

Non-judgmental communication

To listen non-judgmentally is a skill in its own right. Professional mental health workers and counsellors are trained in non-judgmental listening, and it takes some time to become familiar and confident with this approach.

All staff working with children and young people need to be aware of this type of approach and increase their skills in this area. Doing so will help your confidence when dealing with crises and assist you in making the correct assessment of each situation.



What does it mean?

We all spend a great deal of time listening to what people are saying. At least, that is the impression we give. Much of the time the words we hear trigger a reaction in our own minds. This means that we have often switched off to what the person is really saying and are following our own train of thought. We might listen to the words but we do not really hear what the person is actually trying to say.

Non-judgmental listening is about the listener adopting a set of attitudes and using listening skills (verbal and non verbal) that:

- Allow the listener to hear and understand exactly what is being said
- Enable the person to talk freely and comfortably about problems without feeling that he or she is being judged

Attitudes

The attitudes involved in non-judgemental listening are **acceptance, genuineness** and **empathy**. These are sometimes referred to as the core condition because all are necessary to create a safe, comfortable environment in which the person will talk more openly.

Acceptance: is all about respecting the person's feelings, experiences and values, even though they may be different from yours. Do not judge or criticise them because of your own attitudes or beliefs

Genuineness: is about showing the person that you accept them and their values by what you say and do. Do not present an outward appearance of one attitude while actually holding another. Try to reach a position in which your body language reflects what you say

Empathy: is the ability to 'place yourself in the other person shoes' and to demonstrate to the person that you truly hear and understand what they are saying and feeling. It is not the same as sympathy, which is about feeling sorry for the person.

These ideas may sound complex but can be summed up very simply. You are very close to being non-judgemental if you can:

- Accept the person exactly as they are
- Genuinely make no moral judgement about their situation
- Empathetically try to get on their wavelength.