

## Chapter 12

# COMMUNICATION SKILLS



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Many people who live with a condition  
or are coping with a difficult situation  
often feel isolated.

They may feel that no-one understands how they are feeling  
and they may find it difficult to ask for help.

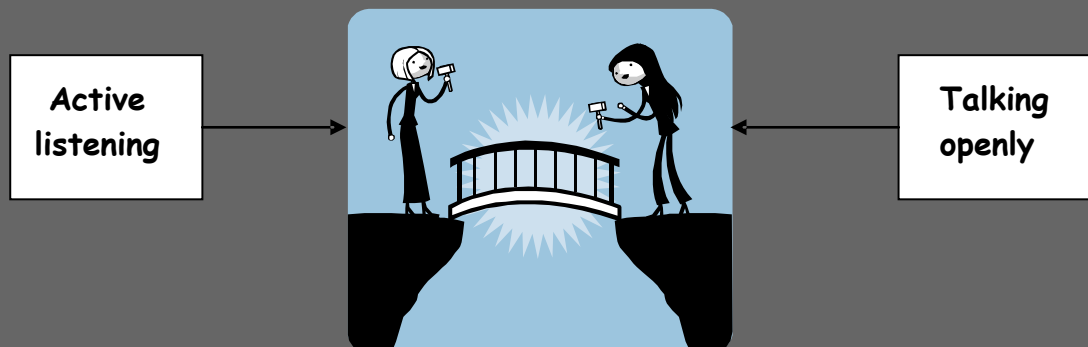
They may find it difficult to get their needs fully met.

Friends and family of people who are coping with a condition may not know how to help  
or may feel awkward because of their lack of understanding.

They may not know whether to help or just be quietly supportive.

Misunderstandings and confusion can easily arise  
and a gap between people can grow.

**With good communication**  
this gap can be bridged.



However, it is how you listen and how you talk that make the difference. In this busy world, people don't always take the time to really listen, or know how to ask for help in a positive way.

In this chapter

We touch on how to listen "actively", and how to ask for help or understanding in an assertive, respectful way. We also address how to talk to yourself in a more positive way. If you are thinking more positively, it will be easier to communicate your needs and feelings to others. They will not only feel better able to listen and help, but will also be more willing!

## LISTENING AND BEING LISTENED TO



How often have you had someone listen to you without interruption?



To have someone interested in you enough to listen to what you say makes a huge difference to how you feel:-

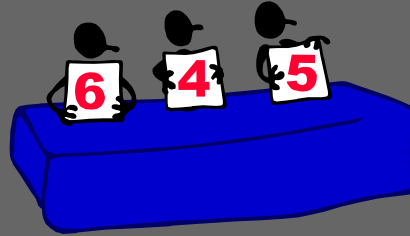
- about yourself
- about that person
- about the situation you talked about.

WE ALL NEED TO BE LISTENED TO.

## WHAT MAKES GOOD LISTENING?

Listening ...

without making judgements



without telling them to pull themselves together



without telling them that  
the same thing happened  
to a friend of yours



and without offering solutions



HAS ANYONE EVER THANKED YOU FOR LISTENING TO THEM  
IN THIS WAY?

AND DID YOU THINK

"I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING! I ONLY LISTENED!" ?

Listening in the right way is a simple but wonderful thing to do for someone.

Being listened to helps people to think about issues such as:-



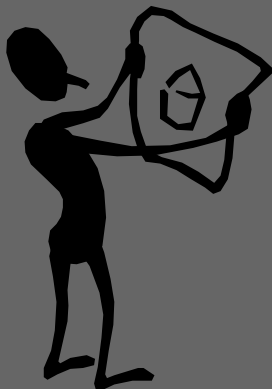
Coping with disappointment



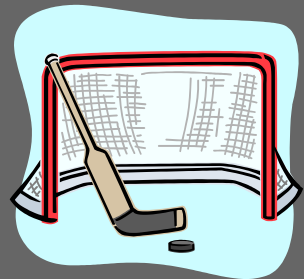
Finding solutions



Clearing up confusions

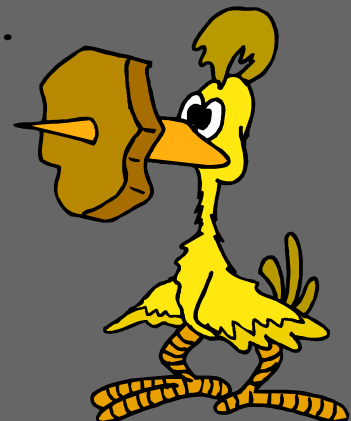


Planning



Setting Goals

and it helps people work their way out of a situation where they feel stuck.



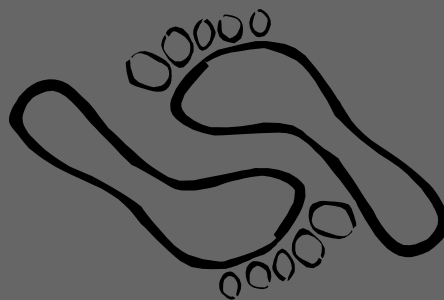
## So --- what is ACTIVE LISTENING?

When someone listens to you and you feel as if they have really heard and understood you - they have been listening actively.

What did they do? They probably -

- Kept eye contact with you
- Made sure they understood what you were saying by checking what you meant
- Asked for clarification to make sure they fully understood
- Remained neutral and non-judgmental
- Made sure you knew they were listening by nodding occasionally
- Reflected back to show that they understood how you felt

So that at the end  
they have understood what it is like



to walk in your footsteps.

# Self Talk

Have you ever actively listened to yourself?

This means listening to how we talk or think about ourselves and our situations.

If you did, you might have noticed times when your thinking was quite positive, and other times when your thinking was quite negative.

The brain tends to think quite negatively when it is distressed or going through periods of struggle.

If these times are prolonged, our thinking style can become habitual and consistently negative unless we actively do something about it.

There are two opposite ways of thinking:-

<b>NATs</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>PATs</b>
Negative Automatic Thoughts		Positive Automatic Thoughts

## PATs

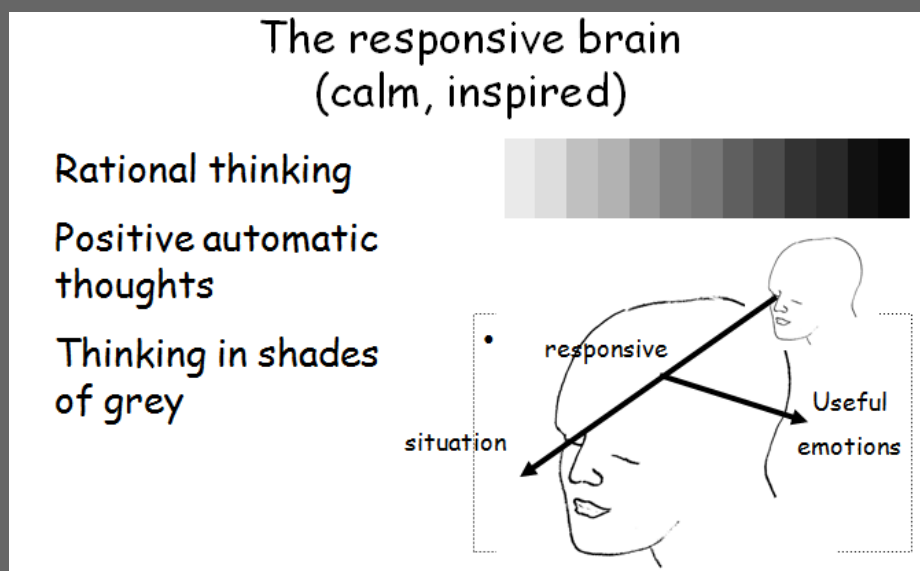
### Positive Automatic Thoughts

This is the thinking style of the relaxed, responsive and mindful brain.

It is of course possible to habitually think in a more positive way.

People who do this tend to have a more realistic and helpful way of looking at a situation or feeling.

- The brain responds rather than reacts.
- The brain manages emotions well.
- The brain thinks rationally about situations.
- The brain thinks in shades of grey.



"Ok, things haven't been going so well lately. They have picked up before and they can pick up again."

"I feel anxious and it's ok. Come on - don't get anxious about being anxious."

"I can't just now but with practice things might be different."

"I should? Who says?"



# NATs

## Negative Automatic Thoughts

This is the thinking style  
of the distressed, depressed brain.

(It is also the thinking style of the ACUTE STRESS RESPONSE.)

In a danger situation, we need to think quickly when our survival is an issue -

**FIGHT OR FLIGHT**

(Yes or no - now!)

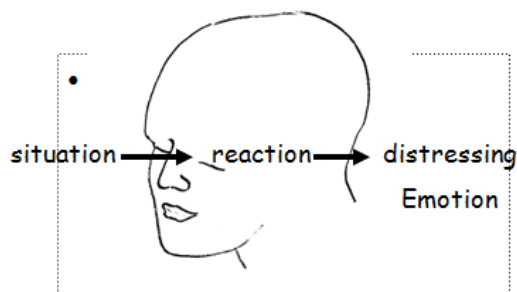
The problem is when we find ourselves thinking this way  
habitually.

- The brain reacts rather than responds.
- The brain is hijacked by energy sapping emotions.
- The brain thinks irrationally about situations.
- The brain thinks in black and white.

Even the hardest of us can feel helpless in the face of constant  
difficulties.

### The reactive brain (distressed, depressed)

- Attention locked
- Fight or flight
- Negative automatic thoughts
  - Black or white
  - All or nothing



Weighed down by NATs!

# TYPES OF NATs

## All or nothing – black or white

If you fall short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.

If others fall short of perfect, they are total failures.



## Dwelling on a single negative detail

Your vision of all reality becomes darkened

(like the drop of ink that colours the entire beaker black).

## Disqualifying the positive

That good thing that happened doesn't count because.....



## Jumping to conclusions

"Mind reading" – you conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you without checking it out.

## Fortune telling

You anticipate that things will turn out badly.

## Catastrophising

You think something is worse than it actually is.

## Making assumptions

Assuming that, just because you feel something, it must be true.

"I feel stupid, so I must be stupid."

## Musts, oughts, and should

You whip yourself - and others with must, ought and should statements.



## Labelling

Instead of describing the behaviour of others or yourself, you attach a negative label to others or yourself.

"I'm useless."

"He's lazy."

Whenever you become aware of your thinking patterns  
you can **CHANGE** them  
by **RE-FRAMING** your thoughts.

Similarly ...

When you become more aware of your habitual way of  
expressing yourself and your situation,  
you will also become more aware of an  
alternative way of expressing things.

**Changing habits**  
takes time and practice,  
but eventually, with persistence,  
you **CAN** change and you will  
begin to see your situation in a different light.



You will begin to open up to  
the possibility of  
**CHANGE.**

So all you need to do to  
start this process is to  
observe your thinking.

## CHANGING OUR THINKING STYLE

Once you have begun to notice the way you think, you will become more aware of whether you are predominantly a negative or a positive automatic thinker. We can all be negative at times, although some more than others.

Here is an exercise you might like to try that will get you on the road to changing your thinking style if you practise it enough. If you catch yourself coming up with a negative thought:-

- Step into your “observer self”  
(and take a few belly breaths).
- Acknowledge the difficulty/problem and reframe the thought.

For example:

<b>NATs</b> Unrealistic Thinking	<b>PATs</b> Realistic Thinking
I'm Stupid.	OK, I have done some stupid things in my time, but I have also done some good things.
It doesn't matter what I do, nothing works. There's no point in even trying.	Things aren't working just now, but they have in the past, and will do again.
I should be able to do more but I am always too exhausted.	I am often exhausted, but things improve when I take time to rest.

# ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

## 3 Communication Styles

There are three styles of communication usually identified in assertiveness training.

These are set out below with examples to help you recognise them in your own or other peoples' communication.

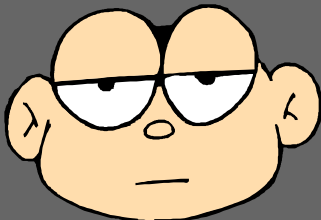
### Aggressive

- Shouting or talking forcefully
- Not listening to what others are saying
- Interrupting people
- Snapping at people
- Being unwilling to compromise
- Getting what you want (no matter what)



### Passive

- Talking quietly or timidly
- Apologising all the time
- Not saying how you feel
- Not asking for what you need
- Doing what other people want all the time
- Hiding how you feel



### Assertive

- Stating things in a calm clear way
- Saying how you feel about things
- Listening to others
- Being prepared to compromise
- Meeting your own needs
- Taking others into account



## What are the advantages of practising assertive communication?

1. People understand you or your situation and how you feel about it, and you understand them and theirs.
2. Your needs and wishes are more likely to be met, or your feelings acknowledged and understood.
3. A good compromise or a „win-win“ situation is more likely to be worked out between you and others.

## What difference can that make?

- You boost your self-esteem
- You improve your relationships
- You feel more confident and relaxed
- You know that you did your best
- You have had respect for the rights of others
- You did not abuse the rights of others

Being assertive comes naturally to some people,  
while others need to prepare and practise  
for important conversations  
and develop their skills over time.

Eventually, it will become more natural to you.  
It will be your first response every time.

# What stops us being assertive, and what makes us either passive or aggressive?

Here are some examples :-

## Passive

Embarrassed to say how  
I really feel

Worried that I will  
upset people if I say no

Too shy or low in self-  
esteem to ask for help

Think others should  
know what I want  
without me having to ask

Think others don't want  
to hear about me and my  
situation

Think other people's  
needs are more  
important than my own

## Aggressive

Feel really angry with  
someone and want to  
shout at them

Enjoy being in charge  
and telling others what  
to do

Think that people don't  
listen unless I shout

Just feel frustrated and  
take it out on others

Think my needs are more  
important than other  
people's

Think that everyone  
wants to hear about me  
and my situation

## How to communicate assertively when asking for help or understanding.

1. Speak directly to the right person rather than to a third party.
2. Now might not be the right time if you are feeling angry or upset. Why not allow some time for emotions to settle down and arrange to meet at a time and place convenient to both of you?
3. Remain calm and keep it amicable. A good way to do this is to acknowledge how the other person is feeling. There are always two sides to a story.
4. Stick to the facts and avoid accusations. Remember, black and white rarely exists!  
Saying, "When you do --- I feel ---"  
sounds less accusing than, "You make me feel---"
5. Be clear.
  - State what exactly this person does or says which causes you concern or difficulty.
  - State exactly what you feel at these times.
  - State what you need instead.



Here is an example of what an assertive conversation might look like:-

"Jane, there are a few things about this condition that I would like you to know and I think it would be helpful for us to talk.  
Perhaps we could meet up for a coffee tomorrow?"

During coffee the next day

"I know you are getting frustrated because I'm not going out very much just now, and that must be hard for you."

"When this condition gets on top of me, it can be really hard for me to feel able to talk to anyone. I've been feeling really down recently and have been finding it hard to be in a group of people."

"When you get impatient with me I feel even more useless than I have been feeling already, and I find it harder to pick myself up."

"What I need is for you to be patient with me and give me a bit of support."

"Perhaps we could plan to do something tomorrow - just the two of us?"

