

Section 6: Connecting, Communicating, and Mediating

Listening

Attending Skills

Attending skills are the listening and body language signals that show you are listening. Listening is not a passive behavior; it requires involvement, attention and focus. The goal is to create a comfortable climate that encourages a person to communicate. Combinations of the four attending skills will result in such a climate.

1. **Eye Contact** – Be aware of what culturally appropriate eye contact may be. For example, for Caucasian Americans, it is generally appropriate to use significant and sustained eye contact.
2. **Body Language** -- The way you physically hold yourself has an impact upon how well s/he will communicate with you. Sit facing the person, arms and legs uncrossed, try not to have any barriers in place between you and the other person. However, be aware of your need to feel comfortable.
3. **Verbal Tracking** – The process of accurately following what the person is saying. Stay focused, do not worry about what to ask or say next. Take your leads from what the person is saying to you. Also, pay attention to what in each statement is important. Do not start talking about “B” or “C” or “D” when “A” was what the person was emphasizing.
4. **Vocal Quality** -- Your vocal quality, tone, volume, and speed affect how comfortable a person feels while talking to you. Generally, try to match your tone, volume and speed to that of the person.

Roadblocks to Active Listening

Ordering, Directing, Commanding

- You must do this.
- You cannot do this.

Warning, Admonishing, Threatening

- You had better do this, or else...
- If you don't do this, then...

Moralizing, Preaching, Imploring

- You should do this
- You ought to try it.

Advising, Giving Suggestions or Solutions

- What I think you should do is...
- Let me suggest...

Persuading with Logic, Lecturing, Arguing

- Do you realize that...
- Let me give you the facts.

Judging, Criticizing, Disagreeing, Blaming

- You are acting foolishly
- You are not thinking straight

Name-calling, Ridiculing, Shaming

- You are a sloppy worker.
- You do stupid things all the time.

Praising, Agreeing, Evaluating Passively, Buttering Up

- You usually have very good judgment.
- You are an intelligent person.

Interpreting, Analyzing, Diagnosing

- You are jealous.
- What you really need is...

Reassuring, Sympathizing, Consoling, Supporting

- Don't worry, things will get better.
- It is always darkest before the dawn.

Probing, Questioning, Interrogating

- Why did you do that?
- What have you done to try to solve it?

Distracting, Diverting, Kidding

- Think about the positive side.
- Try not to think about it until you're rested.

Empathy is *not* Sympathy

Many times when people need to talk, we offer sympathy. However, empathy has been found to be much more helpful to the person with the problem.

Sympathy...

Involves taking on the other person's feelings (ex: feeling awful because of what's happening to them, worrying about them)

Assumes that the other person feels as you would in the situation.

Places the focus on **you**, the helper.

Casts the person with the problem in the role of victim and you in the role of rescuer.

Assumes that you need to fix the problem.

Assumes **agreement** with your own values concerning the situation.

Empathy...

Communicates your understanding and acceptance of their feelings and the causes of their feelings.

Recognizes that different people react in different ways and concentrates on how **this** person is reacting **now**.

Keeps the focus on the person with the problem.

Shows respect for the person to act and react without shifting the responsibility to yourself.

Gives the person a **choice** how to solve the problem because s/he knows the situation best and is the one who will have to live with the consequences of the choice.

Conveys **acceptance** of the other person's values, whether you agree with those value

Guided Discussions

Why?

A guided discussion is a conversation with a direction and purpose between you and the residents on your floor. It is an opportunity to:

- Get to know your residents without seeming nosy.
- Have meaningful contact that will allow you to learn more about each resident.
- Discover your residents', as well as your own, needs, perceptions, and goals.
- Discuss College and residence hall policies, your role as a CF, and GAC Life in general.

How?

Your discussion should:

- Have 1-6 participants
- Involve anyone from roommates to “across-the-hallers”
- Be in a comfortable, private setting.
- Last 30-60 minutes
- Begin with introductions, if necessary
- Use “returners” whenever possible to provide floor history, legacy, etc.
- **Be natural!** – an extension of your own personality, not canned or insincere.

What?

1. “Who are you?”

These questions will provide you with more than superficial knowledge of each resident. It will offer the opportunity to discuss thoughts and feelings about various topics. A journal may be helpful for your use as an aid in remembering what different residents said.

- Why did you choose Gustavus?
- What interests you about your major?
- Do you have a lot of friends at Gustavus? Are they old friends or did you just meet them?
- Are you the first member of your family to go to Gustavus?
- What kinds of things do you think you will get involved in during the year?
- How do you plan to spend your spare time?
- How much time do you plan to spend studying?

2. Hall Living (or “What you should know while you’re here.”)

This topic will provide the residents with information about your position and how you will relate to the floor/section. It will also provide a discussion of College and Residential Life policies and their enforcement and more information on College resources.

- Why does Gustavus have Collegiate Fellows?
- What is your perception of Residential Life policies?
- What do you know about the judicial process at Gustavus?
- What kinds of CFs have you had before, if any? What did you like? What didn't you like?
- Do you know what the Head Resident is here for? The Area Coordinator?
- What College services are you familiar with and do you know where to go to find them?
- What do you like about Gustavus? What do you like least?

3. The Floor as a Community (or “We’re more than a place to eat and sleep.”)

These questions will provide information regarding the benefits of a strong floor community. It will offer the chance to discuss their floor goals and expectations.

- What do you want from this floor besides a place to sleep?
- What floor activities do you want to be involved with?
- How many people do you know on the floor now?
- What efforts are you willing to take to get to know others?
- What do you see as potential conflicts on our floor? In the hall?
- How often do you plan to go home?
- How well do you get along with your roommate? How do you plan on dealing with any conflicts that may arise?

Conflict Resolution/ Roommate Mediation Process

1. **Problem recognition.** CF meets with roommates X and Y in their room to urge discussion of the conflict.
 - Assume from the beginning that both participants have legitimate positions.
 - Be aware of your biases towards those whose personalities may clash with your own.
 - Listen quietly no matter how unreasonable or violent the remarks are.
 - All expressions should be allowed to be voiced without any interference.
 - Listen with all senses to observe whether a person is stating one message but meaning another.
 - Avoid interrupting.
2. **Problem definition.** CF listens alternately to both roommates' stories,
 - Use frequent paraphrasing to achieve full understanding.
 - Do not take sides.
 - Do not allow yourself to become emotionally involved.
 - Judging is not your task -- avoid "I'm right, you're wrong."
 - Be wary of telling your own personal experiences -- listen instead.
 - Saying "everyone feels that way" makes it seem the situation is rather common and insignificant.
3. **Commitment.** CF asks both X and Y if they are willing to solve the problem.
4. **Exchanging pleasing and displeasing behaviors.** If both roommates agree to attempt to resolve their conflict, specific pleasing and displeasing behaviors are obtained about each roommate from the other in each other's presence. Pleasing and displeasing behavior must be observable (that is, not statements such as "Y is sloppy," but rather "Y leave clothes around the room").
 - Don't be afraid to clarify a point:
 - What was she/he trying to say?
 - What was he/she feeling at this point?
 - Was the other person hearing what was said, "I hear you say... is that it?"
 - If the participants can't possibly talk to each other have them talk separately to you.
 - There are limits to what you can handle on your own. Be aware of them.
5. **Negotiation.** Roommates negotiate specific behaviors to satisfy the needs of each. For example, X will allow Y to have a guest spend the night as long as they clean first.
6. **Contracting.** A contract is made using the specific likes and dislikes of each roommate. After X and Y come to an agreement, they co-sign a contract that will be posted conspicuously in their room.
7. **Follow up.** New contracts are made weekly. Intervention by the CF is terminated as soon as possible.

Assertiveness

Myths That Make Assertiveness a Challenge

1. Everyone has to like me.
2. I have to like everyone.
3. If I can't do something perfectly, I shouldn't do it at all.
4. Every decision I make must be the right decision.

Four Assertive Ways to Make a Request

1. Direct Assertion

Be sure to clarify in your mind what it is you really want before you make your request.

- "I think..., I need..., I want..., I feel..., I would like..."

2. Empathetic Assertion

You are trying to convey that you understand that the other person may also have a problem.

- "I realize that... and yet...; I understand that... but..."

3. Mixed Feeling Assertion

Use this type of request when you are ambivalent about the subject.

- "Part of me says... but a bigger part of me says..."

4. Confrontation Assertiveness

Use when someone fails to follow through on an agreement.

- "You said that you would (what was promised), but instead (what has actually occurred). I need (a restatement of your original direct assertion)".

10 Guidelines for Assertive Behavior

1. Know you are worthy and so are your opinions and desires.
2. Be open-minded and tolerant; others' opinions and desires are also worthy.
3. Work to understand and honestly express your emotions, opinions and needs.
4. Don't be afraid to say "no."
5. Avoid asking "could you," "would you mind," etc. Know what you want, and ask for it.
6. Use factual descriptions instead of judgments or exaggerations.
 - Ex: "This is sloppy work." vs. "The punctuation in your report needs work".
7. Use "I-statements" rather than "you-statements."
 - Ex: "You always interrupt me!" vs. "I would like to talk without interruption."
8. Use clear, direct requests when you want others to do something.
 - Ex: "Would you mind taking this to John?" vs. "Please take this to John."
9. It's okay to stop what you're saying. Others will respect your efforts to be more assertive.
 - Ex: "Excuse me. Let me start over."
10. State your thoughts with "I think," your opinions with "I believe," and your feelings with "I feel" or "I am."