

A SPECTRUM OF ATTENTION

Six Ways We Listen

Every mode has its place but the chaplain's calling leans toward one.



Casual

Passive, social background listening half-attending amid the noise of the day.

Appreciative

Listening for enjoyment music, a story, a voice we love.

Comprehension

Listening to learn gathering facts, information, and instruction.

Critical

Listening to evaluate weighing an argument's logic and evidence.

Therapeutic

Listening to support giving a troubled person room to unburden.

Empathetic

Listening to understand from within — feeling with the other. The chaplain's primary posture.¹⁷



Three Principles for Listening Well

Simple commitments that reshape the entire encounter.

01

Let Them Do the Talking

Encourage the speaker to carry most of the conversation; resist the urge to fill every silence with your own words.

02

Stay Present

Keep your attention here and now undivided, unhurried, wholly with this one person.

03

Stay Objective

Set aside judgment, advice, and agenda; receive their story on its own terms.¹⁹

THE FRUIT THE STUDENT FEELS

Valued • Respected • Emotionally Complete



Four Basic Responses

Reflecting back what you hear, so the speaker feels truly received.

01

Literal Repetition

Echo their exact words back: “You said you feel invisible.”

02

Reflection

Name the feeling beneath the words: “That sounds lonely.”

03

Paraphrasing

Restate their meaning in your own words to confirm you understand.

04

Summarizing

Gather the threads: “So this week held three hard losses.”¹⁹



Four Facilitating Responses

Gentle moves that open the door to more.

01

Open-Ended Questions

Invite depth:
“What was that like
for you?” never yes-
or-no.

02

Buffering

Soften and slow a
charged moment
so it stays safe to
continue.

03

Understatement

Use gentle,
euphemistic
wording to lower
the emotional
temperature.

04

“Tell Me More”

Minimal
encouragers a nod,
“mm-hm,” “go on”
that keep them
talking.¹⁹



Two Intense-Interaction Responses

For moments that ask for deeper, braver engagement used with discernment.

01 Calling Attention Gently name what you notice a tension, a contradiction, an avoided topic and bring it into the open. <i>“I notice you smile whenever you mention home.”</i>	02 Hovering Stay close and linger over a significant moment rather than moving on holding space so the feeling can be fully met.¹⁹ <i>Presence, not pace, is what heals here.</i>
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