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*Communicating with persons with
disabilities: Active Listening & Empathy
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School-to-Work Transition for Higher education students with
disabilities in Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro

Presentation structure

- Communicating with PwD
- Communication: defining the field
- Communication skills
- Important counseling skills communicating with PwD:
 1. *Active Listening*
 2. *Empathy*

Communicating with PwD

General guidelines

- Speak to a PwD as to anyone else
- Rely on your common sense
- Use *person-first* language – Put the person before the disability
- Avoid labels
- Treat adults as adults
- Communicate clearly and comprehensibly
- Relax in your communication

1. Communication: what is?

- Two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information, news, ideas and feelings but also create and share meaning. In general, communication is a means of connecting people or places (Business Dictionary)
- Communication can be: 1. Verbal, 2. non-verbal
- Non-verbal communication may for up to 90% of the communication

..because one cannot be an effective counselor, mentor, coach or just fellow man, without being an effective communicator

..main counseling skills (and not only) **are primarily** communication skills:

- 1. Active listening*
- 2. Empathy*
- 3. Focusing*
- 4. Reflecting feelings*
- 5. Self-disclosure*



Active listening implementation is demanding

*I know you believe you understand
what you think I said,
but I am not sure
you realize that
what you hear
is not what I meant*

Active LISTEN

ten eyes
to see

ears to
listen to



full
attention

a heart to
feel

a brain to
think

So, what is active listening (A.L.)?

Active, attentive, effective listening happens when one succeeds to listen to, decode and understand:

what
is said

How
it is said

why
it is said

what is meant
behind the words

what is meant
by the body
language

A.L. sub-skills/techniques

A. Verbal

- Asking open-ended questions
- Paraphrasing
- Summarizing
- Reflecting feelings
- Brief verbal affirmations
(e.g. *I see, I know, sure, I understand*)

B. Non verbal

- eye contact
- nodding
- leaning forward
- tone of voice
- facial expression
- gestures

(just some) Barriers to A.L.

- Forming a judgment or evaluation before understanding what is being said
- ‘jumping to conclusions’
- Hearing what we want to hear
- Downgrading a point of view that differs from our own
- Formulating and rehearsing our response
- Being inattentive - thinking about something else

A.L. tips (<http://psyconsult-llp.eu>)

- Listen in a way that shows respect, interest and empathy
- Show the person you are listening by saying “okay” or “mmm”
- Use a calm tone of voice – not directive
- Listen to the content of what the person is saying – are there issues?
- Listen to how they are saying it – do they seem worried, angry, etc.?
- Allow the person to express her or his emotions (e.g. if she is crying, allow her time for this)
- Never judge a person or impose your own values
- Keep distractions to a minimum and try to find a private place to talk
- Do not do other tasks while talking to a person
- Do not interrupt the person
- Ask questions or gently probe if you need more information
- Use open-ended questions that cannot be answered with “yes” or “no”
e.g. *“Can you tell me a bit more about that?”*

Persons with disabilities...

- ...evaluate A.L. as the most important of communication/counseling skills
- Poem: *Listen!*

LISTEN

(Peer-counselling.org)

**When I ask you to listen to me
and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked.**

**When I ask you to listen to me
and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are
trampling on my feelings.**

**When I ask you to listen to me
and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you
have failed me,
strange as that may seem.**

Listen! All I asked was that you listen, not talk or do - just hear.

**Advice is cheap; twenty cents will get you both Dear Abby and Billy
Graham in the same newspaper.**

**And I can do for myself. I'm not helpless. May be discouraged and
faltering, but not helpless.**

**When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself,
you contribute to my fear and inadequacy.**

But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you and can get about this business of understanding what's behind this irrational feeling.

And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice. Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what's behind them.

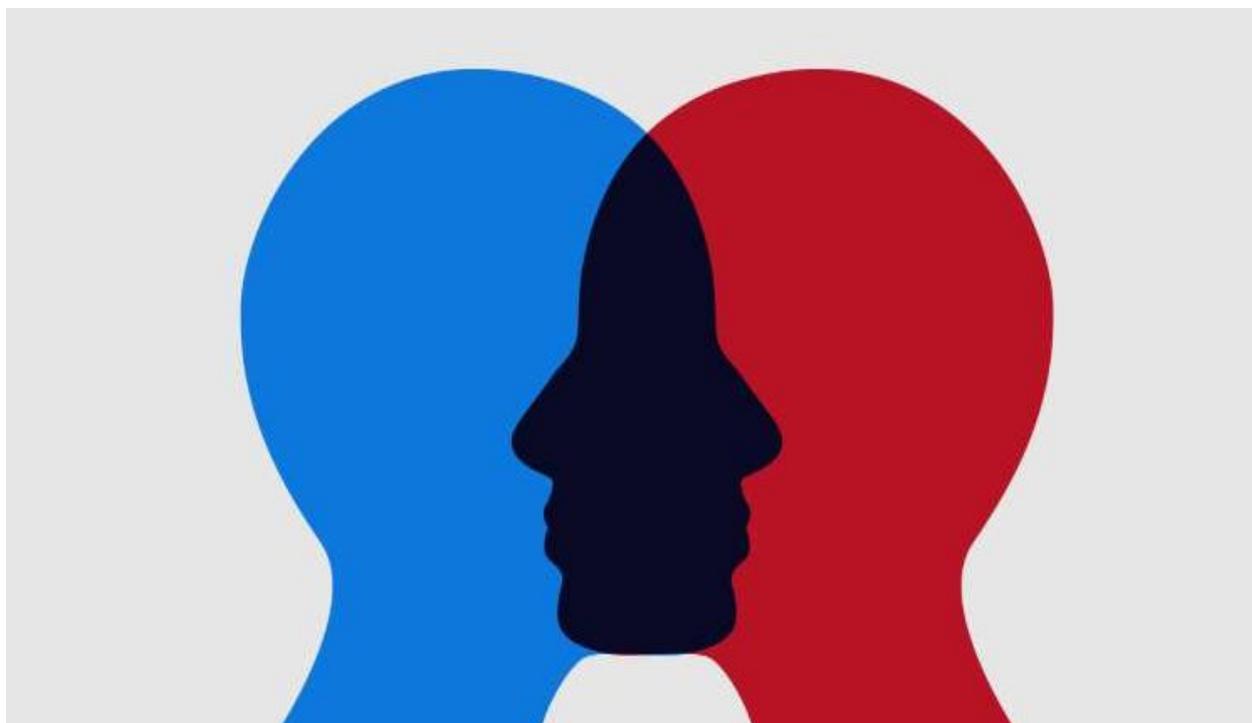
Perhaps that's why prayer works, sometimes for some people - because God is mute, and He/She doesn't give advice or try to fix things.

**"They" just listen and let you work it out for yourself.
So please listen and just hear me.**

And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn - and I'll listen to you

A.L. *“at a glance”*

Video: *Active listening skills*



Empathy: What is?

To understand and share another person's experiences and emotions: the ability to share someone else's feelings.

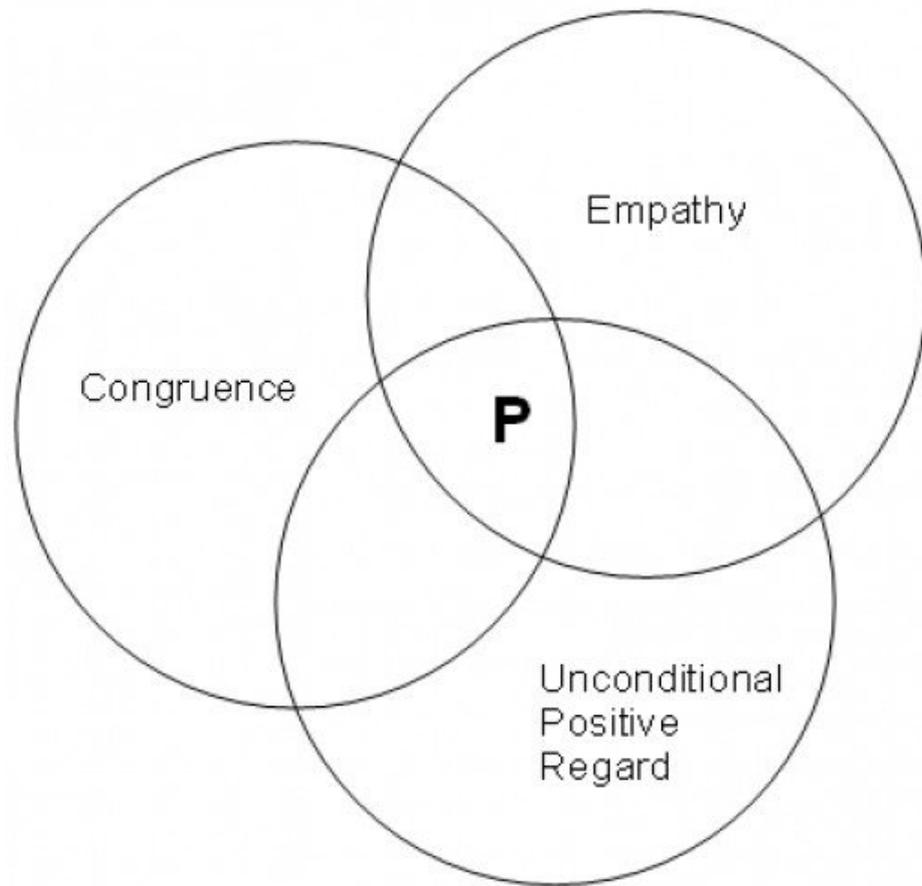
- Our social radar
- allowing yourself to become tuned into another person's emotional experience
- Understand others' situation, feelings, perspectives
- Recognize and respond to others needs
- Acknowledging and rewarding others

Showing empathy

Step 1: Create a safe and nurturing environment for the client. Be a calming presence

Step 2: Use encouraging behaviors to prompt the counseling client to share more information about his/her life circumstance

Step 3: Truly listen to the client's words and observe non-verbal cues. Every single ounce of attention needs to be focused on the client



The three factors in the person-centered philosophical approach. Graphic by Tony McGregor

Empathy: what is not?

- **Sympathy:** feeling sorry for another's hurt, pity
- **Kindness:** actions like being friendly, generous, considerate

Deviations from empathy:

- Identification
- Hypocritical empathy
- Avoiding empathy

Empathy vs. Sympathy

Video: *Rene Brown on Empathy*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw&t=46s>

Group Activity: Expression cards

- Form groups of two persons
- Each one chooses the photo of preference
- In pairs each member explains the reasons of choosing his/her photo and the feelings/associations caused (1 min./person)
- In plenary, each member tells what she/he has heard from his/her couple (1min/person)

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