

Effective Communication Skills

Active listening is one of the most important tools for effective communication. A crucial component of active listening is letting your family member know that he or she has been heard and understood. Active listening occurs when family members:

Take turns when talking.

Listen to each other without interrupting.

Nod and make eye contact.

Paraphrasing helps make it clear to your family member that his or her message has been received.

When paraphrasing, it can help to begin with a phrase like, “I hear you saying that...”

Reflecting your family member’s feelings helps to acknowledge his or her emotional state.

A simple template for reflecting another person’s feelings may look like, “It seems like you felt (insert feeling) because (insert reason behind feelings).”

Ask for clarification in a curious, non accusatory way to show interest and attention to your family member’s experience. For example:

“I want to understand. Did you feel frustrated because you thought I had extended my deployment on purpose? Or just because we wouldn’t be seeing each other as soon as we thought?”

Ask for more information to show your interest in—and attention to—your family member’s experience.

For example:

“Tell me more about what it felt like to not be able to go to gymnastics while I was deployed.”

Being curious involves inquiring about the story behind your family member’s opinions, feelings, and reactions.

Your curiosity demonstrates that you value their experiences. For example:

“Giving gifts to the children seems very important to you. Is there a story behind that?”