



THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS EVERY  
PASTORAL CARE FACILITATOR NEEDS  
TO KNOW ABOUT INTERACTIVE...

# Micro-skills

TIP SHEET

peoplecare.GLOBAL

# Micro-skills

Effective interpersonal communication requires more than the mere transmission of information. Pastoral care facilitators need to know how to both encode and decode messages, whether they are verbal or non-verbal. A person developing and sending a message (however subtle) is the 'encoder'. The encoder has to carefully consider how the message will be received by the intended party. Therefore, when delivering a message, the encoder must do it in such a way that it will be received in the manner in which it is intended. A person receiving and interpreting messages (however subtle) is the 'decoder'. The decoder must pay careful attention not only to what's being communicated, but also the emotional context in which it is being delivered. A clear and accurate exchange of information is vital for effective interpersonal communication.

ENCODING	DECODING
The process of transforming ideas and feelings into means of communication (using messages, words or symbols).	The process of transforming communication (messages, words or symbols) back into ideas and feelings.

# Understanding Micro-skills

Micro-skills are a set of highly sophisticated verbal and non-verbal communication techniques that pastoral care facilitators can use when encoding and decoding information. Whether in one-on-one or group consultations, micro-skills help foster a clear exchange of messages which, in turn, serve to build a healthy pastoral care alliance. In the right context, these subtle communications skills can also help people feel valued and validated. Through the establishment of trust, people are encouraged to open up. Each of these aspects are important for relationship formation.



Different micro-skills can be employed by facilitators in different settings and for different reasons. Consider the following:

# 01 ATTENDING

WHAT IS IT?	WHEN IS IT USED?	WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION?
Asking open ended questions, using the speaker's name, leaning in while listening, maintaining appropriate eye contact (Western-societal context), and affirming/reassuring.	It is especially useful during the initial phase of relationship formation (i.e. at the start of individual or group consultations) but can be used any time in the Pastoral Care process.	Showing genuine interest in what someone is saying encourages them to feel safe in opening up (trusting the facilitator with their personal information). Helps build rapport.

## VERBAL ATTENDING EXAMPLES

- “Go on, I’m listening (name).”
- “If I were in your position, I’d feel the same.”
- “(Name), that would likely frustrate me too.”
- “You’re right you know; it’s absolutely true.”

## NON-VERBAL ATTENDING EXAMPLES

- Nod head to agree, affirm or validate
- Use facial expressions to convey interest
- Position yourself to mirror the one speaking
- Use eye contact and encouraging gestures

# 02 REFLECTING

WHAT IS IT?	WHEN IS IT USED?	WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION?
Listens for both what a person is saying, and how it’s being said. It combines both effective listening (gathering information) and affective listening (decoding emotions).	Often used in interviews (gathering information) to bring out underlying feelings and truth. Can also be used to help explore more obscure, hidden or alternate viewpoints.	To qualify and validate ideas, questions or feelings. This process can reveal to people which thoughts are helpful (logical, rational, true) or unhelpful (illogical, irrational, untrue).

## SPEAKER EXAMPLES

- “I don’t get it, why abruptly change plans?”
- “I assume that’s the reason. It has to be. It is.”
- “I’ve looked everywhere for my private journal. I don’t know what I’ll do if I can’t find it. What a disaster!”

## REFLECTING EXAMPLES

- “You’re feeling confused about the change?”
- “That assumption must feel compelling.”
- “You’re worried about your missing journal? What concerns you most; losing it, or someone finding it?”



**NOTE: You should stop reflecting when...:**

(a) a person’s concerns demand immediate practical action; (b) a person is wallowing in negative thoughts or feelings to avoid dealing with their issues, and (c) a person repeatedly mediates thoughts or feelings of resentment for things in the past that cannot be changed.

# 03 CLARIFYING

WHAT IS IT?	WHEN IS IT USED?	WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION?
Asking specific questions at strategic times throughout a conversation to help ensure that what's being said is accurately being understood. Simplifies and brings coherence to ideas.	Can be used any time in the Pastoral Care process, but is especially useful when there's uncertainty or confusion, when important details need recording, or when 'lingo' is being used.	Conveys a sincere desire to understand. Confirms to people they've been heard correctly. If people sense they're not being understood, they may stop communicating.

## SPEAKER EXAMPLES

- "I go to bed and two minutes later I'm up again. Who knows what's going on?"
- "I clearly prove my point, but then it gets twisted and ends up out in the treetops."
- "When I'm finished working at my job, I'll be able to study so that I can get a job and finally start work."

## CLARIFYING EXAMPLES

- "Are you saying that you're having difficulty getting to sleep?"
- "I'm not sure I follow; what would you say is your main point?"
- "Let me see if I've understood correctly. You would like to go back to school so as to get an even better job?"

# 04 FOCUSING

WHAT IS IT?	WHEN IS IT USED?	WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION?
Directing the conversation to 'zoom in' on a specific theme, concentrate on a single idea or word and give emphasis to that which is important.	Often used when a facilitator believes a specific area of enquiry is relevant. May also be used if a person is not forth coming on specific details.	Helps direct people's attention to areas that are of greatest importance. Allows people to go deeper and get to the 'heart' of an issue (or aspects thereof).

## SPEAKER EXAMPLE

- "When I was told what they'd done I could have screamed. How could they do that?"

## FOCUSING EXAMPLE

- "What they'd done? What did they do? Could have screamed? How did they do what?"



### NOTE: Less is more...

Focusing should be used sparingly. While focusing can be great to direct people's attention to important themes (or specific aspects of themes), it can also consume considerable time. If you focus too much on a specific theme (whether person or issue), you can get 'bogged down' in details and miss the bigger picture.

# 05 FLIPPING

WHAT IS IT?	WHEN IS IT USED?	WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION?
The process of translating thoughts into feelings. This requires effective listening and affective processing of information (discerning and clarifying the emotional foundation and fuel for thoughts being expressed).	It's useful to 'flip' thoughts into feelings when people are not cognisant of the emotional drive behind ideas. Flipping also can be used to convey a deeper understanding of concerns, and helps foster empathy.	Highlighting the feeling behind the thought helps enrich a person's story. Flipping thoughts into feelings also helps a person identify the emotional energy that either helps or exacerbates issues.

## SPEAKER EXAMPLES

- "I might as well be talking to an elephant. They just seem to stomp right over me."
- "It's like I'm standing on the edge of a cliff and all these hands are pushing from behind."
- "I think I can get through it, but time and time again I fall back into that deep dark well."

## FLIPPING EXAMPLES

- "Are you saying you don't feel heard or respected?"
- "If I understand you correctly, you're saying it feels like everyone is out to get you?"
- "Sounds to me like your feeling disheartened or possibly discouraged. Is that right?"

# 06 PAUSING

WHAT IS IT?	WHEN IS IT USED?	WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION?
The strategic use of silence gives people the chance to collect their thoughts and carefully process ideas without distraction.	When wanting to direct attention to important statements (which precede the pause) or to let people speak without interruption.	Helps people go deeper, disclosing even more. Silence can be awkward, naturally prompting people to want to fill the gap.

## SPEAKER EXAMPLE

- "When I was told what they'd done I could have screamed. How could they do that?"

## FOCUSING EXAMPLE

- "What they'd done? What did they do? Could have screamed? How did they do what?"



### NOTE: Be strategic...

When 'pausing', be aware of non-verbal cues. If people appear restless, they may interpret the pause as 'nothing is happening' and 'this is a time waster'. The overuse of silence may inadvertently communicate that you've run out of questions or are unsure how to proceed.