

Communication Tools to **INSPIRE** Someone's Story

1. **EMPATHIC RESPONSE:** Start here, always. Come in with no agenda other than to listen and truly learn their story, experiences, emotions - to relate and know them. This is the *put yourself in their shoes* mindset.
2. **ATTENDING:** Listening, talking, & nonverbal behavior. Includes **eye contact** (look at the person), paying attention to theirs and your **vocal qualities** (rate, tone, and volume of speech), **verbal tracking** (follow the subject/story and don't change it), and **body language** (attentive: face them squarely, lean in slightly, have an expressive face, use facilitative, encouraging gestures).
3. **OBSERVING:** Be mindful of a person's **non-verbal behavior** - it communicates a lot.
4. **MIRRORING:** Taking a **posture** similar to that of the person you are listening to. Aids in comfort creation.
5. **SILENCE:** Others are unable to talk while you do. Silence allows others the process and think about their responses to your questions. Don't short change this time. Embrace the awkwardness.
6. **OPEN QUESTIONS:** Start with, **who, what, when, where, ***why*****, and **how**. Open questions *cannot* be answered in few words ("yes/no") but instead help to elicit maximum information from others.
8. **ENCOURAGING:** Short responses that help someone keep sharing their story: **repeat key words & short statements** which leads to further elaboration.
9. **PARAPHRASING:** Shorten and clarify the essence of what has been said in a story, using main words of the story-teller. People feel heard, will give more detail, and sometimes clarify your paraphrase if it is off.
10. **SUMMARIZING:** Used over a longer span of story-telling time and integrates the person's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Similar to paraphrasing but used sparingly (best at beginning/end of story).
11. **REFLECTION OF FEELING:** Identify key emotions of a person and feed them back to clarify their emotional experience.
12. **CONFIDENTIALITY:** Acknowledge and commend someone's vulnerability to share their story. Honor them by keeping their story safe and secure. Seek permission to share before doing so.

Communication Tools to **DISCOURAGE** Someone's Story

1. **MULTIPLE QUESTIONS:** "Where did your family grow up and why did they move here?" Ask one question at a time to people to help them articulate answers before moving on.
2. **NON ATTENDING BEHAVIOR:** When you are not paying attention to someone it will be obvious. Put your phone away, stop fiddling with your pen or ring, and give your full attention to the person. Don't be thinking of your response while they are speaking. The way we attend and listen deeply affects the story someone shares.
3. **"I UNDERSTAND...":** No you don't. You can try and put yourself in their shoes (empathy) but you never will truly understand life from their perspective. So, never used this phrase. Instead try, "I can see how that could frustrate you." "I imagine that was scary for you?" These responses can elicit clarification if inaccurate.
4. **CHANGING THE TOPIC:** When someone shares *their* story, it's not yours. Track the subject with them and help to keep that subject going until they finish and want to move on.
5. **CLOSED QUESTIONS:** Start with **is, are, do**. Closed questions CAN BE answered in few words and don't aid in elaboration of story (think "yes/no"). However, they can be used to clarify specifics however.
6. **INTERRUPTING:** This communicates to someone that what they are saying is not important enough to wait for a pause to speak. It also communicates you want to be the one talking.
7. **"HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?":** This question implies that someone lacks the personal responsibility for their reactions, responses, and emotions. I might be angry, but that's my choice. I don't have to be. Therefore, nothing makes me feel anything. I choose my emotional response. Instead, ask "How did you / do you feel about _____?"
8. **PROJECTING YOUR EMOTIONS.** Misunderstanding their emotions and/or projecting your own emotions based upon your experience can be a show-stopper. (See Feelings Wheel for help in emotional terminology).