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INTERACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Interactive Listening as a goal: - To hear and understand the speaker
 - To let the speaker know that they have been heard and understood

Interactive Listening in action: - Negotiate with yourself to be curious and open to learning
 - Inquire and verify your understanding by using the tools below

SKILL	PURPOSE	HOW TO	EXAMPLES
INQUIRE	To encourage the speaker to communicate and define what is important to them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use open ended questions ✓ Don't agree, disagree or problem solve ✓ Acknowledge importance of speaker's statements to them 	<p>"Tell me the situation from your point of view."</p> <p>"What brought you here today?"</p>
SUMMARIZE	<p>To confirm your understanding or the speaker's perspective; demonstrate to the speaker that they have been heard; and to invite speaker to add to your understanding of their perspective.</p> <p>To move the conversation forward and help the speaker focus on their interests</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Bullet speaker's statements ✓ Ask speaker to evaluate listener's understanding after interpretation is conveyed to speaker ✓ "Reframe" the speaker's positional statements into interest statements (<i>be sure to ask the speaker if you have identified their interests correctly</i>) 	<p>"I hear you are looking for x,y, and z. Is that correct?"</p> <p>"So "x" does not seem to meet your present interests. What would work for you?"</p> <p>"So you would like for your boss to trust you more. Is there anything else?"</p> <p>"It sounds like you would like your salary to be commensurate with your colleagues. It also sounds like being treated fairly is important to you. Is that correct?"</p>
ACKNOWLEDGE	To demonstrate a commitment to the conversation and an interest in the speaker's concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use neutral language ✓ Acknowledge importance of speaker's statements to them ✓ Encourage speaker to elaborate on their interests 	<p>"You seem angry."</p> <p>"I hear that these issues are important to you."</p> <p>"I appreciate your willingness to be here."</p> <p>"This seems like a very difficult time for you."</p>



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MWI Mediation Preparation Page

The following checklist is designed to help you prepare for mediation by clarifying your goals and priorities in advance of the session. Please take a moment to answer these questions for yourself.

1. *Interests* (i.e., hopes, goals, needs, concerns, motivations) – What interests are you hoping to have satisfied at the mediation? What do you think is important to the other party? Imagine the mediation were a success - what goals of yours would be met as a result?
2. *Options for agreement* - What would be considered a good outcome for you and for the other party? If you were not a party to this dispute and you were asked to suggest some options for resolution that all parties might accept, what would you propose? (These possible terms should meet the interests of all parties.)
3. *Alternatives to reaching an agreement* - What will you do if you do not reach an agreement with the other party? What do you think the other party will do if an agreement is not reached? How well do you think these separate outcomes meet your interests compared to what you might do together?
4. *Objective Standards* (examples include - laws, precedents, and industry norms) - What standards of fairness apply to your situation? How do you think a neutral (arbitrator, court, administrative judge, etc...) would rule on your matter and why? What have other people in your industry done when faced with a similar situation?
5. *Communication* - What messages do you want to send and have understood by the other party? What questions do you have for the other party at the mediation? What do you think the other party wants you to understand?
6. *Relationship* – Define the quality of the relationship between the parties. Should it continue or end? On what terms should it continue or end?
7. *Commitment* - Are you prepared to enter into an agreement? Does the agreement have to be enforceable from your point of view? Do you need to check in with anyone else before committing to an agreement?
8. *Other* - Please identify any other issues that you think need to be discussed. It's sometimes helpful to think of the mediation as a meeting and it's your job to create an agenda that will cover.



TEN TIPS ON ASKING QUESTIONS

The ability to ask appropriate questions is an essential dispute resolution skill. Ten tips on questioning include:

1. Identify the reasoning behind questions

A single question can cause defensiveness. A series of questions can feel like an interrogation. To avoid defensive reactions to any form of questioning, let the parties know the reasoning behind your line of questioning. For example, when trying to understand the nature of the relationship between two neighbors, you might start by asking, "Help us understand what your relationship was like before the disagreement." Follow with an open-ended question (a question that does not require a "yes" or "no" answer or a specific reply, but allows the parties to respond in their own way, such as, "What would you like your relationship to be?").

2. Use open-ended prompts

A great deal of valuable information can be gathered by using brief, general, open-ended prompts such as, "Can you tell us what brought you here today?" or "Can you tell us about the situation that concerns you?" The use of open-ended prompts allows the parties to express their perceptions and feelings in their own words and in their own order, without interruption. Follow-up responses to open-ended prompts should vary according to circumstances and what the parties have said already. Consider the methods listed below.

3. Acknowledge responses

Brief, one-to-three-word statements or non-verbal gestures demonstrate that you are following the conversation. Try a nod of the head or "Um-hmmm," "Uh-huh," "I see," etc. If a person's comments become repetitious, summarize what has been said to indicate that you understand, and then follow with a statement that encourages closure such as, "Now that I understand that point, can we talk about . . . (new subject) " or an invitation to expand (see below).

4. Value silence

Never underestimate the power of silence. Silence in combination with your own thoughts expressed through facial and body expression can send invaluable messages such as, "I hear what you are saying and I need time to think about it, " or "I see that you need time to think about this more." Put effort into feeling comfortable with silence.



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5. Offer invitations to expand

Brief phrases or prompts will signal the parties that you hear what has been said and that you encourage the person talking to say even more. Try phrases such as, "Anything else?" "Is there more you want to add?" or "Is there something else you think we should know?"

6. Offer invitations to clarify or be more specific

Often a party will make a general expression that becomes more useful as it becomes more specific. For example, if one party says, "He always borrows my things without asking, I want them back!" you might respond by saying, "Can you give me an example of what you mean?" or, if appropriate, "Please describe the items that you want returned." On other occasions, a party may not feel comfortable talking about a sensitive issue. In these cases you might say, "We want to make sure that you have an opportunity to raise any and all issues of concern. Is there anything else you want to talk about?"

7. Make checks for accuracy

Many times you must check to make sure that you have understood a single thought correctly. For example, "Did you say that you moved in two years ago?" On other occasions you might want to summarize what has been said to see if you have an accurate picture of a person's more general perspective. For example, "So, from what you've said so far, I sense that you really like living here and that you want to stay here. Is that correct?" A person who can summarize both accurately and positively is in a good position to earn trust and build momentum.

8. Follow a line of thought

Often a series of questions is helpful. For example, it might be important to gain a composite picture of a particular issue or to develop the terms of an agreement. At these times, it is helpful to identify the goal of the questioning (see item #1 above) and to stay focused. When working as a team, allow your co-worker to complete a line of thought before injecting a new concept. Questions that clarify or focus the matter may be appropriate at this time.

9. Encourage problem solving

As the parties' concerns become clear and you encourage the parties to shift from determining issues to resolving them, encourage parties to become problem-solvers: "So, have you thought about ways to resolve that issue?" "Can you think what might be done to make sure that issue doesn't arise again?" "Can you suggest methods to explore to take care of that issue in the future?"



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10. Weigh options tentatively

It is often helpful when options are offered tentatively so that either party is free to think about, accept or reject them without feeling threatened, losing face or becoming entrenched in a position. Try, for example, "So, moving to a different unit is one idea. Thank you for raising it. Are there other ideas that might work?"



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TAP Member Benefit – Dispute Resolution Services

Sites that are members of MassHousing’s Tenant Assistance Program (TAP) are entitled to dispute resolution services as a TAP benefit through a contract with Mediation Works Incorporated (MWI). MWI provides MassHousing/TAP member sites with services designed to help residents, staff, management, board members and other interested parties resolve conflict effectively and productively.

The following services are included in the dispute resolution benefit:

Mediation

A mediator (neutral) will come to the site to help people in conflict reach resolution. Mediation can be between tenants, tenants and staff, staff and staff, staff and management, management and management, as well as management and MassHousing, to name a few.

Mediation is a process in which parties agree to work together, with the assistance of a trained neutral, to explore their respective interests and generate options for resolving their dispute. The mediator helps to facilitate communication and has no power to impose a resolution. Mediation is also a flexible process that allows the parties to discuss in confidence any issues they choose to address and determine the outcome.

Benefits of mediation include:

- High Success Rate
- Convenience
- Self-Determined Outcome
- Time Savings
- Preservation of Relationships

Examples of disputes that MWI has mediated at TAP sites include noise through the wall, floor or ceiling, deteriorating friendships, housekeeping issues, poor relationships among staff, and groups not getting along or not willing to share common areas.

Facilitation

A facilitator will come to the site to help a group of people have a productive conversation. Board members, managers, staff members or groups of tenants can utilize facilitation. For groups of residents these sessions are often called “community discussions.”

Facilitations have been used to address issues found in environments described as “negative” or “a broken building” due to the overall unhappy tone of the residents at a site. Other examples include addressing cultural and ethnic tensions and dealing with an inactive or disbanded tenants’ council.



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Consultation

TAP members can contact Josh Hoch at Mediation Works Incorporate (MWI), 617-973-9739 x23 to discuss a conflict or situation they are having trouble solving. Consultation has been utilized by RSC's, property managers and tenants to discuss options for resolving conflicts.

Presentation

MWI will conduct a workshop at the site for residents or staff. **Building Peaceful Communities** is a two-hour, on-site presentation for residents or staff. The idea for the program grew from the desire to introduce residents to mediation and dispute resolution in a non-threatening way. Often when there's a dispute it can be difficult to get all the parties to "come to the table." This problem is not unique to MassHousing sites; we see it all the time.

Residents resist mediation for a number of reasons: for one, we all like to think of ourselves as able problem solvers and calling in an outside agent suggests that we are not; for another, residents may feel that going to mediation is an admission of guilt, "I've done something wrong so I'm being asked to speak to a mediator" whom they often see as a judge; and finally, because MWI has a contractual relationship with MassHousing, residents assume that we represent management.

Having a presentation allows MWI to address these issues in person and to demystify the mediation process. Our hope is that residents (and staff) will begin to see that engaging a third-party neutral is a powerful and pro-active tool that they can use to enable communication and creative problem-solving.

During the presentation we engage the participants in a discussion about the types of situations that they find challenging. We then introduce them to a framework for understanding what's happening, and give them some tools to help them manage those situations more effectively. It's a very interactive process that is both entertaining and educational, and by early accounts, popular.

For more information about the TAP Member Benefit, "Dispute Resolution Services," contact Josh Hoch at 617-973-9739 x23 or jhoch@mwi.org or visit www.mwi.org/masshousing.