a statement to be “crazy”, “boring”, “stupid”, “hostile”, etc. before it is completed
- Remembering your own personal experiences instead of listening to the talker
- Busy thinking of the next thing you are going to say
- Quickly changing the topic when it gets too serious
- Automatically agreeing with everything before hearing the whole story
- Changing the topic
- Pretending you know better than they do
- Too much advising not enough listening
- Telling your own story too soon

# 20 Things to Remember when Responding to Survivors

## 1. Be non-judgmental

- a. You may be the first person with whom the survivor has ever spoken with about the abuse. Your response will be important: it could set the tone for how the survivor feels about themselves and the events in the future. A caring, non-judgmental response will help in their recovery

## 2. Believe the victim

- a. One of his/her fears may be that no one will believe. Everything he/she tells you may not be completely organized. It is normal and is most likely because of trauma, confusion, and being scared, not because the assault did not occur.

## 3. Listen

- a. Often just being there is enough. Allow him/her to express themselves in whatever way feels most comfortable. Don't fall into beliefs about how a survivor "should behave" We all express ourselves differently.

## 4. Reinforce that the assault was not his/her fault

- a. Questions like, "Why didn't you report the incident?" or "Why did you drink so much?" or "Why don't you leave?" might make him/her feel like you are blaming them. People are not always as safe as they should be, but no one deserves to be hurt.

## 5. Provide him/her with options so that he/she may make all of the decisions

- a. You can help by giving information and weighing options, but the final decision must come from the client. We can give legal information but not legal advice. See legal advice vs. legal information.

## 6. Choose your words carefully

- a. Your words should reflect the vocabulary of the survivor. It is important not to label their experience. He/she may be struggling with what happened: your role will best be served if you help clarify their feelings.

## 7. Allow for silent time

- a. Don't fill silences with unnecessary talk. Silence can allow the survivor to calm themselves and gather thoughts. If it appears that the silence is uncomfortable, it is perfectly fine to acknowledge it. If you are feeling uncomfortable, most likely they are too.

## 8. Ask open-ended questions

- a. Instead of those which require only yes or no answers, open-ended questions encourage a person to talk. They also allow him/her to set the agenda. An example of an open-ended questions would be "How do you feel?" A closed-ended question would be "Are you OK?"

## 9. Paraphrase or summarize his/her words

- a. Often summarizing what the person has said can help clarify the event. It also demonstrates to him/her that you are listening and that care enough to make sure you understand correctly. Sometimes what we hear is not what the person meant; therefore, it is important to take ownership for the paraphrase. For example, "I hear you say.... Is that correct?" or "Am I understanding you correctly when you said...?" It is also helpful to make perception checks if you are feeling confused. For example, "Do I understand that what would be helpful is...?"

## 10. Try not to use the word "Why"

- a. This word often makes people feel defensive, and likely to feel uncomfortable in talking with you further. Any statement that uses a "why" can be phrased differently. Example: "Why didn't you call the police right away?" can be rephrased "What made you decide to call the police later?"

**11. Take time to think**

- a. There is no need to give an immediate response. Try to relax. If you are talking on the phone, you will want to take notes.

**12. Be patient**

- a. Wait for the client to respond. Allow the person time to think things through. There is no hurry. Remember, don't interrupt. What they are telling you maybe be hard to articulate.

**13. Your responsibility is to support him/her, not to investigate**

- a. You may have a desire to find out more information. Before you do, ask yourself "What makes me want this information? Will knowing it allow me to better assist the client?" If no, don't ask the questions.

**14. Do not hug the person or touch the person without permission**

- a. ALWAYS ask the person first if it is OK to give them a hug.

**15. If you don't have the proper information, say so**

- a. It is okay to say, "I don't know, but I can find out more information for you."

**16. Deal with what the survivor wants, not what you think he/she needs**

- a. You should ask the person how you can be of help to him/her.

**17. Ask about suicidal thoughts**

- a. Facing the issue of DV/SA can be so painful that a survivor may have thoughts of wanting to end his/her life in order to end the pain. It is okay to ask if they are having such thoughts. Some people fear that asking these questions will install ideas of suicide, but if a survivor is feeling suicidal, the thoughts are already there. If a survivor states that he/she is feeling suicidal and actually has a concrete plan, you need to seek out additional help.

**18. It is important to educate ourselves**

- a. We live in a society that has taught us many myths surrounding DV and SA. The media, family, and friends may frequently reinforce these beliefs. For you to best help a survivor, you will need to examine your own beliefs. Seek out literature that deals with DV and SA, read writings by survivors, and seek out educational programs. It is important for us to realize the impact that these myths have not only on survivors, but also on ourselves as advocates.

**19. Be aware of Secondary Trauma**

- a. Be aware of your feelings and how the caller's situation may be affecting you or triggering your trauma.

**20. W...A...I...T!**

- a. Every time you are speaking, ask yourself "Why Am I Talking?!" The caller should be the person doing most of the talking. Your job is to listen, validate their feelings and life experience, and offer options for safety. On a crisis call, you should NOT be talking about yourself.