

COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The following are all ACTIVE LISTENING skills and techniques. Each Technique/Skill ACKNOWLEDGES the thoughts, words and experience of the speaker.

Technique/Skill	Function	Example
VALIDATING Support and acknowledgement of the parties' feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledges the feeling of hurt and conveys respect, acceptance • Allows understanding of feelings and other perspective 	"You're feeling overwhelmed by having to make these decisions... where do you begin?"
REFLECTING (in the form of a question) Checking in and interpreting what you have heard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to clarifying, reflecting provides an opening for a richer and more thorough response • Allow an opportunity to expand upon and clarify a perspective • An opportunity to confirm and acknowledge feelings 	"You're feeling like your efforts aren't being recognized or respected by the ICU staff, or by me... am I accurate?"
MIRRORING Repeating /echoing the other party's words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reflective technique that uses the exact words • Provides opportunity for the patient or family member to hear their words • Allows time and space for the patient or family member to continue their thought or expand on it • invites expansion on the comment 	Family: "I can't believe this is happening. Just yesterday he was out jogging." [Silent pause.] Practitioner: "He was out jogging just yesterday..."
REFRAMING Turning a negative statement into a positive or more neutral statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps clarify and de-escalate conflict. • Tones down blaming or critical statements and provides context • Converts a complaint into a problem solving action • Can help identify the interests behind a stated position 	"This frustration you're feeling really says a lot about how much you both love your mother."
PARAPHRASING Using your own words to interpret your colleague's thoughts and feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lets the speaker know that you hear the message they are sending • Gives the receiver (perceiver) the same opportunity • Slows down the pace of the conversation 	"You feel like we have been disrespectful and neglectful in your mother's care."
QUESTIONING Appropriate use of open & close-ended questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opens up discussion • Allows exchange of information. • Encourages expression • Obtains fact and feeling information. • Confirms understanding • Provides who/what/ where/why/how insight 	Open: "Can you help me understand more about...?" Closed: "When did you decide to...?"

Technique/Skill	Function	Example
CLARIFYING Checking to verify facts, information, or feelings that have been expressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof positive that you are listening closely • Helps elucidate or disarm conflict issues 	“You’re finding this hard because you’re not sure if it’s what your mother would have really wanted... Is that right?”
OBSERVATION Commenting on what you see and what that indicates to you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence for the party that you are involved, aware and listening closely to both verbal language and non verbal signals • Opportunity to further clarify or expand information 	“I can see how angry you are about all this.” “While we’ve been taking about your mom, I noticed that you haven’t been looking at me. I’m wondering if there’s something upsetting you.” “You seem surprised to hear this.”
LINKING Making a connection between statements, issues, etc., that require an explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining why you are asking questions – especially with sensitive topics helps one understand and locate themselves in the conversation when and if it shifts 	“In order to understand... I would like to ask you more about...”
ASKING PERMISSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respects and empowers party self-determination and autonomy 	“I need to ask you a sensitive [or difficult] question so I can understand... Is that OK with you??”
NORMALIZING Stabilizing common anxiety or concerns that leave one or both parties feeling uncertain or vulnerable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements intended to decrease anxiety and increase comfort/ease. • Inclusive, reassuring, may ease feelings of isolation 	“Many people in these circumstances struggle in the same way. It makes sense that you are feeling so upset.”
Use “AND” instead of “YES, BUT”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “and” connects and provides possibilities in a difficult conversation, can diffuse volatile emotion • “but” dismisses the content and feeling of prior statements, can escalate conflict 	“Yes you’re angry, but there’s no need to yell.” ...Instead... “You’re really angry and it’s important we talk about the situation.”
SUMMARIZING Brief verbal reviews throughout your conversation. Final summary moving to settlement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to maintain a mutual and accurate understanding of facts, interests, needs and positions • Keeps the discussion on track i.e. “where we are” • Helps focus the parties • A final summary of your mutual agreement enhances the resolution process 	“You think we don’t respect your efforts and goals, so you have been unwilling to engage in any more discussion with us.”