

The Listening Continuum in Three Parts

Nondirective listening behaviors give clients the responsibility for choosing what to talk about. Consistent with person-centered approaches, using these behaviors is like handing your clients the reins to the horse and having them take the lead and choose where to take the session. In contrast, directive listening behaviors (Chapter 5) and directive action behaviors (Chapter 6) are progressively less person-centered. These three categories of listening behaviors (and the corresponding chapters) are globally referred to as *the listening continuum*. To get a visual sense of the listening continuum, see Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 The Listening Continuum

Nondirective Listening Behaviors on the LEFT Edge (Chapter 4)	Directive Listening Behaviors in the MIDDLE (Chapter 5)	Directive Action Behaviors on the RIGHT Edge (Chapter 6)
Attending behaviors or minimal encouragers	Feeling validation	Closed and therapeutic questions
Therapeutic silence	Interpretive reflection of feeling	Psychoeducation or explanation
Paraphrase	Interpretation (classic or reframing)	Suggestion
Clarification	Confrontation	Agreement/disagreement
Reflection of feeling	Immediacy	Giving advice
Summary	Open questions	Approval/disapproval
		Urging

The ultimate goal is for you to use behavioral skills along the whole listening continuum. Further, we want you to be able to apply these skills *intentionally* and with *purpose*. That way, when you review a video of your session with a supervisor, and your supervisor stops the recording and asks, “What exactly were you doing there?” you can respond with something like this:

I was doing an interpretive reflection of feeling. The reason I chose an interpretive reflection is that I thought the client was ready to explore what might be under their anger.

Trust us; this will be a happy moment for both you and your supervisor.

Hill (2020) organized the three listening continuum categories in terms of their primary purpose:

1. Nondirective listening behaviors facilitate *client talk*.
2. Directive listening behaviors facilitate *client insight*.
3. Directive action behaviors facilitate *client action*.

This content is excerpted from J. Sommers-Flanagan and R. Sommers-Flanagan (2024). *Clinical interviewing* (7th ed.), (chapter 4). Wiley.