



**Sexual Assault**  
DEMONSTRATION INITIATIVE  
Enhancing Sexual Assault Services

# SCENARIOS FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

## WORKSHEET

Many of the skills and aspects of active listening are things we do every day. We use these skills when talking with our loved ones and being supportive. However, when working with survivors of sexual violence we need to be even more intentional in the use of these skills. We can provide great support to survivors by solely listening. This is different from how we use these skills in our daily lives, where it is often a more mutual sharing of stories.

It's important to always check in with a survivor about what makes them most comfortable when you are having a conversation. Some survivors may prefer privacy and to meet in a room with a closed door, while this may feel unsafe for others and they may prefer a more public space or to meet in a room with the door open. Invite a survivor to choose where they are most comfortable in the space and check in with them about where they prefer you be in proximity to them. Follow the survivor's cues in terms of eye contact and speed of the conversation. Different cultural, individual, and situational norms are likely to shape what makes a survivor feel comfortable in a conversation and it is our responsibility to help create this safe space.

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The following activity can be done in small groups or individually.

Review the scenarios below and discuss or journal your response to the following question: What active listening skills may help you to understand and support each survivor?

### [ SCENARIO #1 ]

Angela is a 43-year-old Latina woman who was sexually abused by her brother, David. Angela never told anyone. Until recently, she has been using coping strategies that have been helpful and thought she had put the abuse behind her. Recently, Angela's 13-year-old niece, Trinity, revealed that David has been sexually abusing her as well. Trinity is pregnant because of David's abuse. Angela calls the helpline and is distraught with guilt and shame. She hasn't been able to sleep or eat for days.



### [ SCENARIO #2 ]

Charlie is a 32-year-old, Native American man who was sexually assaulted while serving in the Army. He is experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and walks into your organization because the VA in the area will no longer assist him when he calls on the anniversary of his assault. He often feels suicidal during this time of year and he doesn't know what to do. He has attempted suicide once before but doesn't have a specific plan to attempt again, but he is nervous and is feeling out of control and wants to talk with someone who he hopes won't judge him.



### [ SCENARIO #3 ]

Alyssa is a 60-year old African American woman with chronic health conditions resulting from a history of sexual victimization. She has used your agency hotline on occasion over the years when she was experiencing flashbacks. She is contacting you now wanting assistance with advocacy with her insurance company and primary care physician. She was denied coverage due to a preexisting condition when she recently changed plans and doesn't know what to do. She has also been asking her doctor to help coordinate care between several specialists that she is seeing for both mental health and physical health needs. She is asking if you would come with her to her next doctor's appointment since she feels that she isn't being listened to by her doctor. This



is the third survivor in a month that has reported issues with insurance discrimination and access to health care.

#### [ SCENARIO #4 ]

Duane, a 19 year old African American man, walked into your office to talk with someone the day after he was given access to his adoption records and information about his birth parents. He learned from the paperwork that he was conceived through rape and his birth mother did not give permission for her name to be released. He has been waiting for 10 years to find his birth parents and now feels devastated. He came to your office to learn more about sexual violence and to try to understand why his mother would give him away. There is also no information about his biological father available and he is struggling since all he knows is that this man raped his mother.



#### [ SCENARIO #5 ]

Daniel, who is a white 14 year old was kicked out of their home after coming out to their religious conservative parents as transgender and bisexual. Prior to being kicked out, Daniel's parents yelled at them a lot and verbally abused them. They've been living with different friends because they were unsure of where else to go. However, after being sexually assaulted by a friend's family member, Daniel moved into an abandoned building about a mile from home with a few other people, and has been living there for the past three months. Daniel was hoping that eventually their parents might change their minds and let Daniel come home but that hasn't happened yet. Daniel is trying to keep up in going to school but is struggling without the support of their family, extended family and community. A friend suggested Daniel contact your office and when you meet with them, Daniel appears tense and expresses uncertainty about how you can help them.



*Please note that this publication uses they/them/theirs in the singular to recognize there are more than two genders and affirm survivors who are transgender or who identify outside the gender binary.*