

Gathering Information and Clarifying Statements

*He who answers a matter before he
hears it, it is folly and shame to him.*

Proverbs 18:13

I. Methods of Gathering Information

A. Using the Personal Data Inventory

1. Health Issues

2. Religious Issues

3. Marriage and Family Issues

4. Parenting Issues

5. Vocational Issues

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B. Asking Direct Questions

1. There are some core questions that will help you to get started (Jay Adams, *Christian Counselor's Manual*, pg. 435).

a. What is your problem?

b. What have you done about it?

c. What can we do? or What is your expectation in coming here?

- d. As you see yourself, what kind of a person are you? Describe yourself.**
 - e. What, if anything, do you fear?**
 - f. Is there any other information that you think we should know?**
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2. There are follow-up questions to the above that will help you to dig a little deeper.

a. Question #1—What is your problem?

Some follow-up questions may include one or more of the following:

- What makes you feel this way?
- Has anyone ever told you that this was your problem?

- **What did they say?**
- **Do you think that they were accurate in what they said? Why or Why not.**
- **What are the symptoms of this problem in your life?**
- **Have you always had this problem?**
- **When did you first start to realize that you had this problem?**

b. Question #2—What have you done about it?

Some follow-up questions may include one or more of the following:

- **Why did you do that?**
- **Do you feel like it helped you or hindered you?**
- **If it did not help, why do you think it did not help?**

c. Question #3—What is your expectation in coming here?

Some follow-up questions may include one or more of the following:

- What makes you feel it will be different this time?**
- What do you feel you will do different this time?**
- Why have you chosen to come to me (or to the church)?**

In addition to using a logical progression of questions, it is important to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

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C. Observing Body Language

- 1. The pitch or tone of voice.**
 - 2. Noticeable change in facial expressions or posture.**
 - 3. The crossing of arms or legs at significant times.**
 - 4. The occasional sigh or groan.**
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D. Being Observant in Sessions

- 1. Continual interrupting of one party**
 - 2. Apparent domination of one party**
 - 3. Body language of listening party**
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E. Practicing Keys to Good Questioning

1. Avoid yes and no questions.
2. Ask specific questions that require specific answers.
3. Let new questions arise from previous answers or statements.
4. Make sure that the timing of a specific question is appropriate.

5. Ask the same question in different ways to check on the authenticity of the answer.
6. Ask relevant questions that involve their past, the present and plans or concerns regarding the future.
7. Be aware of the person's social standing and ask questions in a manner that gives respect to who they are.

8. Use carefully constructed questions to interrupt rambling and get the counselee back on track.

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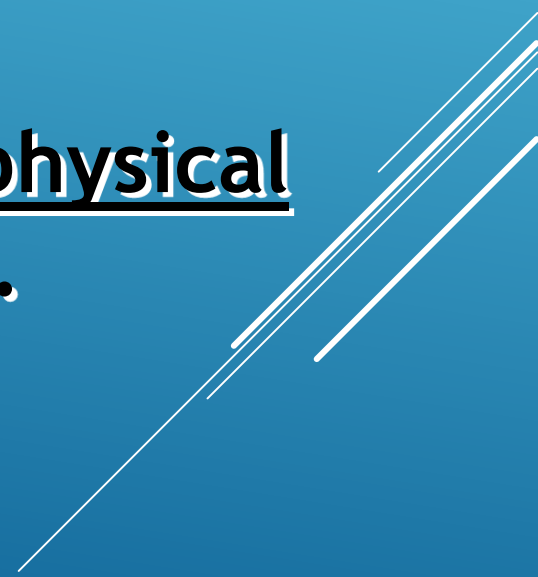
II. The Importance of Listening

A. Listening involves concentration.

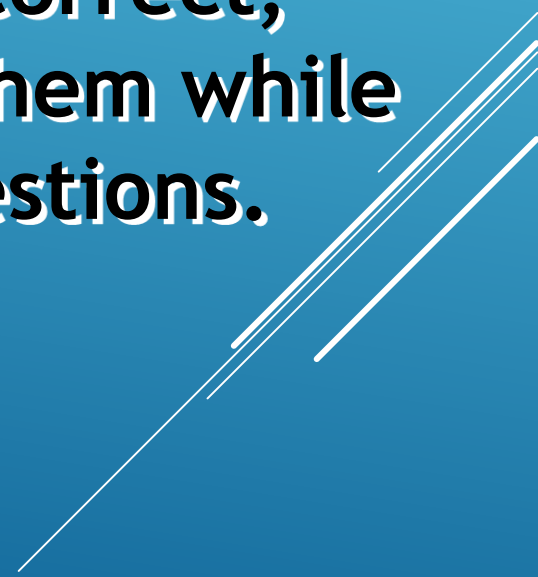
1. It involves paying careful, undivided attention when they speak.
2. It involves maintaining good eye contact with the person speaking
3. It involves minimizing distractions (i.e. cell phones, pagers, outside noise).

4. It involves maintaining an appropriate distance from the counselee.
 5. It involves the counselor minimizing talk about him or her self.
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B. Listening involves maintaining a positive climate for disclosure.

- 1. This includes giving responses that demonstrate interest.**
 - 2. This includes maintaining non-threatening voice tones.**
 - 3. This includes insuring the physical comfort of the participants.**
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C. Listening involves minimizing negatives that threaten disclosure.

- 1. This means that we never interrupt the counselee in mid-sentence or mid-thought.**
 - 2. This mean that we do not correct, challenge or dispute with them while they are answering our questions.**
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3. This means that we do not make judgmental statements especially in the information gathering stage of the counseling process.
4. This means that we do not make statements that reflect impatience or disgust on our part.
5. This means that we do not feel like we must adjust every misstatement or poor word choice.

6. This means that we do not reflect negative body language.

a. Positive body language includes the following:

- Nodding**
- Good eye contact**
- Good facial expressions**
- Good posture**

- **Expressing appropriate emotions**



b. Negative body language includes the following:

- Nodding off or yawning**
- Slouching**
- Crossing Arms**
- Looking at watch or clock repeatedly**
- Looking away or staring off into space**

- Playing with any object

7. This means that we do not go overboard in giving positive strokes and reinforce negative behavior.

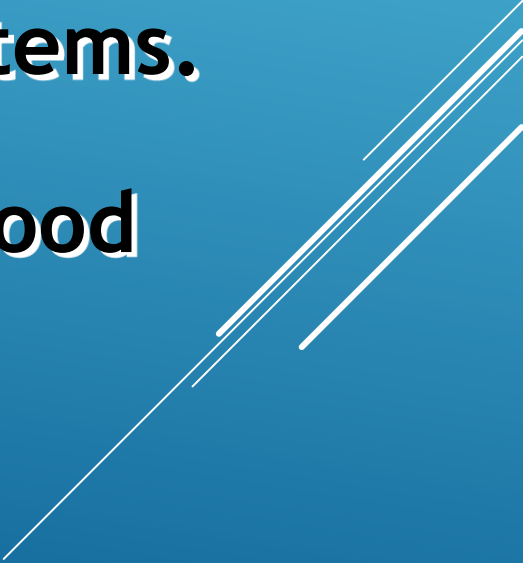
D. Good listening involves good note taking.

1. The purpose of note taking.

a. To glean and record clues to root problems.

b. To list out future agenda items.

c. To do for us what even a good memory cannot do.

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2. The service your notes will provide.

- a. The will help you to remember to ask certain questions of clarification without having to stop the counselee in mid-conversation.
- b. They will help you remember things that were said from session to session.
- c. They will help you to keep a record homework and homework results.

d. They will help you refresh your memory over long periods of time.

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3. Guidelines for successful note taking.

- a. These notes are for your eyes only.**
- b. These notes should contain your own code words.**
- c. These notes should be kept in a safe place.**
- d. These notes should be destroyed when no longer needed.**

III. The Importance of Clarifying Statements

A. There are common statements that must be clarified.

1. This includes exaggerations and sweeping generalities.

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- a. There are certain words that characterize most exaggerations including words like “all, everybody, everything, always, never, anything and no one.”
 - b. These words need to be challenged and clarified by the counselor.
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2. This includes common euphemisms.

**Some examples of euphemisms
include the following:**

- a. Emotional problems**
- b. Alcoholism**
- c. Behavioral problems**
- d. Eating disorders**

3. This includes all non-specific terminology.

the following examples:

- a. The counselee may suggest, “My husband doesn’t love me.”**
- b. The counselee may suggest, “My husband is inconsiderate.”**

B. There are common excuses that must be challenged.

Note the following chart from Jay Adam's Christian Counselor's Manual, page 107-108 for possible responses.

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C. There are common questions that will help bring clarification to counselee's statements.

1. How? Or in what way?

This question will help the counselor to understand the way in which a particular problem is manifest. It should lead to a specific activity that is objectionable.

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2. What for? Or why?

This question will help the counselor to determine the motive or the intention of the person who was acting in a certain way.

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3. How often?

This question will help the counselor to determine the frequency of the problem and whether or not it is a pattern of behavior or an isolated incident.

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4. When?

This question will help the counselor to determine whether or not there is a time when the activity in question is more or less likely to occur. It will help you to understand the context of the event or statement.

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