

wee tips on the **art of conversation**, how to **open up and share** and how to **listen** when someone wants to **open up to you**



Decide what it is you want to say and if possible pick a time and place where you can be heard e.g. deciding to phone a friend whose attention maybe focused on their kids at that moment may not be a good idea, arranging a time where you can both chat undisturbed and privately may work better.

Practice some relaxation, it's easier to talk about how we feel if we are relaxed, something as simple as a 3min relaxer or some mindful breathing can make all the difference. There are examples of this on COPE Scotland's website.

Be kind if the person listening asks a question, this means they are listening and are trying to understand. Effective communication happens when both parties respect each other, trust each other, and feel safe to be open and honest about how they feel.

Recognise this is the beginning of opening up. It maybe it will take time to work through what is causing you distress. Sometimes things happen which take time to resolve, or, it maybe you need time to come to terms with what is happening. But before any journey to a better place can begin, we need to find a starting point, and that can be as simple as letting someone know, "I am not fine, this is why". Recognising there is an issue, makes it easier to explore what next and this is easier when shared with someone else.

Let the person know what your intentions are. Sometimes people worry they need to fix things and so don't know how to listen as they are thinking about solutions. If you start by saying, "I don't need you to fix anything or jump in with a solution, I just need someone to listen then help me decide what next". You are setting the scene and letting the person know you want to talk and what you ask of them is to listen to you.

People aren't mind readers, so you need to take responsibility for being understood. Don't worry if you feel what you are saying is maybe all over the place. Sometimes when we do open up for the first time, we have so much to say it comes in a rush. Just be patient with the person who is listening and say "I know this may not seem to make sense, bear with me" Sometimes we need that space of just letting it all pour out so we ourselves can start to make sense of what we are thinking and feeling. This is why its important people know we want them to listen not solve anything, as sometimes we just need to be heard, even when what we are saying doesn't always make sense, even to ourselves.

It maybe what you are going through needs more than someone just to listen. They may suggest you also speak to someone else. Please don't feel that doesn't mean they don't want to listen, or, don't care, it just means they have heard and recognise it maybe helpful for you to share with someone else too. Talking to that person, may help you decide its maybe time to talk to someone who can offer professional help. Remember, its important people offering professional help are good listeners too.

How to listen when someone needs to talk to you as we can all at times have people want to share with us too

You are focused on the person you are listening too, not thinking about what you are going to reply, or, have for dinner, what else you need to do at work etc. At this moment your focus is on listening to the other person.

You are patient. Sometimes when someone has held things in for a long time they don't know where to start or seem to be all over the place. An effective listener will understand this and be patient realising it can be hard to talk and not forcing others to explain or go over things or hurry up. Giving the person space to realise they are being listened to and as result, may feel more relaxed and safer to share how they really feel.

Don't get angry or defensive an effective listener won't get angry or defensive with you if you challenge something they will reflect and will patiently try and work out what they misunderstood so you are both back on the same page. This is why sometimes we find it hard to talk to loved ones, and why sometimes we do need to talk to someone else about how we feel.

An effective listener is empathic as opposed to sympathetic. Empathy is about understanding the feelings of another and sharing them, it is around a shared connection about what it means to be human. Sympathy can be more around pity and sorry for someone else's misfortune and many of us don't want someone's pity, we do not want anyone to feel sorry for us, we want to be understood.

The person knows you are giving them your full attention with your eye contact and body language and perhaps occasional words of encouragement to continue, the person senses you are interested and want to hear more.

Non-judgemental, an effective listener knows, this isn't about their views, or what they think this is about. They want to listen to what we have to say, what is important and matters to us.

Don't bombard with questions. Effective listeners encourage us to talk. They don't bombard us with questions but to show they are listening may say things like "tell me more about", or, "I sense this has made you feel angry, sad, confused". Their words help you realise they are paying attention and they are trying to understand, and it also gives us a chance if they aren't understanding for us to say e.g. "no I am not angry I am just very frustrated"

Sometimes someone needs more support than a listening ear and knowing local support and services to help link the person can help you feel more confident to listen. Sometimes someone is so despairing they may think of suicide. Attending a suicide first aid workshop can help you be ready willing and able to offer a suicide first aid intervention.

Samaritans Freephone 116 123

**Zero Suicide Alliance Online
Suicide Awareness Training
www.zerosuicidealliance.com**



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