

Fairness in Practice Webinar Series: Tips for Effective Communication

Active Listening

Attending: giving full attention and demonstrating awareness of the person. Use open body language, make eye contact and allow some silence to give the person time to think as well as to talk. Avoid interrupting or jumping in.

Paraphrasing: repeating what you think the other person has said to check if your understanding is correct. For example, “It sounds like you’re concerned about _____” or “If I understand you correctly, you’re saying that_____”.

Encouraging: using brief, positive prompts to encourage the person to continue telling their story.

Reflecting: reflecting the person’s words to demonstrate you have heard them. For example, “This seems really difficult for you”.

Clarifying questions: using clarifying questions to request more information or to resolve confusion. For example, “Can you tell me more about_____”.

Being Responsive

- Discuss any steps the person needs to take or responsibilities they have.
- Review any steps you or your organization are taking, including when the person can expect follow up from you.
- Manage expectations by being clear about anything you cannot do.
- Outline any rules, policies or eligibility criteria that apply. If possible, offer copies, or refer them to published documents or websites.
- Confirm that the person understands the information that you have provided.

Responding To Challenging Behaviour

- Acknowledge that the person’s concerns or feelings are understandable.
- Use a neutral tone and slower pace of speech.
- Find common ground and agree where you can.
- Name any unacceptable behaviour and explain the effect on you. For example, “When you speak with a loud voice, it makes it difficult for me to understand you.”
- Set boundaries. “Please lower your voice or I will need to end our call.”
- Keep a record of your conversation.

The B.C. Ombudsperson provides independent and impartial oversight of public authorities to ensure every person is treated fairly in the provision of public services. Our three-year Prevention Initiatives Program (2017-2020) offers educational webinars, training workshops and individual consultation with public authority staff to support fairness and continuous improvement across the public sector. By working proactively with public authorities, we are able to share our expertise and knowledge of administrative fairness principles outside of the setting of formal investigations.

What should I do when someone is upset?

Use empathy, paraphrasing, and acknowledgement to make them feel heard.

Phrases to use when....

Someone is angry:

I can understand that would be frustrating, let me see if I am able to assist you. *(If no further action being taken)* let me explain why we are unable to achieve the outcome you are seeking.

Someone is upset that you made an error in the conversation:

I'm sorry, that's my mistake. I should have said _____. I will clarify that in my notes.

Someone is having difficulty accepting a decision:

I understand you don't agree and this is not the outcome you were seeking. If you wish to dispute/appeal this decision the steps are_____.

What should I do if someone is talking endlessly?

Use summarizing, questions and forward thinking to direct the conversation.

Phrases to use when....

Someone won't stop talking, is repeating themselves or is going around in circles:

Can I stop you for a moment and share my understanding of what you are saying? I understand your request is _____. Now, I'd like to focus on what steps we need to take to move your request forward.

Someone is giving irrelevant information:

I've got enough information on _____, thank you. But I'd like to know more about _____, can I get some more information about that?

What should I do if I feel the conversation is becoming abusive?

Name the behaviour, set boundaries, follow through, and provide options for when the behaviour changes.

Phrases to use when....

Someone is swearing or shouting:

I would like us to discuss resolving the issue but cannot do that if you continue to swear/shout. I'll have to end the call if the swearing/shouting continues. *(If swearing/shouting continues)* Let's talk again on _____ *(name date and time)*.

Someone is being threatening or abusive:

We are committed to hearing your concerns. However, *(specify the language or behaviour)* is making it difficult for me to assist you and I cannot continue speaking with you if it continues. *(If language/behaviour continues)* I am going to have to end our call.

Visit our website to access our webinar series or download additional resources from our Prevention Initiatives Program www.bcombudsperson.ca/resources/prevention. To sign up to receive notices of upcoming training opportunities and other news from the Prevention Initiatives Program, send us an email to consult@bcombudsperson.ca.