

EFFECTIVE LISTENING

DO'S AND DON'TS

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING

- Approach the person calmly, and open the conversation without judgment
- Be aware of your body language (both as you open the conversation and throughout); you do not have to maintain eye contact if it isn't comfortable for both of you, but the youth should know that he or she has your attention
- If you do not think the person is in immediate danger of harming themselves or others, **it is okay to give them space if they are not ready to talk**, but make sure to let him or her know that they can speak to you when they're ready
- Be patient when the person is talking, show you are listening and understand by summarizing what they are saying and clarifying important points
- **Validate and accept their feelings and emotions, even if you do not agree with their behaviors**
- Ask open-ended questions (i.e., questions that cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no") to find out more information
- Express empathy and offer emotional support

THINGS TO AVOID

- Don't blame the youth for their feelings or emotions
- Don't minimize or dismiss what they are telling you (e.g., "that's nothing to be afraid of", "toughen up", "it doesn't seem that bad")
- Don't argue or debate with them about their thoughts or feelings
- Don't give superficial 'reassurance' such as "don't worry", "cheer up", or "everything will be alright"
- Don't interrupt with stories of your own
- Be aware of the signs of mental illness, but don't attempt to diagnose
- You are not responsible for providing treatment or counseling, just listen openly and with empathy

IF THE CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER OF CAUSING HARM TO HIM/HERSELF OR OTHERS, CALL 911.