

ACTIVE AND REFLECTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES

Effective listening is key to successful communication with patients. By engaging in active and reflective listening techniques with your patients, you can demonstrate your support and understanding of the patient, build trust, promote positive patient engagement, and foster motivation to change.

What is active listening and why is it important?

Active listening involves being fully engaged and attentive to the patient, receiving and interpreting their words, body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions to understand the fullest meaning of their message. When we engage in active listening, we can improve our interpersonal relationships.

*Benefits of **active listening** for patient-provider interactions:*

- ✓ Promotes trust and respect
- ✓ Eases patient fear and anxiety
- ✓ Helps to reduce misunderstandings and resolve conflicts
- ✓ Improves interpersonal relationships
- ✓ Enables better care

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What is reflective listening and why is it important?

Reflective listening is a more specialized form of active listening that goes a step further, not only to seek to understand the patient, but to also communicate the idea back to the patient to ensure it was understood correctly. A reflective listener asks questions to the patient and will typically paraphrase or mirror the patient's message back to him/her to confirm understanding.

*Benefits of **reflective listening** for patient-provider interactions:*

- ✓ Reinforces a positive relationship with the patient.
- ✓ Lets the patient know that they've been heard and understood.
- ✓ Enables you to check your understanding of what the patient has communicated to you.
- ✓ Helps the patient think about and articulate their concerns more clearly.
- ✓ Improves clarification of expectations for the healthcare provider and patient.

The OARS Approach

The OARS technique can help you practice and improve your active and reflective listening with your patients. OARS stands for:

O Open-Ended Questions

A Affirmative Statements

R Reflective Listening

S Summary Reflections

Each of these is described, with examples, on the following pages of this resource.

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O Open-Ended Questions

Rather than asking closed questions which elicit 'yes' or 'no' responses, asking open-ended questions encourages a two-way dialogue and help you understand the patient's perceptions, expectations, and potential barriers. Open-ended questions can also help you seek clarification if the patient's message is unclear to you.

Examples of open-ended questions:

- How do you feel about your weight and health right now?
- How would you like your health to be different?
- What have you tried before to make a change?
- What strategies worked for you in the past?
- What do you want to do next?
- How can I help you with _____?

Examples for seeking clarification:

- Can you say more about that?
- Can you tell me more about.....?
- Could you explain what you mean by...?
- I'm not sure I completely understand, can you tell me more about...?
- Help me understand _____

A Affirmative Statements

Affirmative statements recognize your patient's strengths and acknowledge their behaviors that lead in the direction of positive change. When expressed sincerely, affirmative statements help to build the patient's confidence and foster a collaborative provider-patient relationship.

Examples:

- I appreciate your willingness to discuss this with me today.
- It sounds like you have been working hard to improve your _____.
- I can see that you are dedicated to improving your health.
- You've made a clear improvement by _____.
- That seems like a good approach.
- The steps you are taking show a great deal of _____.
- You found an effective way to deal with that challenge.

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R Reflective Listening

Reflective listening involves restating, paraphrasing, and/or reflecting the patient's feelings and thoughts back to them. This helps to confirm that the patient has been heard and that you understand the meaning of their statements and/or their perspective.

Restating/Paraphrasing Examples:

- I hear you saying that...
- So you're saying that...
- In other words...
- So your point is that....
- So what you mean is that...
- So you're wondering if...

Reflection Examples

- So, you're feeling...
- It sounds like this has been [frustrating] to you...
- You seem [discouraged] by this...
- You feel _____ about _____
- You feel _____ when _____

S Summary Reflections

Summary statements are helpful to communicate at transition points in the conversation, to ensure that there is a correct understanding of the patient's statements and as a step towards change.

Examples:

- To summarize what you've said today, I hear you saying that...
- Here's what I've heard from you...
- So my understanding of what you've been describing is _____. Is that right?
- Let me see if I understand so far...Tell me if I've missed anything.
- On the one hand, you're saying...and on the other hand, I hear you saying that...

Next Steps:

- Is there anything you would like to add or correct?
- Did I miss anything?
- Let's discuss some steps to develop a plan that makes sense for you.
- Let's brainstorm some strategies to help address your concerns.

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