



## Supportive Communication

Opening the lines of communication between yourself and a person at risk or in distress can be extremely difficult as they are often feeling hopeless and helpless about their situation. In order to do this, you will need to use effective and supportive communication skills to build trust that will make the person feel comfortable and confident talking to you.

Supportive communication involves providing a safe and supportive place and space for the person to discuss the issue/s behind pain. Just by listening, you provide an opportunity for someone to explore their pain.

Communicating with someone thinking about suicide is not necessarily about choosing the right words but how you convey yourself through your verbal and non-verbal skills. People do not feel comfortable talking or being open with someone when they think that they are going to be judged. Nor do they feel comfortable talking to someone who tries to convert them to their way of thinking.

### Elements of Supportive Communication

- Communicate non-judgementally
- Listen attentively, BE PRESENT
- Empathise with their situation
- Acknowledge their feelings
- Let them hear your concern

- Affirm that they came to you for support
- Assess yourself- check your own feelings, attitudes, beliefs to ensure they do not impact negatively on the other person

### Be an Active Listener

Active listening is Intentional listening - a set of skills that if done correctly can:

- keep the listener focused
- help the listener have, and show, empathy
- let the person talking know that they are respected
- has the effect of a person feeling 'really listened to'
- keeps the conversation flowing

Often in conversations...

- We might be busy thinking of what we are going to say next, rather than fully tuning in to the person in front of us
- We might interrupt the speaker to put our own thoughts and ideas forward
- We might second-guess what the speaker is going to say and finish off their sentence
- We might be busy making judgments about what we are hearing
- ...or be busy offering advice

## To be an Active Listener:

- 👂 Ensure that you are not distracted
- 👂 Make a conscious decision to listen
- 👂 Don't rush the speaker
- 👂 Be aware of your non-verbals
- 👂 Do not interpret, give advice, or talk about your 'own stuff'
- 👂 Do not rescue: many really compassionate people can be poor listeners because they are so anxious to help, to solve problems, give advice or to 'cheer up' the speaker, they do not give the speaker a chance to fully share what is happening for them.

## Important Things to Remember

- 👂 **Do not minimize feelings**
- 👂 **Do not Judge**
- 👂 **Be Empathetic not Sympathetic**
- 👂 **Do not give your opinion**
- 👂 **Don't rush the speaker**
- 👂 **Be aware of your non-verbal's**
- 👂 **Do not interpret, give advice, or talk about your 'own stuff'**
- 👂 **Do Not Rescue**
- 👂 **Trust that the most effective way you can help is to really LISTEN and to give the person the opportunity to work through their experience.**

*To learn more about Suicide and how you could help in the fight against suicide, contact TALK SUICIDE Support Service on 1800 008 255 to discuss tailoring a training package to suit your needs.*

TALK SUICIDE Support Service is an initiative of Suicide Prevention Pathways inc. (SPP) offering programs that educate, raise awareness and above all provide emotional and practical support to those at risk of suicide and their family and friends. For more information visit [spp.org.au](http://spp.org.au) or call us on 1800 008 255.

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