

Listening carefully

Suggested script for telephone listening service

Pause and prepare

- **Wait** for the phone to ring 2-3 times before picking up. This gives the caller time to breathe and calm a little, and it gives you time to **prepare yourself to listen** well.
- Sit down and **focus your attention** on the caller.
- Make sure you have a **pen and paper** so that you can take notes.
- Remind yourself that **you are a channel of God's love** into the life of the caller.

Introduce yourself clearly, slowly and warmly

- (Smile as you speak – even though they can't see you it will warm your voice.)
- "Hello, thank you for calling."
- "My name is _____. I am a volunteer listener working for (name of project)."
- "And your name is _____?" (If necessary, ask – "Let me check how you spell it/how you say it, so that I know I have your name right.")
- "I want you to know that this call is completely confidential. However, if you talk about someone who is in danger, or at risk of being hurt, we will need to talk together about the best way to help them. This may mean that we need to talk to someone else who can help to keep them safe. Is this alright with you?"
- "We have 30 minutes to talk today. If you need longer, we can arrange for you to call again, or we can call you back."
- "I want to listen well, and check that I have really understood you. I might stop you from time to time and sum up what I have heard you say, so that you know for sure that I have heard you correctly."
- "Tell me what's the most important thing you want to talk about today."

Take notes

- Take very brief notes about what the caller is saying.
- This is important to help you stay focused on their needs and concerns. Otherwise your own thoughts can crowd in and prevent you from listening effectively.

Let them *hear* you are listening

- Remember that the caller cannot see you.
- Nodding and other visual cues that show you are listening are not visible to the caller.
- You need to reflect back what you have heard (so you are saying that...?), and say things like "mm", "uhuh" at appropriate points in the conversation.

Clarify what they need most

- Listen for their physical needs – food, housing, safety, etc.
- Listen for their social needs – loneliness, relational distress, etc.
- Listen for relational/emotional needs – acceptance – especially if they feel they have made a mistake, attention, appreciation, caring kindness, feeling valued and valuable, comforting of their sadness, encouragement, respect, relational safety, and support/help.

- Direct them to specialist help if necessary. Provide the phone number of any organisations that might be able to help them with their practical problems, or that can offer more skilled support than your service is able to provide (mental health care/suicide prevention, etc.).

Listening to distress

- Occasionally someone who calls will just need to cry for a while. That's ok. Stay with them. Let them know that you are there and that you care for them.
- Say things like: "That's so very sad." "I'm sorry that things are so hard for you right now." "I just want to let you know that I am still, and I care for you." "I wish I could be there to give you a big hug right now. Put your arms around yourself and give yourself a big hug, and imagine someone is with you and comforting you right now."
- It's ideal to keep the call to around 30 minutes and to encourage them to call back another time. But it's more important to be compassionate and to "mourn with those who mourn" when people are especially distraught and sad.

Gently remind them that the call is ending

- "I just want to remind you that we only have 5 minutes left. I wonder if you have anything else you especially want to talk about before we close."

Pray?

- Prayer may or may not be appropriate.
- You can say: "I am happy to pray for you, if you would like me to."
- Any prayers should be short; caring/comforting; in simple, everyday language; and focused on the caller's immediate needs. The prayer can also be used to remind them of God's loving care for them at this time.
- Example: "Loving Father in heaven, I want to pray for (name) today. I know that You love (name) very much and that You care about the struggles that he/she is facing right now. I pray that You will be very close to (name) and comfort him/her. May (name) know how much they are loved by You and may he/she experience the help/comfort/wisdom that he/she needs at this time. Thank You for hearing our prayer. Through Jesus' name, Amen."

Affirm their call

"Thank you, (name), for calling us today. I want you to know that we are here for you. Please feel free to call us again."

After the call has ended

- Pause, breathe, reflect. Take time to think and respond.
- Do anything you promised to do in response to their call.
- Reflect on the conversation: What went well? What would you do differently next time? What questions do you have that you would like to talk about in the supervision group?
- Reflect on yourself: What effect did this conversation have on your own emotional balance? Did any part of the conversation trigger strong feelings in you that you need to bring to supervision for your own wellbeing?

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