

## Practicing Compassionate Listening

- Respect the survivor's autonomy and strengths
- Validate the survivor and indicate responsibility of violence is with the perpetrator(s)
- Stay engaged and focused on survivor's needs and validate the survivor's strengths
- When it is possible and appropriate, [sincerely apologize](#)
- Do *not* invalidate or blame or pathologize the survivor
- Do *not* take away the survivor's autonomy

### Specific Suggestions for Compassionate Listening:

These suggestions are drawn from instructions that address listening skills in the moment -- these instructions were used in a study by: Foynes, M.M. & Freyd, J.J. (2011). [The Impact of Skills Training on Responses to the Disclosure of Mistreatment](#). *Psychology of Violence*, 1, 66-77. The particular wording of these instructions was designed to match a control condition in our study. (See <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/disclosure/> for the specific experimental and control materials.)

First, it is important to utilize attentive body language.

1. Do not make inappropriate facial expressions (Examples: smiling when someone is discussing a sad topic, rolling eyes, raising eyebrows when hearing how someone coped) and do not move your body too much (Examples: excessive fidgeting, playing with cell phone).
2. Do sit in a posture (leaning forward or upright) and use gestures that convey engagement (nodding).
3. Do maintain consistent, not constant or darting, eye contact (look directly at the person for brief periods of 3-6 seconds, then look away briefly before reconnecting).

Second, it is important to use verbal skills that encourage the speaker to continue.

1. Do *not* change the topic or ask questions that are off-topic. This may seem like a way to decrease your anxiety or make the other person more comfortable, but it often has the opposite effect.
2. Do allow silence and convey that you are listening by using encouraging words like “hmmm” and “uh-huh” periodically.

3. *Do* state/name/reflect back the emotion being described. It might also help you to imagine yourself in the speaker's place and look at the situation from his/her perspective. (Examples: "Wow - sounds like it was scary for you." "It seems like you feel really sad about that." "I feel like that must've made you angry.")
4. *Do* ask questions if you are confused, and try to ask questions that require more than one word (Instead of: "Was that scary?" "Do you mean it wasn't that bad?" Ask questions like: "Could you tell me a little bit more about that?" "What was that like for you?" "What do you mean when you say \_\_\_\_?")

Third, it is important to use words in a way that convey support.

1. *Do not* reassure the person in a way that might minimize their experience (Examples: "That happened so long ago, maybe it would help to try move on." "It's not worth the energy to keep thinking about it." "Don't be scared.")
2. *Do not* make judgments or evaluations about their responses or decisions (Examples: "Couldn't you do/say \_\_\_\_\_ instead?" "I don't think you should worry about it anymore." "I think it'd be better for you to \_\_\_\_." "Why don't you \_\_\_\_?")
3. *Do* validate the person's emotions in a genuine tone (Examples: "If that happened to me, I can imagine I'd feel really overwhelmed too." "Given that experience, it makes sense you'd feel/say/do \_\_\_\_." "I think many people with that experience would have felt similarly.")
4. *Do* point out the person's strengths (Examples: "I'm amazed at how much courage that took." "You've done a great job at keeping everything in perspective." "I really admire your strength." "I'm impressed with how you've dealt with this.")
5. *Do* focus on their experience rather than your own and only give advice when it is requested.