

SOFTENS: authentic listening behaviours

(from E. Shepherd & A. Griffiths (2021) *Investigative Interviewing: The Conversation Management Approach. Third Edition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press)

S	Signs of sincerity and concern	<p>Use facial expression to evidence that you respect and empathise with the individual's perspective/perceptions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A genuine smile shows that you are receptive and open. • A slight lowering of the brow communicates shared understanding. e.g. looking concerned. [NB. Avoid deep, long furrowing of the brow: it can be mis-construed as you being judgemental – negatively!]
O	Open posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your hands away from your mouth. • Keep your arms uncrossed. • Sit comfortably (<i>not</i> slouching) rather than “to attention”. <p>Be at an appropriate distance from each other, i.e. sharing each other's <i>personal space</i> (1½ - 4 ft./0.5-1.6 m apart). Never be within each other's <i>intimate space</i> (less than 1½ft/0.75 m) or be located too far apart, i.e. in <i>public space</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – When standing – distance is from chest to chest. – When sitting – distance is from the middle of your shins and the middle of individual's shins. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place chairs at a “ten-to-two on the clock face” angle (a little more than 90 degrees): face-to-face is perceived as confrontational or pushy. <p>[Practice tip. Organise distance and orientation of chairs before the interview. If this is not possible, make the necessary adjustments to your chair immediately prior to sitting down.]</p>
F	Forward lean	<p>Judge when to reduce the distance between you and the individual to send an important non-verbal message.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaning slightly forward signals you are interested, listening and want the individual to keep talking. • Leaning slightly further forward at critical points signals empathy, e.g. when the individual discloses feelings; when the individual is engaged in an “inner dialogue”. [NB. Never invade the individual's <i>intimate space</i>.]
T	Touch	<p>Touch is the most primitive form of communication – signalling respect, empathy and supportiveness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shake hands on meeting and departing. • Where appropriate, e.g. at a critical point of disclosure, touch the individual symbolically, i.e. stretch and gradually raise your hand towards the shoulder area of the individual's “profile” that you have in your field of vision. <p>[NB. Do <i>not</i> physically touch the individual. This risks evoking negative perceptions of inappropriate, unwanted touching and lead to a complaint or allegation of assault.]</p>
E	Eye-contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look straight at the individual. • Maintain maximum eye-contact: but don't stare! • Sustained eye-contact sends critical messages. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>I am listening.</i> – <i>I am paying attention.</i> – <i>I am interested.</i> – <i>Carry on talking – I am happy to listen.</i>
N	Nods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consciously nod (guggle) at the key ideas within the individual's utterances that they vocally stress. • Guggling reinforces the messages sent with your face and eyes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>I really am listening.</i> – <i>I am following what you are saying.</i> – <i>I am seeing things from your perspective.</i> – <i>Carry on talking – I really am happy to listen.</i>
S	Silence and supportive sounds	<p>Pausing, sounds of understanding, and caring words evidence respect and empathy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause – foregoing/deferring the speaking turn to keep the individual in the speaking turn even if they have stopped talking. [Practice tip. Develop the skill of automatically pausing and judging pause duration: be comfortable with a minimum of 2-3 seconds - ^^^^ ^^^^ ^^^^ Learn to create - and to cope with - pauses of longer duration.] • Make supportive noises (guggling), e.g. <i>Uh-huh</i>. • Say supportive words, e.g. <i>Take your time.; Have a think.; There's no rush.; It's difficult.</i> [Practice tip. Keep it short and simple.]