Ears to Hear: Handout 2

Guidelines for listening

1. Listen with undivided attention, without interrupting.
2. Remember what has been said, including the details (the more you listen, and the less you say, the better your memory)
3. Listen to the 'bass line' – what is not openly said, but possibly is being felt.
4. Watch for body language, non-verbal clues that help you understand feelings.
5. Listen to yourself, how you might feel in a described situation, as a way of further understanding – this is the first step towards empathy.
6. Try to tolerate pauses and silences that are a little longer than is usual in conversations (and avoid asking lots of questions to break silences).
7. Create a comfortable and relaxed setting so that you can give attention to each other; keep calm even when you don't feel calm

Guidelines for responding

8. Use words carefully; be as accurate as possible in describing feelings and ideas that you perceive (not just 'depressed' or 'angry').
9. Use your empathic understanding, again making this accurate, although also tentative (you may be wrong).
10. Keep questions to a minimum, unless:
    - you need precise information (in which case ask precise questions);
    - you want to open up an area (in which case use open-ended questions);
    - you wish to prompt (when rhetorical questions help).
      Avoid at all costs questions beginning with 'Why …?'
11. Use minimal prompts: 'Mm', 'Yes', or repeat the last few words.
12. Paraphrase or reflect accurately as:
    - a way of prompting;
    - an indication that you have been listening;
    - a way of checking out that you have heard correctly.
13. Avoid making judgements or loaded remarks.
14. Avoid changing the subject or interrupting unnecessarily.
15. Identify links between different experiences, events, reactions and ideas.
16. Avoid speaking too soon, too often, or for too long.

And finally, when you have responded:

17. Return to the listening mode, to watch and listen for the reaction to your response, as well as for anything new that emerges.

Swift to Hear by Michael Jacobs (2nd edition) SPCK, 2000 p 15-16