

Listening

UNITE RESOURCES
BC MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES

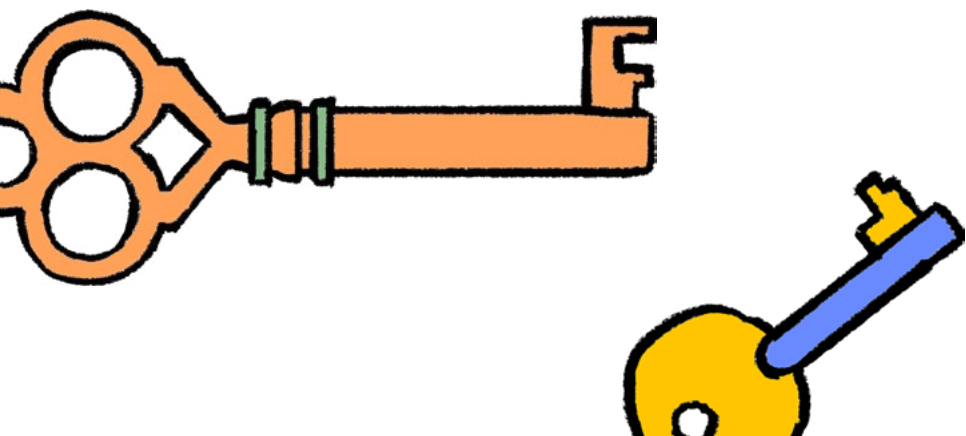


“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

–Stephen Covey

“Deep listening is miraculous for both listener and speaker. When someone receives us with open-hearted, non-judging, intensely interested listening, our spirits expand.” –Sue Thoele

LISTENING IS A KEY element in dialogue. Dialogue involves people not only speaking but also really listening. The intent is to leave the conversation with a better understanding of both the topic at hand and the alternative perspectives that might contribute to deeper understanding. When we embrace judgemental attitudes that stigmatize or engage in discriminatory behaviour, we cut ourselves off from the gift of the other’s perspective. When we create spaces where all participants feel comfortable and can have open, honest, and non-judgemental conversations, we open up possibility for greater understanding of ourselves, others and our shared world.



Listening is more than just hearing words. Listening involves:

OPENNESS

Real listening requires us to acknowledge that we do not know everything. Listening means we are open to receive new perspectives that may transform our current understanding. In the context of stigma and discrimination, listening means reflecting on our own assumptions and engaging with people unencumbered by stigmatizing attitudes and assumptions. Such openness not only offers hope to the other, it creates possibilities for one’s own growth.

What are my assumptions about people experiencing mental health or substance use challenges?

PATIENCE

To be a good listener, we need to practice patience and shift our attention from ourselves and what we have to say in order to hear and understand what the other person has to offer.

In what ways can I practice patience?

EMPATHY

Real listening is grounded in empathy. In seeking to understand others, we must seek to understand their experiences—to see the world from their perspectives as best we can. This does not mean we must agree with their

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ideas. When we listen to those who experience mental health or substance use challenges, it is important to accept them for who they are while listening to them in order to understand their unique experiences. Remember that empathy is the intention to know what another person is experiencing and not necessarily to respond to that experience in any concrete way. Through empathy a deeper understanding of our world is born.

How does it feel to be stigmatized or discriminated against?

ATTENTIVENESS

We listen, not with the intention of finding flaws or constructing a better argument, but to understand.

We listen openly to multiple perspectives rather than “murder” the alternatives.

We are curious about the experiences of others, ask genuine questions, and try to understand the meaning beneath what the speaker is saying.

We listen not only for what is being said but also for what is not being said. We listen to the underlying emotions and needs.

