

## Advice Sheet 1

### **ACTIVE LISTENING: LISTENING TO PUPILS IN A NON CONFRONTATIONAL MANNER**

Active listening is a specific strategy designed to allow the pupil to have their point of view expressed and listened to in a non-confrontational manner.

Active listening helps pupils to identify and to express what they are feeling and allows them to identify both positive and negative emotions. It is important in active listening to allow pupils to communicate their needs and their feelings so that they 'talk out' rather than 'act out' their emotions. It is an attempt to understand the pupil's feelings / point of view, and also an attempt to build trust and a positive relationship with the pupil.

Active listening is not a problem-solving mechanism, or is not about arguing the merits of a particular behaviour with a pupil. In active listening, we are not necessarily condoning a specific behaviour or giving permission to act in this way. We are responding to the pupil's feelings, rather than just focusing on the actual behaviour. What we want to do is to let the pupil know that we understand how she/he feels: At its most basic this might require us to say:

*"You feel (insert feeling / emotion here) when / because (repeat what you have been told)".*

#### **How do I do it?**

1. Find time and space to talk one-to-one with the pupil, calmly. Sometimes the pupil may be upset but the goal of active listening is to get him/her to talk to you, to give voice to their feelings.
2. Use a range of verbal and non-verbal techniques to encourage the pupil to 'open up'.

#### Verbal techniques

*Minimal encouragements:* "go on", "ok", "tell me more", "and"

*Open questions:* "how do you feel?", "what happened next?" "what do you think about that?"

*Reflective responses:* "you are angry about..", "you were upset with.."

*Summarization:* "this is what you've told me..", "what you're saying is.."

#### Non-verbal techniques

*Silence* – very powerful, allow the young person time to continue talking or just reflect

*Nods* – simple way of giving affirmation and showing that you are listening but don't want to interrupt

*Facial expression* – can show approval or disapproval, concern or affirmation through our facial expressions

*Eye contact* – shows interest in the pupil's story, but be careful not to over-use as it may intimidate / cause anxiety. Look away from time to time. So it is important to know the pupil well and know what works.

*Tone of voice* – use a calm, respectful, non-threatening, non-confrontational tone, and speak slowly.

**For more:** <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/active.htm>

<http://www.youthwork.com/activelisting.html> (test your understanding of active listening)