

## Active Listening

Active listening is a basic counseling skills that helps you, the listener, really listen; in other words, to be an active listener. By using active listening, the person will feel that you care about what they are saying, thus feeling that you see them as a worthy person. Here are some things that are important in active listening.

- **Pay attention to your body language.** Facing the speaker and sitting up straight, is one way to show the person you are listening.
- **Make eye contact.** Look directly in the person's eyes. This will show a level of confidence and comfort.
- **Show understanding to what the person saying.** Many people will immediately become defensive if you use the phrase "I understand". This may lead to questions like, "How do you understand?" "Have you ever been to prison?" By nodding and using phrases like "uh-huh" and "really" shows the person you are interested in what they are saying.
- **Minimize external distractions.** Minimizing distractions may be difficult at times, depending on the setting where you are working, but you can do this by turning off the radio, TV, and your cell phone. Also, put away any books or magazines.
- **Minimize internal distractions.** Do not think about your own concerns. Focus on the person with whom you are talking. If you are not focused on him or her, this may show in your own body language and give the impression that you are not really listening.
- **Focus only on what the person is saying.** Do not try to think ahead, as you may lose what the person is saying right now. Let the conversation flow in a natural manner.
- **Avoid advice.** Ask open-ended questions in order to try and help the person to come up with their own solutions. "What other options have you considered?" or "How have you handled this in the past?" are examples of open-ended questions. Open ended questions cannot be answered by "Yes" or "No."
- **Do not get defensive.** Even if the person does not agree with you, let them finish speaking before you respond. This way, the person will feel that you have listened to them.
- **Keep an open mind.** Do not judge. Your experiences may be very different from the other person's experiences. Avoid making assumptions by waiting until the person finishes speaking before you ask him or her to clarify anything you do not understand.