

# COMPANIONS



## LISTENING

Listening is something many of us take for granted, but during a home or outreach visit, it becomes one of the most vital skills we can offer. True listening takes discipline. It means setting aside distractions, personal experiences, and assumptions to give your full attention to the companion in front of you.

It's easy to fall into poor listening habits—like being there in person but not really paying attention, or jumping in too quickly with advice before fully hearing the other person. This can lead to unhelpful behaviours such as:

- Offering solutions based on our own experiences (e.g. “When I was in that situation, I just got another job.”)
- Focusing on how we'll respond instead of truly listening
- Minimising or criticising the companion's concerns (e.g. “It doesn't sound that bad.”)
- Becoming distracted—by surroundings, mobile phones, or our own thoughts
- Steering the conversation or giving instructions rather than letting it unfold
- Lecturing, preaching, blaming, or judging

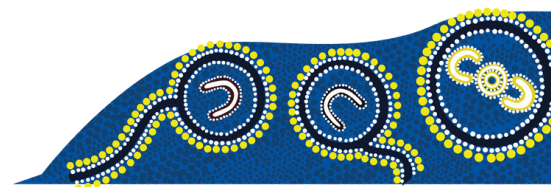
None of these help build trust or support. In fact, they can make a companion feel unheard or dismissed.

### What Listening Looks Like on a Vinnies Visit

During a visit, active listening means choosing to be fully present. It means letting go of personal concerns and tuning in to the companion's story with empathy and respect. Each companion is unique—our role is not to fix, but to understand and support.

Here are some examples:

- A single mother tells you she's behind on rent. Rather than jumping in with, “You need to budget better,” try listening for what's really going on—perhaps she lost hours at work or is supporting extended family.
- An older man expresses frustration about the food provided. Instead of taking it personally or explaining logistics, allow space for him to talk. You might discover he's dealing with a recent health diagnosis or grief, and the frustration is a symptom of something deeper.
- A companion asks for help multiple times in a short period. Rather than assuming dependency or misuse, listen for underlying needs—are they isolated, anxious, or managing a mental health issue?



## Active Listening in Practice

- Pay full attention to words, tone, body language, and feelings
- Be present—put phones away, and make eye contact where culturally appropriate
- Notice what is said and not said—sometimes silence speaks volumes
- Allow silence—companions may need time to collect their thoughts
- Ask gentle, open-ended questions (e.g. “Can you tell me more about what’s been happening lately?”)
- Show respect in your tone, body language, and responses
- Acknowledge strengths or resilience you observe
- Clarify or paraphrase to confirm understanding (e.g. “So what I’m hearing is...”)
- Listen for outcomes—what is the companion hoping for today?
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By listening with intention and compassion, we honour the dignity of each person we visit—and we fulfil the heart of our Vincentian calling.

## TRY THIS Activity

### Watch

The Power of Empathy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jz1g1SpD9Zo>

It’s not about the nail

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4EDhdAHRoG&t=1s>

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Can you think of a time during a visit when you may have responded too quickly or offered advice before fully understanding the companion’s situation?

What might you do differently next time?

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How can you remind yourself to stay fully present and listen actively during your next Conference visit?

