

Johns Hopkins University  
Krieger School of Arts and Sciences  
Whiting School of Engineering

# GRAD NET

A graduate student peer mentoring program

## 2009 - 2010 Training and Reference Manual

**Graduate Affairs and Admissions Office**  
[www.grad.jhu.edu/student-life/student-organizations/index.php#gradnet](http://www.grad.jhu.edu/student-life/student-organizations/index.php#gradnet)

## **GradNet Peer Mentoring Network**

### **Guidelines 2009-2010**

Created by graduate students, GradNet has the following goals:

1. To provide a self-sustaining network of support amongst graduate students.
2. To help incoming students quickly adjust to life on the Homewood campus.
3. To support individual growth and development and, in the long-term, improve graduate student retention and encourage timely graduation.
4. To promote a diversity of backgrounds and experiences in an academic setting.
5. To encourage a healthy and productive working environment for research and learning for all.

#### **Guidelines for Mentors**

1. Mentors need to contact their mentees before their arrival to campus (via email).
2. Mentors should review the training and reference material as provided by the Counseling Center and found on the GradNet website:  
<http://grad.jhu.edu/student-life/student-organizations/GradNet>.
3. Mentors should plan to attend the August 26 GradNet Mixer.
4. Mentors should meet with their mentees at least once a month for one academic year (September to May).
5. Mentors need to respect the sensitive nature of personal conversations.

#### **Guidelines for all Participants**

1. Everyone needs to respect common boundaries – i.e. appropriate times to call, method of contact etc.
2. All participants need to be respectful of confidentiality.
3. At the end of the academic year, the formal relationship between mentors and mentees ends.

Please contact the Graduate Affairs Coordinator, Rita Banz ([banz@jhu.edu](mailto:banz@jhu.edu), 410-516-8477), if any issues arise throughout the duration of your GradNet participation.

# Peer Listening/Counseling

**“Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand.”**

The role of a listener is not to solve other peoples' problems for them, but rather to assist them in finding their own solutions. Peer listeners do not tell people what they should do, nor do they give advice, interpret, or diagnose. Rather, they help the other person clarify thoughts and feelings to explore various options and solutions by using active listening and counseling skills.

## ***Empathy***

**Be Empathetic:** Empathetic counselors, no matter what their training, orientation, or experience, are much more effective than counselors that are not empathetic. In this case empathy is the ability to see a problem from the other person's perspective in a warm and supportive manner.

### **Basic Guidelines for Empathic Listening**

- Give your undivided attention
- Let the person set the pace and direction of the conversation
- Listen to what the person is saying and how it is being said
- Watch for non-verbal cues to the person's feelings
- Be mindful of the content and feeling of what the person is saying
- Use their words to clarify your understanding when responding
- Let the person know if you need clarification or are having difficulty following
- Respond only to what you hear and nothing more
- Avoid pursuing your own interests or interjecting your own opinions

### **Why Empathic Listening Works**

*The other person sets the pace.* You let them take the lead in the conversation. You don't push them faster than they want to go. Your patience builds trust.

*The other person is completely free to be natural.* It is a rare opportunity. The talker will probably take advantage of it by relaxing and behaving in the ways that are most real and honest. When you show that you can be trusted, other people are free to tell you about their pains, secrets, and ambitions. The result is that you can really understand them.

*The other person gets more self-understanding.* In a mirror, you can see things about your physical self that cannot otherwise be seen. In the same way, empathic listening serves as a mirror in which people can see their behaviors and attitudes more completely, ultimately helping them understand themselves better.

*Giving your empathic listening is a gift.* Empathic listening is hard work. When you listen with empathy, you show the other person that you care.

*It keeps you from accidentally hurting others.* While you are engaged in empathic listening, you will not do anything that is punishing, painful, or hurtful to the other person.

**Be Nonjudgmental:** Your lack of judgment is paramount in empathic listening. This builds trust and

creates a safe environment for whoever is talking.

If you are uncomfortable in a situation, you can gently let the person know.

*This is a situation that I am not entirely comfortable with. Let me find someone who can be more helpful to you.*

## ***Listening Skills***

### **Nonverbal & Minimum Verbal Attending**

- Make good eye contact: Look at the person most of the time.
- Communicate caring: *I am with you. I'm listening. Uh-huh.*
- Body posture: Be comfortable and relaxed. Avoid distracting gestures or fidgeting.
- Facial expressions: Don't be a brick wall. Display empathy and appropriately mirror the person's facial expressions.
- Follow the other person's lead: Don't interrupt or change the subject. Listen carefully.

### **Open Questions**

Open questions are an open invitation to talk.

An OPEN QUESTION:

- Cannot be answered with one or two words
- Usually starts with *How...?* or *What...?*
- Encourages the person to talk

A CLOSED QUESTION:

- Can be answered with a *yes* or *no* or with a single word
- Starts with *Is... Do... Have...*, etc.
- Discourages the person from talking and hinders the flow of conversation

**USE OPEN QUESTIONS TO:**

- Begin a conversation

*What would you like to talk about?*

*What's going on with you?*

- Clarify and Elaborate

*What do you mean by upset/ lonely/ scared?*

*How so?*

*What is it about the situation that bothers you?*

*What is that like for you?*

*Upset/ lonely/ scared... [use the talker's words], how?*

### **WHAT TO AVOID**

- *Why?* Questions: They can be invalidating or seem judgmental.
- Giving advice in a question (e.g. *Have you tried talking to him?*)
- Asking questions out of curiosity; try and stick with what's important to the talker.

### **EXAMPLES OF OPEN QUESTIONS**

*What does it feel like?*

*Please tell me more about...?*

*Where would you like to begin?*

*What could you have done then?*

*Can you tell me what that means to you?*

*What do you imagine?*

*How did it happen that you were there at that time?*

*What would you like to have happen?*

*How do you see things changing?*

*What is most important for you?*

*What would you like to talk about?*

*What would you like to do about...?*

*If you could have things just the way you wanted, what would they be like?*

*What is that like?*

*How is that for you?*

*What have you thought of?*

*What would it be like?*

*How would you like things to be?*

## Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a way to let the person know that you understand, to check in and actually make sure that you do understand what's been said. It also gives him a chance to change his mind or reexamine something he's already mentioned. Sometimes even hearing his own words back helps him to clarify for himself where he's at. A paraphrase should also convey empathy and demonstrate your listening and understanding. In effect, a good paraphrase says, *I am with you.*

A good paraphrase reflects the essence of what the person has said. Ideally, it should:

- **Convey the same meaning**, using similar or slightly different words.
- **Be brief.** Your paraphrase should be shorter than what the person said.
- **Be clear and concise.** Your paraphrase should help clarify things, not confuse them.
- **Be tentative.** You want the other person to feel comfortable about disagreeing with or correcting your paraphrase if it is inaccurate.

*It sounds like you're upset at your roommate because she took your favorite sweater.*

*What I think I'm hearing you say is that it was upsetting when your roommate took your sweater.*

## **EXAMPLES OF PARAPHRASE LEAD-INS**

*It sounds like you...*

*Is what you're saying that...?*

*From where I stand you seem...*

*This is what I think I hear you saying...*

*I'm not sure if I'm with you; do you mean...?*

*What I think I'm hearing you say is...*

*...is that what you mean?*

*...is that the way you feel?*

*I'm not sure if I am with you, but...*

*Let me see if I understand; you...?*

*Please tell me more about...*

*As I hear you...*

*...is that the way it is?*

## Feelings

You can help the person sort out what she's feeling here and now. You can help her to identify, define, and clarify what she's feeling.

**IDENTIFY:** Just ask!

*How do you feel about that?*

*What kind of feelings does this bring up for you?*

*What emotions do you feel in relation to...?*

*How does that make you feel?*

*What it is like when you remember...?*

Try to help the counselee stick to the here and now. Talking about feelings in the past tends to turn into storytelling. Even when the situation deals with a past event, the counselee has here-and-now feelings about what happened. It is essential that you get feelings for answers rather than thoughts. Statements that begin with I feel... usually express feelings. If the counselee gives you a non-feeling answer, paraphrase it and then ask the feeling question again. These techniques are illustrated in the following example:

*Counselor: How do you feel about that?*

*Counselee: Well, I feel like I should be angry with her.*

*Counselor: So you think you should be angry with her, but how do you actually feel?  
What emotions are you experiencing?*

*Counselee: I'm pissed-off at her and frustrated that I haven't told her.*

**DEFINE & CLARIFY:** You should never assume that you know what someone means when they say a feeling word. You can ask, so both you and the talker can better understand what she is really feeling.

*What do you mean when you say you feel depressed?*

*What is it like when you feel anxious?*

*What does frustrated mean to you?*

*In what way are you upset with her?*

As you define and clarify feelings, it is likely that other feelings will come up. These can then be defined and explored as well. Define and clarify what their feelings, words, or expressions actually mean in their world.

*Counselee: I feel depressed*

*Counselor: How do you experience that depression?*

*Counselee: It's like a numbness, a not wanting to do anything.*

*Counselor: What is it like feeling numb?*

*Counselee: I feel like there are all these feelings inside me and yet I can't really feel them.*

*Counselor: (stays silent)*

*Counselee: You know, it just feels so numb.*

*Counselor: Could you describe the numbness?*

*Counselee: It feels like there's a void within me. It's empty... no, it's not, it's full of feelings... but they're dangerous...they need to be kept under control.*

*Counselor: What are those dangerous feelings?*

**PARAPHRASE FEELINGS:** When someone expresses feelings, it's a good idea to paraphrase them. This tends to clarify what was expressed.

*Counselee: I get so frustrated when my sister comes to visit for the holidays and all she does is complain.*

*Counselor: So you're feeling frustrated, is that right?*

## Options

Only explore options if the talker expresses an interest in exploring them. Often people just want to talk and may not be ready to figure out what to do.

*What are your options?*

*What do you see yourself doing?*

*What would be the best/worst thing you could do/ that could happen?*

*What have you thought about/tried?*

*What would you like to do?*

**EXPLORE:** While in most cases, a resolution will not be reached, if needed we can help the person explore

each option. This allows him to really think about how each possible choice would affect them, their situation, and their feelings. Talk about the pros and cons of each option, even if someone reaches a decision. That decision will be more likely to be the best one if all the available options have been examined. Be sure to give all options equal opportunity for exploration—don't focus on the one you think is best. Let the talker lead.

*What would happen if you did that?*  
*What do you think would be the best option for you?*

*What is most likely to happen?*  
*What could happen if you do that?*

**EVALUATE:** The last step is to evaluate the options. This involves sorting through the options and determining the feasibility and possible success of each one. In most situations a decision will not necessarily be reached. However, this step is used to clarify and determine the most likely paths to follow or scenarios to occur.

*What would happen if you did that?*  
*What do you think would be the best option for you?*

*What is most likely to happen?*

## Summary

At the end of a conversation, or when you need to end it, you can use a summary to capture the essence of what the person said, to tie together content and feeling, to put things in perspective, and to identify important trends, conflicts, or possible decisions. Even so, it is a good idea to keep the summary brief. A summary is another way of letting the person know you were/are listening, and letting them get a sense of what they said. Use paraphrases of thoughts and feelings the person mentioned to accomplish this.

A summary is not a sequential recounting of what has been talked about. A good summary takes what has been said and puts it in a logical, usable form. It mentions both the thoughts and the feelings and ties them together. A summary helps people see where they've gone and where they're going.

## Silence

In listening, silence can be one of the most helpful best tools we have. Silence leaves room for people to process and think, and even encourages her words. The person talking has a lot going on in their mind at once. Silence allows time for her to sort through what's there and choose what she wants to talk about. Try leaving silent spaces, and see what happens.