

Flourish!

Choose well – Think well – Live well

Choose to Help Others by Listening Well

When we listen well, we are giving people attention, care, comfort, and significance. It is especially important to listen to those whose voices are not being heard and valued – such as children, teenagers, women, displaced and vulnerable people, and those whose voices may have been silenced by their culture, experience, and families.

Give your full attention to the speaker

Stop what you are doing and show that you are relaxed, available, and focused. Put away your phone and give warm eye-contact. Avoid interrupting, distracting them or telling your own stories. This shows that you are interested in the person and what they have to say.

Follow up

Ask them if there is anything else you could do to help. Do whatever you promised to do. Check in with them later by phone, text, etc.

- **Respond to the speaker's story by summarizing what they have said**

'So, you're saying that...? And then...happened?' This encourages them to speak and shows how well you are really listening to the details of their story.

Be curious

Ask questions that invite more information and ideas, such as: 'What happened after that?' 'Who was most helpful at that time, and what did they do?' Thoughtful questions show that their story is important to you, and that you are ready and open to hear more from them. Ask what they are most concerned about, and what their hopes are.

- **Helpful reminder**

Use your body to remind you how to listen: Eyes – eye contact; Ears – listening; Mind – engaged, thoughtful and curious; Heart – aware of emotions and relational needs and how to care for them; Hands – ready to help.

- **Listen for their practical needs**

If the person is distressed, they might not be aware of their physical needs, especially in an emergency or crisis. Do they need food, water, warmth, shelter, safety, clothes, medical care, and personal supplies? Ask 'When did you last have something to eat or drink? Are you warm enough? Do you have somewhere safe to sleep and rest?' 'Do you have any injuries that need attention?' 'What do you need most and how can I help you?'

- **Listen to the speaker's story with your heart**

Respond to the speaker's emotions and empathise with their feelings. 'What were you feeling right then?... 'That sounds sad, troubling, painful, discouraging...' etc. 'That sounds very frightening. I'm so sorry that you had to go through that alone.' 'If I had been there with you, I would have wanted to help by...' 'I can see that it's upsetting to think about this experience. What can I do to comfort you right now?' This shows that you can identify their feelings and care for them.

Listen for their relational needs that are met through caring relationships

Relational needs are: comfort, acceptance, affection/kindness, appreciation, attention, respect, encouragement, security/safety, being valued by others and being helped. Each time we meet one of these relational needs in a simple way, it can soothe the other person's distress and help them to feel less frightened, alone, and anxious.