Befriending through Active Listening
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Aims:
For volunteers to become familiar with the skills of Active Listening by:

• understanding the key principles and practice of Active Listening in a Befriending context
• having the opportunity to practise Active Listening skills

Objectives:

• to ensure all volunteers have a full understanding of the Active Listening skills needed when Befriending
• to ensure all volunteers feel confident in the practice of Active Listening
• to enable all volunteers to confidentially and effectively support callers, through Active Listening
• to foster the volunteers’ desire to further develop their listening skills

Resources:

Flip chart paper and pens
Individual paper and pens
Sets of skills practice briefings (RESOURCE: 1, RESOURCE: 2)

Total length of workshop: 1 hour 30 minutes (approximately)

(you may need to be flexible with timings to take account of local needs and the needs of individuals)
### Introduction

This workshop begins by outlining some key principles and providing examples of good practice that demonstrate Active Listening in Befriending.

This section will focus on what we mean by Active Listening, Befriending, and the skills and personal qualities that make a good Befriender. We shall discuss the good practice characteristics which enable the befriending relationship to obtain the best outcome for both caller and Befriender.

### Start:

Establish that this is a short exercise to find out what is meant by the term ‘Active Listening’ and how it is different (if at all) from simply listening to another individual.

### Get everyone into pairs

Ask each pair to decide together what each term means............

- listening
- active Listening
- a conversation

### Bring the Group together

Take Feedback

**Note to Trainer:** Establish that there is a difference between each of the terms above.

### ‘Listening’ is the act of hearing attentively, which involves receiving, deciphering, and perceiving a message with intent to respond. Planning ahead for a conversation.

### ‘Active listening’ means, as its name suggests, actively listening, that is fully concentrating on what is being said rather than just ‘hearing’ the message of the speaker, in order to reflect back to the speaker what has been heard and acknowledged.

### ‘A conversation’ is a talk, especially an informal one, between two or more people, in which news and ideas are exchanged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Establish that this is a short exercise to find out what is meant by the term ‘Active Listening’ and how it is different (if at all) from simply listening to another individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Ask each pair to decide together what each term means.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Take Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 minutes</td>
<td>Establish that there is a difference between each of the terms above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total for exercise: 30 minutes**
The art of active listening and Befriending

Active listening skills have the power to transform a conversation, in particular when involved in a Befriending relationship. We are now going to establish what is meant by the term ‘Befriending’.

What is ‘Befriending’?

Befriending is a term that can be used in a range of circumstances to relate to a variety of practices. There is not a single agreed definition of ‘befriending’. The ways in which it works will depend upon a variety of factors, such as how formal and structured the relationships are.

We shall be looking at Befriending primarily in the context of those organisations that support people in despair and who express suicidal feelings.

Start: The following exercise is designed to introduce the concept of Active Listening.

Get into Triads (groups of 3)

Explain that Active Listening is about asking open questions which allow the person ‘talking’ the opportunity to answer and explore what they wish to say. It is not simply asking questions to confirm your own preconceived ideas and which in part tell the person what you would like to hear them confirm.

For example:

Q: Don’t you think the weather has been bad today?

(Comment: This question does not invite anything other than a positive or negative response. . . . . . . yes or no)

A: Yes I suppose it has . . . .

Whereas, by using the following:

Q: What do you think of the weather today?

(Comment: This is an example of an open-ended question, it invites more than simply yes or no . . . .)

A: I’m not sure. It seemed really bad one moment then the sun came out . . . .

Now, thinking about this example of an open-ended question and how to ask one, hand out the skills practice (RESOURCE: 1) to each triad.

2 minutes

5 minutes

2 minutes
Ask each triad to identify:

- the Talker
- the Listener
- the Observer

(Each will have an opportunity to take each role during this exercise).

Now hand out a copy of each role (RESOURCE: 1) (The Listener, the Talker and the Observer)

- Ask them to read their brief
- Tell them they have two minutes to practise asking open ended questions, as described in the briefing

After two minutes, call time and get the volunteers to change role as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Round</th>
<th>2nd Round</th>
<th>3rd Round</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listener</td>
<td>Talker</td>
<td>Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Listener</td>
<td>Talker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talker</td>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Listener</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 minutes
2 minutes
2 minutes (for each round)

Continue until all three rounds are complete. Call the two-minute time at the end of each round; explain that they will be asked to feed back in their triads at the end of the exercise and not after each round.

Finally, ask the triads to discuss and take notes to feed back to the whole group:

- what did it feel like as a talker?
- what was it like as a listener?
- what did the observer experience?

10 minutes
(Total for exercise: 25 minutes)

Having reviewed the feedback from the previous exercise, it is important to take some time to think about the way in which Active Listening works.

The idea is to encourage someone to speak by asking open-ended questions, and then when there is an appropriate space to reflect back what the listener has ‘heard’.
This shows that the listener:

- has been attentive (by reflecting back what has been said)
- has clarified what has been said, thereby inviting further elaboration
- is progressing the contact through respectful and thoughtful interaction

By letting the other person finish their sentences, and by listening ‘between the lines’ for what’s not being said, the Befriending relationship allows for an acknowledgement of what is being said.

It is very important at this point to stress that Befriending is about accepting without judgement what someone is saying. Acknowledgement doesn’t mean you need to agree, it means you have genuinely listened and accepted.

**Active listening** also allows us to hear what’s important to the other person – their interests, needs and priorities.

Very simple aides to **Active Listening** are open-ended questions used to expand the discussion — beginning, for example, with:

- how?
- what?
- where?
- who?
- which?

And very importantly in a Befriending situation:

- why?

For example,

- ‘Why do you think you feel this way?’
- ‘Why did you say that?’

The ‘why’ question may enable someone to consider what they are really feeling and thinking, allowing them to focus on what they would really like to do.

**This next exercise** is about practising **Reflecting Back**. By listening to someone and then reflecting back, you are able to communicate that you have heard what has been said.

Reflecting back shows very strongly to the speaker that they have been heard.

Useful phrases to aid **reflecting** could be:

- It sounds as though you would like some help remembering
- If I have heard you right, what you are saying is...........
- It sounds like you believe................
**Warning - blocks to listening**

Whilst actively listening, it is important that the listener guards against any other kind of distraction. This includes the natural dialogue that everyone has running constantly through their mind.

Forming judgments about what is being said is also a block to active listening, as is the urge to provide information at, what may be, an inappropriate pause in the conversation.

Do not be fearful of silence, it is not necessary to fill it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start: Establish that this next exercise is to practise reflecting and listening skills in order to enable volunteers to feel confident in supporting callers in a conventional Befriending situation.</th>
<th>5 minutes getting group into triads (3’s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The exercise will form a skills practice session aimed to address the ways:</td>
<td>5 minutes getting group into triads (3’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to encourage the caller to talk about their feelings</td>
<td>5 minutes getting group into triads (3’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to enable the caller to express difficult feelings</td>
<td>5 minutes getting group into triads (3’s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to practise reflecting and summarising what the volunteer has heard</td>
<td>5 minutes getting group into triads (3’s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ask the group to get into triads (3s)**

In this triad each volunteer will take on the role of Volunteer, Caller or Observer.

Ask each triad to identify:

- the Talker (Caller)
- the Listener (Volunteer)
- the Observer

(Each will have an opportunity to take each role during this exercise).

Now hand out a copy of each role *(RESOURCE: 2)* (The Listener, the Talker and the Observer) and ask them to read their brief.

Tell them they have two minutes to practise asking open-ended questions, as described in the briefing.
After **two minutes**, call time and get them to change role as below:

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Continue until all three rounds are complete. Call the two-minute time at the end of each round; explain that they will be asked to feed back in their triads at the **end of the exercise and not** after each round.

Finally, ask the triads to discuss and take notes to feed back to the whole group:

- what did it feel like as a talker?
- what was it like as a listener?
- what did the observer experience?

Bring the group together and facilitate Feedback and Discussion.

(Note to Trainer: *This exercise has been designed to show how important it is to use open ended questions, listen and reflect back what has been said .................and not what you think was being said!*)

(Total for exercise: 40 minutes)

And finally:

Active listening and responding appropriately are two of the key skills a Listener needs to use during a one-to-one Befriending session with a caller.

Being able to communicate effectively is an important requirement. It is only by understanding the importance of these skills, and being able to apply them accordingly, that an honest and open Befriending experience will be achieved.
Print off enough copies to cover the number of attendees. (You could make up sets and laminate them, then simply hand them round according to the table, as the roles change).

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**The Talker:**

You would like to talk about the really great weekend you have just had. When the Listener asks you what you have been doing, try to explain what you did. You are quite hesitant and not wanting to push what you have done, so follow what you are being asked carefully.

When the 2 minutes is called to stop, wait for your new briefing, do not discuss the exercise.

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**The Listener:**

Listen to the Talker in your triad (3’s). Ask only questions that can be answered with either Yes or No – for example:

- ‘I bet you had a good weekend......’?
- ‘The weather was really good wasn’t it’?
- ‘You went on your own didn’t you....?’

Make it difficult for your Talker to say more than yes or no.

When the 2 minutes is called to stop, wait for your new briefing, do not discuss the exercise.

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**The Observer:**

Observe both the Listener and the Talker carefully. Sit quite still and say nothing.

When the 2 minutes is called to stop, wait for your new briefing, do not discuss the exercise.
(RESOURCE: 2)

Print off enough copies to cover the number of attendees. (You could make up sets and laminate them, then simply hand them round according to the table, as the roles change).

Cut here........

The Talker:

You have been out with friends for the evening. It was a good evening, but you are now going over the evening in your head and worrying about what you said or didn’t say. You are a bit anxious, and just want to talk to someone who will not think you are wasting their time........

When the 2 minutes is called to stop, wait for your new briefing, do not discuss the exercise.

Cut here........

The Listener:

Listen to the Talker very carefully. When encouraging the Talker, remember to reflect back what you have heard so far and clarify what is being said. Use open questions, and allow the Talker space to think. Do not be frightened by the pauses or silence.

When the 2 minutes is called to stop, wait for your new briefing, do not discuss the exercise.

Cut here........

The Observer:

Observe both the Listener and the Talker carefully. Sit quite still and say nothing........

When the 2 minutes is called to stop, wait for your new briefing, do not discuss the exercise. 

However, if either the Talker or the Listener are distressed in any way support appropriately.