Tips on Listening
from the Companionship Training
Pathways to Promise (pathways2promise.org)

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Listening is one of the most important practices of Companionship. By listening to a person's story and truly hearing it, we can begin to see more clearly what the possibilities are and what the next steps of supporting the person might be.

Tips on listening:
1. **It is a gift simply to listen.**
   - Listening to someone is special. You are not interrupting or giving advice, rather being a listening presence.
   - You can affirm that you are listening to a person by nodding, saying “I hear what you’re saying”, maintaining eye contact.

2. **Listen for feelings and themes.**
   - Listen for what the person is feeling: Is there worry? hopelessness? anxiety? hope?
   - You can acknowledge feelings…”That sounds hard”; “That sounds scary”, “That's good to hear”.
   - Are there common themes? Loneliness? Isolation? Yearning for relationships? A chance to meet others? A need for food or shelter?
   - You won’t have all the answers as a listener, and that is OK.

3. **Listen to yourself.**
   - As a person talks, it may trigger a memory of your own of a similar situation or feeling. This is not a time to talk about your own story.
   - Rather, you can say “That sounds really sad”, “I hear what you’re saying”.

4. **Take care with your responses.**
   - Say “Tell me more about that”or “How did that make you feel?” These responses can encourage the person to share more with you.
   - Ask for elaboration or clarification, from their point of view, not yours.

5. **Listen over time and in community.**
   - A person's story may come out over time, over a number of encounters. We learn the complexity of the person over time.
   - Having a third person involved in conversation can widen the support.

6. **Listen for words of faith, hope and love.**
   - Listen for the person’s strengths and gifts.
   - Where have they found comfort and support? Where is their anchor?

7. **Be open to a person’s spiritual story.**
   - Is this a person of faith? Do they receive comfort from music, nature or other source?
   - You can affirm their faith and sources of comfort.