

# Interviewing Skills that Promote a Positive Working Relationship with People

## Communicating Respect

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**Establishing rapport and trust**—*Increases a person's sense of well-being and confidence and shows that you are interested in them as a person*

"Is this a good time to talk with you?"

"I'd like to take some time to get to know you and understand how you've been doing managing your condition. Is it OK to ask you a few questions?"

"I understand that you were recently hospitalized. How are you feeling today?"

**Using empathy**—*"Walking in their shoes" demonstrates understanding of persons' experiences from their point of view*

"It sounds like..." *(to acknowledge the feeling after you have paused to imagine how it might feel to the patient)*

"Can you tell me more?" *(to show sincere interest and to legitimize and respect the patient's feelings)*

"What has this been like for you? How has all of this made you feel?" *(to check that you "got it" correctly)*

"I want to make sure I have this right. I imagine you must be feeling ..." *(to keep encouraging the patient to help you understand)*

**Showing respect for current coping efforts**—*Shows you recognize person's abilities and reminds patient of inner strengths*

"I know you've been coping with this for a while—how are you able to manage it?"

"So, what have you found helpful?"

"Is there anything you can think of that might be helpful right now?"

**Expanding understanding by asking how others would feel**—*Provides more information from different vantage points or close relationships—broadens your context about the person*

"What do you think your children would say if they were listening to our conversation?"

"How would your husband know if you were feeling better—what would he notice?"

"If I asked your family, what would they tell me was the hardest part of this for you?"

## Effective Questioning

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**Asking open-ended questions**—*Increases likelihood of person giving more information because they're allowed to answer freely, in their own words, and as completely as they wish*

"How is your sleep?" *(Instead of "Do you have insomnia?" You might find they are oversleeping)*

"Tell me about your previous hospitalizations." *(Instead of "How many times were you hospitalized?")*

"To what extent did your appetite change?" *(Instead of "Did you lose your appetite?")*

"Many people have trouble taking their medicines every day—what's your experience?"

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**Asking about feelings**—Offers validations that people may have a range of feelings and helps persons clarify feelings that may be avoided or missed

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“Can you tell me more about how you’re feeling?”

“What types of feelings did you have? Any other feelings?”

“I’m wondering what happened that made you feel that way? Have you felt this way before?”

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**Probing for more detail, affirming, encouraging continuation of thought**—Encouraging person to give more specific information demonstrating that you want to understand them as an individual, helps with making a plan that is more focused on their needs

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“I’d like to hear more about that.”

“And what else...? Anything more you’d like to add to that list? Do I have everything?”

“Please tell me more!”

“I’m not sure I understand...”

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## Effective Listening

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**Active listening**—Listening carefully for both the content and the feeling contained in the persons’ language can help them feel accepted

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“It sounds like you had so much to do that you’re really feeling tired today.”

“So you’re saying just how frustrating it is not to make progress?”

“This is really important to you.”

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**Reflective listening**—Reflecting or restating the person’s words in order to encourage the person to lead the conversation and tell you more

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“...Yes, mm-hmm, sure, of course.”

“When you say your life is ‘a mess,’ what does that mean?” And what did that feel like?”

“Can you give me an example of what would be a bother? How are you feeling about all the ‘bothers’ you’re dealing with?”

“So, when you felt ‘out of it’ last week, what did you do?”

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**Summarizing at key points**—Summarizing the person’s thoughts, actions, and feelings gives the person a chance to correct, add, or revise what you heard

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“Okay, so you’ve been telling me [ ] ....did I get everything right?”

“Let me make sure I have this right. ...”

“So, here’s what I heard [ ]...is it correct?”

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## A Note About Silence as a Listening Tool

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Silence is also an effective and important part of good listening. Sometimes people need a moment (or two) to listen to their own thoughts or to sort out their feelings. Silence can be harder to tolerate over the telephone. Don’t assume nothing is going on just because it’s quiet.

When a person says “I don’t know” in response to a difficult question, this may just be a way to break an uncomfortable silence and it might be wise to give them a little more time to answer.

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The following sources were used in developing the various approaches:

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- Berg, IK, Reuss, NH. (January, 2000) Solutions Step by Step. New York: Norton, W.W. & Company, Inc.
- DeJong, P, Berg, IK. (1998) Interviewing for Solutions. California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Morrison, J. (1995) The First Interview: Revised for DSM-IV. New York: The Guilford Press.