

Tips for listening to people in distress

LISTEN

Listen attentively with the intention of really trying to hear what the person is saying. Stop yourself from immediately thinking of how to respond or giving advice as that will prevent you from being able to listen. Feeling listened to and heard are powerful experiences for anyone who is struggling or sharing something personal.

REFLECT

Reflect back what you have heard. Do this by paraphrasing what you heard the other person say. This achieves two things. Firstly, it's a way of checking that what you've heard and how you've interpreted it is accurate. Invite the person to let you know by using phrases like *"So, if I've heard you right, what you're saying/feeling is....?"*. Secondly, it demonstrates to the person that you are focused on them and on understanding *their* experiences and feelings. This helps the person to feel like you are empathising with them.

EMPATHISE

Empathy means imagining what it is like for another person to be in his/her shoes (and *not* what it might be like for you if you were in his/her shoes). It can be hard to empathise with someone, particularly if you've experienced something similar. Many people who have experienced something similar think about their own experiences and can assume the other person felt/feels the same. Be sure not to fall into that common and most human of pitfalls. Instead, be guided by what the person tells you about how they think and feel. Demonstrate empathy by using phrases like *"That sounds really hard"*, *"I can see you're feeling really worried/upset."*

ASK

Ask questions. Ask how they think and feel about what's going on. Check if they've talked to anyone else or have existing support available to them (a parent, family member, professional, etc.). Ask them what kind of support they think they need now.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Take your time. Doing that will help you and the person who is sharing his/her story. And, remember that you don't have to have all the answers.