

# TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Here are some tips to help you navigate conversations with success and connection for both you and those you are calling. Conversations require two components—talking and listening—and doing both will help the other person feel heard and understood.



## LISTENING

Being a good listener is crucial to your role as a Friendly Caller. As a good listener, you aren't just hearing the words—you are giving those words thoughtful attention and consideration.

### EVALUATE YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

Take a few minutes to go through these statements and evaluate and reflect on your own listening skills. Answer **YES** if you do the statement most of the time and **NO** if you do not do this most of the time.

- Y**  **N** I allow the person to complete what they are saying before I respond.
- Y**  **N** I pay attention and stay focused even if I do not understand what they talking about.
- Y**  **N** I can ignore things that distract from me from what they are trying to discuss.
- Y**  **N** When I am listening to somebody, I do not attempt to do other things (multi-task).
- Y**  **N** I am comfortable with long pauses or at times, silence.
- Y**  **N** When the conversation is completed, I remember what was discussed.
- Y**  **N** I am comfortable asking questions when I do not understand.
- Y**  **N** If I disagree with something said, I can calmly continue to listen.
- Y**  **N** I am comfortable when someone expresses strong emotion.

Responding **YES** to answers means you already have good listening skills in place. **NO** answers mean that there may be a few areas to strengthen and/or gain confidence in your listening skills. Be mindful of your skillset, your strengths and how you can improve as a listener.

### ACTIVE LISTENING

The art of fully hearing and comprehending the meaning of what someone else is saying. In order to become a great listener, it is important to practice active listening. Active listening is a technique used to help establish a positive connection with another person by developing rapport and understanding between two people. It involves holding back judging what the other person says and using empathy to try to understand the other person's experiences, feelings and viewpoints.

#### TIPS FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

- Avoid getting distracted by your own thoughts.
- Focus on the speaker and topic.
- Try not to interrupt the other person.
- Let them finish and respond.
- Use door openers to that show the other person that you are interested:
  - "That sounds interesting."
  - "Tell me more."
  - "Go ahead, I'm listening."
  - If appropriate, take notes of important details.
  - Paraphrase to make sure you both are on the same page.



## TALKING

There are phrases and feedback you can say to help propel the conversation forward, as well as show that you are listening. Here are a few tips for how to help drive the direction and build a quality conversation.

### ENCOURAGE

Draw the other person into the conversation. Use short answers to show you are really listening. Understand that persons of different cultures and backgrounds may have different meanings attached to language that what you may be familiar.

**Examples:** “And?” “Oh?” “I’m listening”

### CLARIFY

Don’t hesitate to ask questions to confirm what the speaker has discussed. Not only does it help you to know that you are getting the correct message, it also helps the speaker examine their own messages.

**Examples:** “Could you tell me which of those things happened first?” “I’m not certain I understand why that made you so upset. Could you tell me again?”

### RESTATE

Restating in your own words what you think the speaker has said. This allows for checking of facts and meanings.

**Example:** “So your friend said she would call right back but did not call back for two days?”

### SUMMARIZE

This is reiterating the major ideas and feelings that the speaker has expressed.

**Examples:** “So the main problem you are having is...” “Is that it?”

### VALIDATE

This is using affirmation and showing appreciation for the speaker’s efforts. This includes thanking them for their efforts at sharing

**Examples:** “I’m really pleased we were able to talk today.” “It must take a lot of effort to manage....” “I appreciate your willingness to talk about such a difficult issue.”



## THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- **Your primary purpose is to listen.** This process is about our callers. Be aware that it is easy to want to share your experiences. This person needs someone to listen to them. Do your best to make sure you are focusing on their needs, not yours.
- **What you are doing is valuable.** You will run into many different types of persons and personalities when making volunteer calls. Some may be suspicious of your motives, some may share overly personal information and some may be of little words. Know that there is a value to most people to have a friendly, caring person reach out to them.
- **Communication styles and needs vary.** Some of the people you connect with will benefit by having a friendly person with whom to exchange casual conversation. Some people may want to have a deeply personal conversation to voice their thoughts and feelings, seeking only to be heard. Other times the purpose of the conversation may be seeking to solve a problem they are experiencing. Be clear about the purpose of the call you are making.
- **Establish time.** It is best to do your calls when you are able to offer uninterrupted time to make your calls. If you have a short amount of time, put a time limit on the call. You can offer "I have about 15 minutes today to talk to you; would that be okay?" Near the end of your time please remind the caller that you have other obligations and confirm the next time you will call.
- **Keep a journal (electronic or handwritten) with notes about your conversations.** Please make sure this information is kept in a place where no one could have access and is destroyed once you are done making these calls. It is important to remember key things you are told, like children's names, jobs, etc.
- **Never share your personal information.** For safety, please do not share your contact information, address, family names, etc.
- **Change the subject.** When persons are showing signs of being overly upset, angry and/or aggressive in their responses, it is okay to shift the conversation to calmer topics. Do not hesitate to redirect back to 211 for assistance or to make a referral to Listening Ear. If you begin to be uncomfortable with the nature of the conversation, feel free to connect your speaker to professional help.
- **Establish reliability.** A key to building a relationship is to keep your promises. If you cannot return or make a call on the scheduled date/time, please let 211 know so that we can reach out to the person and let them know.