

Ethical and Professional Behavior

Behavior: Use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies.

Critical Thinking Question: In determining when to use a particular attending behavior, what considerations must a social worker take into account?

In each of these instances, the social worker will respond differently to the meaning of the client's silence. For example, the involuntary client who is dealing with issues of trust uses silence as a way to control the interview and demonstrate hostility (Sheehy, 2007). The client who is quiet by nature and is not used to giving lengthy explanations may be more comfortable sitting with thoughts rather than giving a spontaneous response. If you understand the meaning behind the silence, you can use an empathy statement to convey such a situation (Boyle, Hall, Malher, Smith, & Farley, 2011). Offering a statement such as "I can understand how it may be hard to trust a stranger; take your time and only tell me things that you are ready to talk about" can put the client at ease.

Generally speaking, the best approach to silence is not to be intimidated by it or uncomfortable with it but to understand and embrace the silence as an appropriate attending behavior. Wait with patience, take a deep breath, drink a sip of water, but remain relaxed and attentive. As you develop your ability to use this skill, you will find that silence is an asset to the relationship. Being able to sit quietly, waiting to see what new revelation will emerge, is worth the wait. Sometimes saying absolutely nothing is exactly what is needed. Use silence intentionally as a way of encouraging the client to be reflective and sit with his or her thoughts and feelings. On a final note, for nonnative English speakers, it is important slow the pace of the conversation to give the client the time he or she needs to think in his or her second language (English) and respond to your questions.

As you watch Mrs. Kia and Diane interact, pay close attention to their attending behaviors. You can hear and see the pacing of the interview. Watch for the give-and-take, pay attention to how they lean into each other. Watch as Diane gives Mrs. Kia plenty of time to think about how she wants to respond to questions. Listen to their tone of voice. Close your eyes and simply listen to the conversation. Can you hear the care and concern being conveyed? Watch their facial expressions, eye contact, and body posture. It is through the nonverbal portion of their communication that the essence of the relationship is affirmed.

Watch the exchange between Diane and Mrs. Kia. Pay attention to the pace of Diane's questions and the silence between them. Think about Diane's use of silence; was it too hurried or just right?

Furthering Responses

The use of **furthering responses** offered by the social worker is another way of conveying understanding, and these are used as a way of saying, "Keep talking," "Tell me more," and "I am listening to you." Furthering responses can be used to highlight a particular word (e.g., Client: "I doubt he'll ever forgive me." Social worker: "Forgive you?"). Hand gestures and nodding of the head are other ways of nonverbally communicating that the social worker is listening and for the client to continue.

Single-word/phrase utterances such as "hmmm," "uh-huh," "okay," "um," and "go on" also convey an interest in the client and serve as inducements for the client to proceed. Furthering responses provide nonmassive support and a way to monitor the flow of the interview (Hill & O'Brien, 2014).

As you listen to the instructor discuss furthering responses, how might you use this skill to convey interest in your client's continuation of their story?

Additionally, using furthering responses such as "And . . ." or "hmmmm" or "but" encourage the client to continue talking. The social worker is subtly directing the client to follow the line of conversation by saying very little yet letting the client know where the social worker would like to take the interview.

Watch as James uses the furthering response "um . . . hr" to encourage Anthony to continue with his train of thought. Can you see how this simple strategy keeps Anthony talking?

The example in Box 5.2 illustrates the use of attending behaviors and other basic interviewing skills. Through reflection of feeling statements, paraphrasing, and furthering responses, social workers convey to clients an understanding of their experiences.

Box 5.2 Franny—Attending Behaviors

F Franny is in her mid-70s. She is living on a very limited budget. She is concerned about her daughter's financial demands.

Franny: My daughter refuses to discuss her finances with me, but she insists she has no money and needs a loan.

Social Worker: A loan? (Furthering responses, direct eye contact)

Franny: A loan, for something, but she won't tell me what that leaves me thinking the worst, like she owes money to some criminals.

Social Worker: And . . . (Furthering response)

Franny: It scares me to death. I don't want anyone coming after her or me.

Social Worker: That is unsettling. (Paraphrasing, said slowly and with concern) What do you think is going on with her? (Open-ended question)

Franny: I don't know, but she always ends up in some kind of trouble, with me bailing her out.

Social Worker: hmmm (Furthering response)

Franny: I know she counts on me to help her, and I usually do, but I won't lend her money unless she tells me what it's for. I can't keep doing this. It's tearing me up inside.

Social Worker: (Silence 10–15 seconds—a furthering response strategy)

Franny: You know, I really feel angry about this whole thing. She uses me and doesn't give it a second thought. She feels justified and entitled to anything I have . . . many people in my life treat me this way. She is my daughter, so I make excuses for her. But as much as I hate to admit it, it isn't just her.

Social Worker: You end up feeling used. (Reflection of feeling) Can you describe some other situations when you have felt this way? (Open-ended question, leaning in and looking directly at client)