

# The Art and Science of Listening

Listening in a care-giving relationship is both an art and a science



As care-givers we are called upon to help someone explore the problems, crises, and stresses of their lives and aid in weaving these narratives into the larger tapestry of their experiences.



As care-givers we are tasked with understanding theories and techniques of care that can benefit those who are experiencing particular moral stresses or crises in their lives.



Our ability to listen both creates complexity and simplicity. We can help others explore their stories and give voice to issues that need clarification; also, we can help people place a narrative in the broader context of their life experiences. This requires us to develop reflective capacities, understand personal narratives, our embodied reactions, and our skills and limits in caregiving relationships.

## Embodied Listening

"Communication is more than words. Our bodies convey a lived theology that may not be fully integrated with what we say we believe and value—our espoused theology" (Doehring, p. 53)

"Authenticity requires at a basic level that caregivers understand what they may be communicating in how they listen and in their tone of voice and body language" (Doehring, p. 55)

"Radical compassion and respect is more likely to be expressed through one's body if one regularly uses spiritual practices to experience self and other compassion" (Doehring, p. 56)

Embodied listening is a learned skill based in the artful and reflexive understanding of one's self and how we use that self in our relationships with others. It requires us to be in constant conversation with the "why" and "how" of what we do as caregivers, as we continually work out what it means to embody radical compassion for our own experiences and the experiences of others.

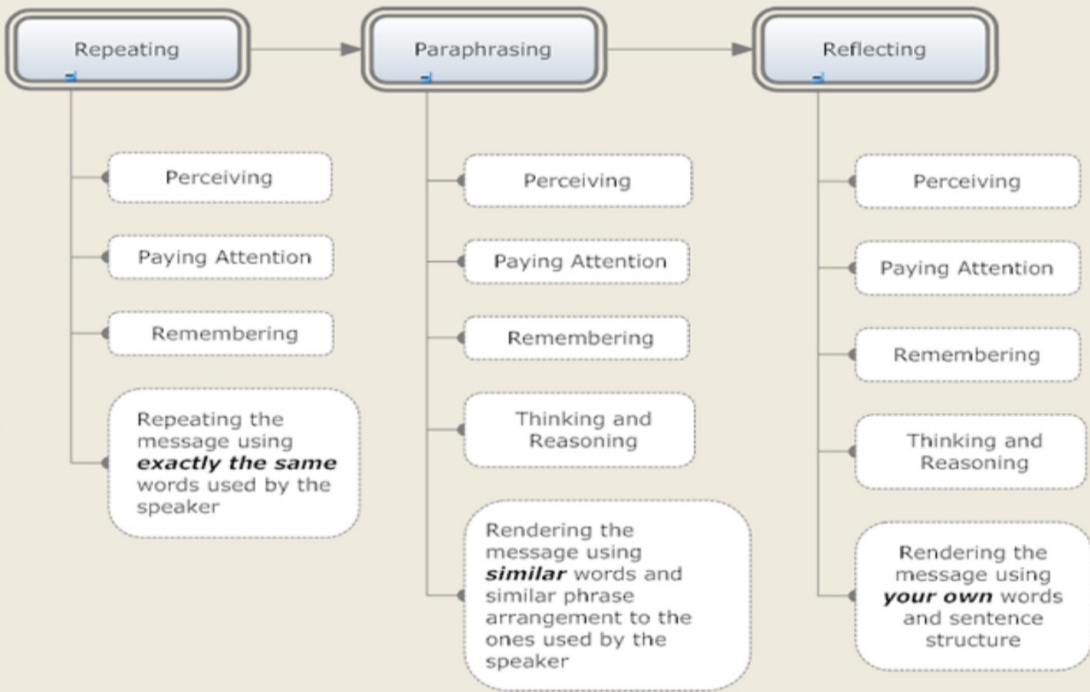
## Active Listening

**Paraphrasing** - Paraphrasing is similar to writing a book report on a story you just read. It involves carefully listening to the plot, characters, and action of the story being told and then summarizing that story back to the person who gave to you.

**Clarifying** -Clarifying is an exercise in careful questioning. It is not about a personal search for more facts or information, though you might learn a bit more from a persons answers to your questions. Clarifying questions help the care-receiver dive into the complexity of their stories and search for connections that will help them understand it differently.

**Interpreting** - Interpreting is the riskiest part of a care conversation for the care-giver. It is not about doling out wisdom or wrapping things up in a neat package. Interpreting is a tentative step that puts together the pieces of a story, then seeks the care-seeker's input. Interpretive statements might give voice to an unnamed emotion; it might make a themed connection that seems obvious, but stays unnamed. Caregivers should not be tied to our interpretations, they are meant to be a small gift to the care-seeker to unpack and see if it fits their experience.

### Degrees of Active Listening



Source: Imelda Bickham

**Self-disclosure** -Where ever we go, there we are. Caring conversations are relationships where there is a complex interaction of perspectives, experiences and memories. Self-disclosure in spiritual care settings boils down to asking ourselves the question: "how does my experience benefit the care-seeker?"

If, upon reflection, we think a personal experience will help a care-seeker see their own story differently and perhaps more clearly, then self-disclosure may provide a vital connection in a caring relationship.

On the other hand, if self-reflection reveals that a story we want to tell speaks to our expertise concerning life and all that it involves, then it may distract rather than connect.

Remember, once you self-disclose, that story becomes a part of the conversation; it is our responsibility to make sure that it contributes rather than distracts from the caregiving relationship.

## Motivational Interviewing

Four Key Features: partnership, acceptance, compassion, evocation (Doehring, p. 57)

### Motivational Interviewing Typology of Responses

Following/Asking	"How are things going?"
Following/Listening	"Hmm-hmm" [Nodding silently]
Following/Informing	"I have had some experience with that [problem/issue]; would it be helpful to hear about that?"
Guiding/Asking	"What happens when you try to [change that behavior]?"
Guiding/Listening	"I'm interested in hearing more about how this [paraphrase by introducing closely related ways of describing the care seeker's experience]"
Guiding/Informing	"I'm familiar with what has helped other people with this problem. I'd like to share some of that information with you..."
Directing/Asking	"Could I stop you for a moment and ask a question about how safe you feel right now?"
Directing/Listening	"I want to hear more about this, and I may need to follow up with some questions of my own."
Directing/Informing	"I need to stop you for a moment and let you know about the limits of confidentiality."