

A CARE NET INITIATIVE

Caring for those considering
ABORTION

SESSION 5:

Interpretive Listening & “Care-frontation”

TAKEN FROM

making **LIFE**
DISCIPLES[™]

*Equipping the Church to offer compassion, hope, help,
and discipleship to women and men considering abortion.*

SECTION 3.4: ACTIVE LISTENING ^{10,11}

As the word implies, “active” listening involves more than just hearing the words a person is saying. Active listening uses skills to help understand the meaning behind words.

Unfortunately, many people think they are better listeners than they are. Some people have a tendency to listen in order to respond, rather than listening in order to understand. As a result, they rarely hear and, thus, do not fully understand the message of the sender. The good news is that, with awareness and practice, a person can overcome these tendencies and become a good listener—an active listener!

Below are ten characteristics of an effective listener:

1. Shows sincere attention
2. Shows respect and acceptance
3. Does not rehearse own input/response while another person speaks
4. Pays attention to nonverbal communications
5. Is aware of the “big picture” while listening to details
6. Tolerates periods of silence and uses them effectively
7. Does not allow emotional moments to throw her/him off track
8. Asks questions for clarification
9. Maintains proper eye contact
10. Recognizes that every person is unique

People often feel obligated to come up with a solution every time someone mentions a problem. As a Life Disciple sitting with someone who is convinced that abortion is his or her only solution, it is initially much more important to listen to understand. There will be a time to suggest solutions, but wait until you have established rapport and the person’s anxiety, if present, is reduced.

Restatement and rephrasing are tools to help an active listener understand better.

Restatement involves repeating what the woman or man says almost word for word, changing only the pronoun and the verb tense when necessary. For example:

Person in need: “I think I might be pregnant.”

Life Disciple: “You think you might be pregnant.”

Person in need: “I planned to go to college.”

Life Disciple: “You planned to go to college.”

Restatement can feel unnatural, but it can be a very effective listening tool. It should be used sparingly so as not to sound like a parrot and run the risk of annoying or insulting someone.

Rephrasing is the second type of active listening skill.

To rephrase, you summarize in your own words what a person has said. This form of active listening is very helpful when a person is upset and incoherent. This approach will help clarify what that person has said by rephrasing the most important parts. It serves as a check that you understood what they said.

Rephrasing is more difficult than restating because you must put the person’s words into your own words without interjecting feelings. Consider these examples:

Woman facing a pregnancy decision: “My parents would go crazy if they found out I am pregnant. My dad would yell and scream and throw things around. Mom would just sit in a corner and cry her eyes out. Then I would get the silent treatment from her, and there’s no telling what my dad would do.”

Life Disciple: “Your parents would be really upset if they found out that you are pregnant.”

Woman facing a pregnancy decision: “I guess I’ll have to tell everybody. I have to tell Jason. I mean, he is the father of the baby. Then I will have to tell my parents. I cannot believe I have to tell them. Then there is Amanda, my best friend. I have to tell her because she is the only one who will really understand.”

Life Disciple: “You want to tell those close to you about your pregnancy.”

As you think about and practice these skills, you will begin to experience some of the benefits of active listening, including the ability to hear and evaluate the meaning of what is being said by those you serve, while conveying to them that they are truly being heard.

SECTION 3.5: INTERPRETIVE LISTENING ^{12,13}

Handout:

Feeling Words

To interpret means to bring the meaning out of something, to explain something to another in a way the person can understand it.

Interpretive listening involves bringing the meaning out of a people's messages—verbal and nonverbal—that enables you to understand the feelings that underlie their statements. Feelings often underlie statements. This skill is critical in assisting a woman or man facing a pregnancy decision understand and explore what they really feel about the pregnancy—feelings they might not be aware of.

There are two skills involved in interpretive listening: listening for feelings and responding to the feelings.

Listening for feelings involves carefully paying attention to a woman or man's words, including voice tone and inflection, and observing body language and gestures to gather clues that answer the question, “How is this person really feeling?”

Once you have identified feelings, the next interpretive listening skill is **responding to those feelings**. This skill involves stating the feelings that you have identified so the person you are serving is given the opportunity to either agree with your assessment of the feelings or to clarify them.

When you use this skill, it is helpful to use a lead-in phrase like: “**It sounds like you feel. . .**” or “**What I hear you saying is. . .**” or “**I think you feel that. . .**”

Lead-in statements give the woman or man a chance to reply without feeling threatened, as well as an opportunity to correct any misinterpretations you might have made.

Consider the following dialogues. Note that each starts with a lead-in phrase:

Woman or man: “I cannot believe it! Is this test really accurate? We have tried for years to have a child and started to think this could never happen. I hope I can handle it. I can't believe it!”

Life Disciple: “It sounds like you feel excited about these results.”

Woman: “When I first found out I was pregnant, I was worried about what my father would think of me. He got furious and threw me out of the house, so now I don’t care what he thinks anymore.”

Life Disciple: “It seems as though your father hurt you deeply when he got so angry.”

Man: “I don’t have a job or any savings, and my girlfriend keeps talking about having this baby.”

Life Disciple: “It sounds like you are feeling upset about your girlfriend’s reaction to the pregnancy.”

As you consider what words to use when responding to the feelings you have identified, be careful not to use high-intensity words (embarrassed, ashamed, furious, etc.) too soon. Instead, start with a low- or medium-intensity word (upset, bothered, worried, etc.) and allow the person to clarify with a higher-intensity word.

To help understand this concept, consider this example:

Woman: “Everybody has advice for me. My mom says one thing, my dad another and my sister something else. They act like it is not my life and like what I think doesn’t matter. It’s ridiculous.”

Life Disciple: “It sounds like you are upset that people want to give you advice.”

The Life Disciple could have used the word “furious” or “angry” in response to the woman’s statement. But because these words are emotionally charged and could make the woman feel uncomfortable if they are not what she is feeling, the Life Disciple instead chose the more generalized word, “upset.” If the woman was, in fact, feeling “furious,” she now has the opportunity to clarify with stronger words to describe her emotions.

To help you prepare to use the interpretive-listening skill of restatement, spend some time practicing with the following commonly heard statements from women and men considering abortion. Remember to use a lead-in phrase to identify the feeling and the reason for the feeling.

- “Even though I am happy about this pregnancy, I cannot stop thinking about the two abortions I had when I was younger.”

- “I just want to leave the area until the baby is born so that no one will know what happened.”

- “As soon as she told me she was pregnant, I thought, ‘why don’t we just get married?’ She said she’d been wondering what it would take to get me to ask. Then my parents and hers decided to buy us some furniture. Everyone has been so helpful. I cannot believe it!”

- “I really resent my boyfriend forcing me to have an abortion. It is my decision and not his.”

- “Seems like almost everyone at high school got pregnant young, and many dropped out. At least I waited until I graduated. It’s not that big of a deal. My mom is already helping my sister with her baby. I’m sure she’ll take care of my kid while I work or go out with my friends.”

- “I do not see how I could raise a child. I am broke and living at home so I can go to college next semester. Having a baby does not fit into my plans.”

- “Sometimes I think that maybe there is a God who loves people, but then I see something awful that doesn’t make sense.”

- “Sure, he slaps me around once in a while but he’s never hurt me that bad. If he sleeps around a little, he always comes back to me... They don’t mean anything to him anyway. Besides, I don’t deserve a good guy. I’ve messed up so many times and done so much that there’s no way I can judge him.”

- “If I had an abortion, I think my life would be back to normal. But if I have this baby, that means that everyone will know, and the rest of the year will be about the baby and not me.”

By honing your interpretive listening skills, you will be better equipped to move your communication to a higher level. Helping those you serve identify, clarify, and understand their emotions is a powerful gift you can give people making difficult pregnancy decisions.

SECTION 3.6: GOOD QUESTIONS ^{14,15}

Asking questions is a good way to learn information from the people you will serve while also helping them learn more about themselves. Learning how to ask good questions starts with knowing which questions to avoid. There are four basic kinds of questions not to use in your role as a Life Disciple. They are:

1. **“Why” questions:** Questions that begin with “why” imply judgment and can put a person on the defensive. An example of such a question is: “Why did you call him when you knew he wasn’t interested in a relationship with you?” One challenge most people have in answering this kind of question is that they often do not consciously know why they did something.
2. **Rapid-fire questions:** These are questions that combine more than one question into a single, long question. An example of such a question is: “Where will you live, how will you pay for it, and who is going to help you?” Rapid-fire questions can confuse people. A good rule of thumb is to never ask more than one question at a time.
3. **Leading questions:** These are questions that contain the answer. An example of such a question is: “You would not really have an abortion, would you?” They are not questions so much as statements of opinion phrased as a question. They do not help a Life Disciple gain information about a woman or man facing a pregnancy decision or their situations. They lead people to provide answers that simply confirm what Life Disciples think or the outcomes they want to see. Leading questions can manipulate the women or men you will meet.
4. **Closed-ended questions:** These are questions a person can answer with a simple “yes” or “no.” They usually begin with “have you. . .” or “do you. . .” or “would you. . .” or “are you. . .” An example of such a question is “Are you upset about being pregnant?”

Sometimes the women or men that you serve will like this kind of question because they do not have to say anything more than “yes” or “no.”

Unfortunately, these kinds of questions can end an interaction before it really gets started. They do not help you gain nearly enough information about the man and women or their situation.

Now that you know the kinds of questions to avoid, let us look at **the kind of questions you should ask**—good questions. These questions fall, quite simply, into one category:

Open-ended and focused on the individual: These questions encourage people facing a pregnancy decision to talk about themselves—their feelings, their thoughts,

and their circumstances. Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no,” and they therefore allow a Life Disciple to better explore people's situations in greater depth.

Jesus is a great example of someone who asked good questions. He often used questions as He taught. Think of the many times He asked the disciples a question or answered the Pharisees' traps with a question, all the while teaching those around Him in ways they would not soon forget. Here are some examples:

In the story of the feeding of the 4,000 that appears in Mark 8:4-5, the disciples asked Jesus how they would find enough bread to feed so many people. In response, Jesus asked, “How many loaves do you have?” He sought information—more detail.

In the story of the Pharisees questioning Jesus about whether or not it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife that appears in Mark 10:2-3, Jesus responded, “What did Moses command you?” Rather than provide the answer, Jesus asked them to answer the question—solve the problem—for themselves.

Good questions usually begin with words like “how,” “what,” “which,” “when,” or “where.” Below are some examples of open-ended questions focused on the person you are serving:

- “How do you feel about your pregnancy?”
- “What makes you say that abortion is the best solution?”
- “What were the circumstances that led up to his leaving you?”
- “Which living situation do you think you would like most?”
- “How may I help you tell your mom that you are pregnant?”

As you practice the skill of asking good questions, use the statements below to create open-ended questions that are focused on the person as you try to gain understanding into his or her thoughts, feelings, and circumstances.

- “Some people seem to believe strongly in God, but I don't really believe one way or the other.”

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- “My parents really disapprove of my friends. They want me to find new ones, but it's hard to break into a new crowd after the school year begins.”
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- “Once in a while, I just let myself dream. I think about what I would like to do and who I would like to be. It is such a relief from the situation I am in right now.”

- “I think that if we could get married, things would be different, and a lot of our problems would go away.”

- “My first pregnancy test came back negative, but I know I am pregnant.”

- “My parents are religious, and I know they will be upset when they find out I am pregnant.”

- “When I told my best friend that I wanted to have the baby, she said I was crazy not to have an abortion.”

- “I feel like adoption is giving my baby away, but parenting seems overwhelming to me. I don’t know what to do.”

Questions that are open-ended allow people who are considering abortion an opportunity to explore their own thoughts and feelings as well. The answers they give can provide new insights and greater understanding as they consider a pregnancy decision.

SECTION 3.7: CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK ¹⁶

The communication skills you have learned up to this point have focused on understanding the woman or man facing a pregnancy decision and obtaining information about her or his situation. To create and maintain an open and honest relationship, you need to provide feedback on both negative and positive thoughts and feelings in a non-threatening manner and provide positive thoughts and feelings in a way that helps the women and men you are serving.

There are two basic types of feedback: constructive feedback and non-constructive feedback.

Non-constructive feedback focuses on the other person and takes the form of “you statements.” These statements transfer responsibility for your feelings, both negative and positive, to the woman or man facing a pregnancy decision. They are non-constructive because they are not behavior-specific, and they do not help the person you are serving.

You can sometimes fall prey to your own negative feelings about a woman or man considering abortion. You may express these feelings in the form of condemnation, sarcasm, name-calling, or accusation. Some examples could be:

- “I can’t believe you did that!”
- “What were you thinking?”
- “Don’t you have any morals?”

Non-constructive feedback can also involve a Life Disciple sharing positive feelings about the woman and man’s situation in general terms that lack specificity. This kind of feedback makes it difficult for the person to know why a Life Disciple shared those feelings. For instance, a Life Disciple might say:

- “You make me happy!”
- “I feel so good around you.”
- “You are really something!”

While these statements have nice sentiment, they leave the person wondering what to think about them, and they do nothing to help the person move forward.

Constructive feedback takes the form of “I statements” rather than “you statements,” and the Life Disciple takes responsibility for her or his own thoughts and feelings. Constructive feedback is specific, containing positive or negative thoughts or feelings connected to the other person’s behavior that evoked those thoughts or feelings.

Good constructive feedback has three elements:

1. A specific feeling
2. A specific behavior
3. A specific reason

An effective format for a constructive feedback statement is:

“I feel _____ when you _____ because _____.”
(*specific feeling*) (*specific behavior*) (*specific reason*)

Here are some examples:

- “I feel hopeful when you share your feelings because it shows you trust me.”
- “I feel hurt when you speak to me sarcastically because I feel put down.”
- “I feel happy when you call me because it shows that you are interested in this relationship, too.”
- “I feel worried when you don’t show up for our times together because that puts your health and the baby’s health at risk.”

Using the scenarios below and the “I feel. . . when you. . . because” format, practice offering constructive feedback:

- You found out that a woman or man used her \$10.00 grocery store gift card from your church’s *Making Life Disciples* ministry to buy cigarettes and alcohol.

- A woman you met through the *Making Life Disciples* ministry asks you to help her find a place to stay. After you spend a great deal of time and energy finding a place, she tells you that she is moving in with her boyfriend.

- A man you met through the *Making Life Disciples* ministry tells you he will follow through on one of your referrals. He does not follow through and does not provide an explanation for not doing so.

- You confront a woman you are serving as a Life Disciple about missing your meeting time. Since that time, she has made every appointment on time.

SECTION 3.8: CONFRONTATION VS. “CARE-FRONTATION”

Most people will say they don't like confrontation. Some people even say they avoid confrontation at all costs, most likely because they link confrontation with conflict and negative emotions like fear and anger. But providing honest feedback to the people you will serve as a Life Disciple is important and sometimes does involve confronting wrong behaviors, thoughts, and choices. The good news for people who generally hate confrontation is that a simple change of perspective—from confrontation to “**care-frontation**”—can help you overcome reluctance to providing needed feedback.

Care-frontation simply means to confront in a caring manner, thus reducing the likelihood that your feedback will produce negative emotions. Care-frontation always includes asking open-ended questions with a calm tone of voice and staying focused on the other person's body language and reactions, all the while helping them recognize—on their own—the destructive behaviors or patterns you have identified.

Care-fronting people who are considering abortion might help them connect or reconnect to their true feelings. People who are considering abortion are often so overwhelmed with whatever makes them feel trapped (e.g. fear, anger, shame, etc.) that they are unable to think about or acknowledge their feelings about abortion, pregnancy, or the unborn baby.

Unfortunately, after an abortion decision, the sorrow from loss is often profound. Therefore, confronting a person's thought processes or rationale could prevent a lifetime of regret.

Care-frontation involves asking open-ended questions that gently challenge a perspective. For example, **consider Olivia**, a woman who is feeling pressured by her father to abort. Olivia tells you that she deeply loves her father, though she describes him as controlling. She denies that he has ever hurt her but says she is terrified to tell him about the pregnancy. She says he will force her to have an abortion, even though she is in college and “should be able to make my own decisions.”

A Life Disciple might say to Olivia, “five years from now, your dad's opinion will not control most of your choices and you will have gotten through this difficult time. How might you feel if your relationship with him includes resentment?”

Her response might be: “But you don't know how mad my dad will be.”

The Life Disciple can validate the feelings and care-front with: “I understand you are worried about your dad's feelings, but I am concerned that you are allowing your father's feelings to override your own. Can you dig deep instead and tell me what you are feeling and what you really want to do?”

Notice the Life Disciple did not use manipulation to get the woman to do what the Life Disciple thinks best but, instead, challenge the woman with thoughtful questions to help her connect with her true feelings and desires about the pregnancy and the unborn child.

CARE-FRONTATION GUIDELINES

When using care-frontation with a person you are serving, the following guidelines will be helpful:

- **The motive for care-frontation must be love for the other person.** If there is any other motivation—such as anger, frustration, scorn, or the need to be assertive—the person will feel punished or rejected, and the care-frontation will come across as condemnation. Care-frontation should never be perceived as an attack. The purpose of speaking the truth in love is to help the person realize that the path she/he is pursuing is likely to lead to pain, sadness, or regret. The motivation behind care-frontation is love and concern.
- **The goal of care-frontation must be to benefit the other person.** The goal of care-frontation is to benefit, not to condemn (see 1 Corinthians 4:14). The kindness of God leads to conviction. Care-frontation is an act born out of the empathy that has developed as you have shared together, employing your listening skills.
- **The context of care-frontation must be trust.** Care-frontation can succeed only in a relationship where a Life Disciple has established trust with the person he or she is serving. In this type of relationship, the person you are serving will have experienced your love and concern, and will feel safe, even if he or she disagrees with the focus of the care-frontation. Therefore, timing is crucial; care-frontation should not happen too early in your interactions with those you serve.
- **Be clear about the focus of the care-frontation.** A Life Disciple should focus on a specific behavior or perception, encouraging the person to make a positive change. Statements that are too general or broad may be confusing and cause a person to feel reprimanded or condemned.
- **The care-frontation must be appropriate.** This is not the time for a lecture, political statement, or to tell a person what you think they should do. Your role is to expose wrong thinking and behaviors so that the person you are serving has the opportunity to realign their perspectives with truth.
- **When care-fronting a person, avoid relying on the same approach with every person you serve.** Each person is unique, and each situation is unique. Care-frontation is specific to the person you are serving. It is never about a script or set of platitudes to repeat.

CARE-FRONTATION EXAMPLES

Woman: “My boyfriend said he would leave me if I do not have an abortion. I do not want to lose him.”

Life Disciple: “It sounds like your boyfriend is asking you to sacrifice this pregnancy for him. Let us talk about how that makes you feel and if you think what he is asking is okay.”

Woman: “I have always thought abortion is wrong but given my current situation, it is my only choice.”

Life Disciple: “You have always thought abortion is wrong. Let us talk about how you might feel after doing something that you believe is wrong.”

Man: “My girl isn’t having another kid. No way. If she doesn’t have the abortion, I’ll jet. She’ll never find me. It’s her own fault for not taking her pills.”

Life Disciple: “You never wanted another baby, but now she’s pregnant again. Let’s talk about the feelings you might have if you actually did abandon your family.”

CARE-FRONTATION RESTATEMENTS

Another skill to use when care-fronting is restatement. Here are some examples:

- “I heard you say that it is a blob, but you also said that these pictures show you that it’s already a baby. Did I get that right?”
- “You said your dad cannot handle this, but you also said that he helped you after your car was totaled. Is that correct?”
- “You said that you look forward to having children, just not now. How might you feel about this baby if your circumstances were different?”

PRACTICE STATEMENTS

Practice your care-frontation skills using the following examples of what a person considering abortion might say:

- “I could never give my baby away.”

- “My dad will kill me when he finds out I am pregnant.”

- “Having an abortion is no big deal. She just needs to get it over with”

- “It is not my fault I got pregnant. I was on the pill.”

- “God does not care what I do with this pregnancy.”

Care-frontation can be a difficult skill to master. It may take a lot of practice to use effectively, but it will be worth the effort because it can help women and men facing pregnancy decisions change their perspective to a life-affirming one.

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