

Intentional Listening

Based on solution-focused brief therapy & narrative therapy

When clients tell you stories, it can be hard to know what to say and how to find a focus. These tips will help you take a strength-based perspective to conversations. Help the client identify their own strengths and identify areas for further support!

How do we Listen Actively?

- **Attending** — Communicating you are ready, willing and able to listen. This requires physical and psychological presence. Open posture, eye contact, warm tone of voice, make encouraging comments, control noise
- **Use Silence** — Consider when silence may be appropriate to provide thinking time, process feelings, and/or work through confusion
- **Paraphrasing** — restating the disclosers words in different words to confirm, clarify, simplify, or present meaning from a different perspective
- **Summarizing** — confirms understanding, organizes complex information into key ideas, patterns, and priorities
- **Ask Questions** — ask open-ended questions that utilize the 5Ws and H (who, what, when, where, why, and how)
- **Empathy** — understanding the emotional perspective of another person and communicating this understanding (I.e., asking "how do you feel?")

Themes to Identify When Listening to a Client's Story

Listen for the themes below:

- Problem solving (e.g., likes video games, enjoys puzzles)
- Valuing relationships (e.g., likes to hang out with friends, family love)
- Answers related to preferred identity (e.g., smart, old soul, good person)
- Highlighting adventure
- Related to self-care and coping (e.g., homebody, animals, exercising)
- Highlighting knowledges and skills (e.g., gardening, reading, sewing)
- Highlighting resistance to problems faced in the daily life of the person

Use these themes to develop a meaningful focus:

- Narrow the conversational territory by co-developing a specific outcome and solvable problem the person would like to pursue
- Determine what would be most important to talk about in the moment and within the context (I.e., your role and the time you have with the person)
- Focus will arise from the stories people tell that will detail the contexts of their lives
- Ask: What is the problem that brings you here today?
- Ask: What would you like to accomplish today?