

When people talk to each other they are also communicating “non-verbally” with body language, eye contact and facial expression. For example we may often may lean forward and nod encouragingly to indicate that we are listening, that we understand and empathise. This “silent communication” may not be easily picked up by a visually impaired person (VIP). As such it can be important to augment our “visual cues” with little “verbal cues”. At an appropriate moment the odd, “Yes”, “I can imagine” or simply a gentle “Mmm” will demonstrate that you are paying attention to what is being said.

Suggestions on how you may listen more effectively

- Face the speaker.
- Listen to the words and try to picture what the speaker is saying.
- Don't interrupt unnecessarily.



Oxfordshire
Association for the Blind
Registered charity 273559

Bradbury Lodge,
Gordon Woodward Way,
Abingdon Road, Oxford, OX1 4XL

Phone : 01865 725595 Fax : 01865 725596

E-mail : volunteers@oxeyes.org.uk
Website : www.oxeyes.org.uk

Oxfordshire Association for the Blind

Useful tips for volunteers

Are you a good listener?

Most of us take our hearing for granted, it is something that just happens without having to think about what we are hearing. When people talk we hear the voice and *then* react as we think appropriate.

Listening is different, Listening is a skill. It is something that we can all do and we can improve our ability to do effectively. Improving our listening skills really can help us relate to other people more easily.

Many of our clients cannot get out and about, consequently they spend too much time on their own. Because opportunities to talk to other people are limited, they will really appreciate a visitor who will spend some time *listening to them*.

Created by Liz Hunter & David Thompson

Losing your sight can be a life changing experience; for many it is perceived as a bereavement, and you may encounter an client experiencing anger, sadness and depression. It can be quite a shock if your client says “I wish I were dead” or “I dread waking up in the morning.” Expressing their feelings may help the client to come to terms with their loss.

You may feel that you haven’t done very much, but just lending a listening ear can be invaluable. Allowing a client to talk about what is happening in their life can act as a “safety valve” releasing stress and enabling them to put things in perspective. Once they have had an opportunity to express their frustration, very often the feelings of anger and resentment are less pervasive. If they continue for your client, please contact your volunteer co-ordinator. It may be that the client needs a professional counsellor.

It can be helpful to explore what activities the client can enjoy during your visit. You may be able to enjoy a walk together or perhaps you share an interest in listening to music or the radio. VIPs can still be potters, artists and gardeners. Whatever your client’s interest your volunteer co-ordinator should be able to put you in touch with helpful contacts.

A different activity or environment can provide opportunities for the visually impaired person to express themselves. It can be a marvellous way of prompting them to talk, perhaps about their past experiences, or about how they are dealing with life and the difficulties they encounter. Of course the client will also be interested to hear about your life, and there will be plenty of times to chat to each other.

Here are few ideas of how you can encourage the client to talk

There may also be occasions when its good for you to encourage your client to talk. This can be particularly rewarding for you both when the client is reminiscing about the past, or recounting some more recent experiences.

- **Use open ended questions. Such as “How?” or “Why?”**
- **Ask leading questions “Could you tell me a bit more about that?”**
- **Help the person to express feelings “How do you feel about that?”**
- **Help the person to be specific “ What bothers you most about this?” or “Could you give me an example of what you mean?”**