

# Empowering by listening

One of the most empowering things we can do for other people is to listen to them with empathy. It can be a powerful experience to feel that you have been genuinely listened to. Sadly the experience is all too rare, and many people pay professionals – such as counsellors and psychotherapists – to provide a listening service by the hour.

We often make the mistake, as listeners, of believing that if someone tells us a problem, we must give them a solution. But when we have problems, inner burdens, worries, just to be listened to is often enough to help us move forward. Advice is rarely particularly helpful, since no-one else can know what will work for us.

These are examples of the most common '**non-listening**' responses to a person describing difficulties:

<b>The listener's response:</b>	<b>Example:</b>
Waits for an opportunity to take over the talking.	<i>It's funny you should say that. The same thing happened to me last week...</i>
Rejection or denial of the speaker's feelings.	<i>Why do you feel depressed? You should be happy!</i>
Gives advice.	<i>You know what you should do? You should....</i>
Mental absence.	<i>Oh dear. Poor you. Ah well...</i>

**Listening with empathy**, on the other hand, involves

- ✓ Focusing your attention on the other person
- ✓ Establishing a rapport with them, for example in your body language
- ✓ Reflecting back occasionally, to show your understanding
- ✓ Checking your understanding
- ✓ Being comfortable with silences and remaining attentive.