

## Podcast – episode 2

### LISTENING

Hello,

I'm Dr. Charles Tauber, CEO of the Coalition for work with Psychotrauma and Peace (CWWPP). You can find out more about our organization on [www.cwwpp.org](http://www.cwwpp.org). There, you also can comment on this podcast and give us ideas for future podcasts. We welcome hearing from you.

In this podcast we are going to talk about LISTENING. The aim of this podcast is to show how you can listen and how you can provide a vent, a place where person can get things out.

You can be a friend, you can be a colleague, you can be a therapist, but it's very important to define your role, because you cannot be all of those at the same time.

We know that the relationship between the two people is the most important thing in the success of therapy. So, in some sense, it doesn't really matter what technique you use. What *is* important is that you form a relationship of trust with the other person. You need to look at how close you get to the other person. If you are going to do anything reasonable, you need to have at least some objectivity in your relationship. In other words, when you get really close to a person, you lose that objectivity. That's why sometimes people go to a therapist instead of going to their closest friends. But close friends can also do very good things by simply listening, but also at the same time trying to remain objective.

The most important thing that you can do if you are going to provide that place for the person to express him/herself is to provide a safe space. If you are going to listen, you must listen in a non-judgmental way, that is, not condemn the actions of a person and realize that the person has done this for whatever reason and those reasons may be known only to the person him/herself. The point of what you are doing is to provide a space where the person can reflect on what he/she has done or what has happened to them and to provide time, a non-judgmental atmosphere, and a reasonably neutral, pleasant environment. That environment could be an office, it could be some place in a park, it could be anywhere. The point is that there is not a lot of noise, that there are not a lot of interruptions, and that the person can speak freely, and that there is enough time for the person to speak. Sometimes, you may want to have more than one conversation. Your job is not to provide advice, not to tell a person what to do. It is not your job to take responsibility for the person. It *is* your job to listen and to provide that safe space.

Your non-verbal behavior is as important as your verbal behavior. In other words, how you sit, what kind of eye contact you have, how you use your arms and your legs, how you breathe, what your facial muscles are doing, all of that is very important. Some people say that that kind of non-verbal behavior is more important than your words.

Now, we are going to go through something called the active listening technique, which also is known as the therapeutic conversation, although it doesn't have to be therapeutic.

There are number of stages to this. The first is to introduce yourself if the person doesn't know you, that is, give your name, your qualifications, how long you have for the conversation, whether there is the possibility for more conversations, and who is going to hear about the conversation, that is, the privacy of the conversation. You must confirm the privacy aspects with the other person. Also, you want to tell the person how long the conversation is going to be and if there will be a follow up

to this, and, if so, how many sessions. Does the person have to pay for this conversation? What techniques are you going to use? Are you “just going to talk?” It’s not really “just”. Are you going to use other techniques? How are you going to work with the person?

The next stage after this introduction is what’s called the *open phase* or the *client-centered phase*. In that, you use what are called “open questions”. These are questions that don’t have one answer but that a person can answer in detail. One example of an open question might be: “Tell me about yourself” or “Tell me what’s bothering you”. The point is to ask something in a general direction and where the person can talk for as long as he/she wants to and get out anything he/she wants to. During this open phase, you do not interrupt. You let the person talk and you even wait for long pauses. Even if the person pauses for, say, 30 seconds, or even a minute, you do not jump in, you let the person talk. You let the person rest, because the person may have said things that take time for him/her to process and the person may be preparing to the next part of the conversation. You encourage the person to talk about whatever he/she wants to. You can do this in a couple of ways. First of all, you use non-verbal behavior, shaking your head, encouraging the person, smiling, etc. You can use small phrases, for example if the person says “Well, you know my father did that to me...” You then might say something like “Your father?”, or you might say something like, “What did he do?” At certain points, you will want to summarize what the person said. So, you will say something like: “If I understood you well...” and then you repeat a summary of what the person said. This does number of things. First of all, it tells the other person that you have listened and that you are being attentive to what he or she is saying. Second, it allows the other person to correct anything that you might have said that was wrong or that you misunderstood. It also encourages the person to talk further. You let this open phase go on as for long as you have time. It’s the most important phase in the conversation.

The next phase is the *closed phase*, the so-called *therapist-centered phase*. The idea here is to get pieces of information that you need. So, for example you might want to ask the person such as, “how old are you?” and/or “what’s your education?”, in other words, little things that did not come out during their open phase. You may want to go back and forth between the open phase and closed phase. So, for example, if, in the open phase, the person talked about his/her mother you might want to say something like, “tell me more about your mother”. That opens up a whole new area for the person to talk.

Then we go into the planning phase. So, what is the person going to do between now and the next session? It’s very important that you both agree on this.

The next phase after that is an evaluation phase. You might ask the person, “Was this useful to you?” and/or “Should we do this again?”. This gives you feedback as to how to continue with the person in the future and what you are doing right and what you are doing wrong.

The final phase is a conclusion. In this phase, you want to summarize what has happened during the conversation and then say goodbye, see you next time. That somehow puts a cap on everything and it makes kind of a closure for everybody.

Now, as a listener, you also have needs. If you are listening to other people stories, you may get secondarily traumatized, which means that you may take on at least some of the traumas of what you’ve been listening to.

Again, listen to the first podcast in this series, which says that you have to get these things out. It’s good to write it out and to talk to somebody else. This is called supervision or intervision. Supervision is talking with one another person. That person can be another friend, it can be another

colleague, it can be a professional therapist. There is also a technique called intervision, which is talking about all of this in a group. The point is do get it out.

Please do listen to other people. You may be the only person that they have. I don't know how many times I've been told, "nobody wants to listen to me; you are the first person who will listen". That's a role that you can take.

See you next time.