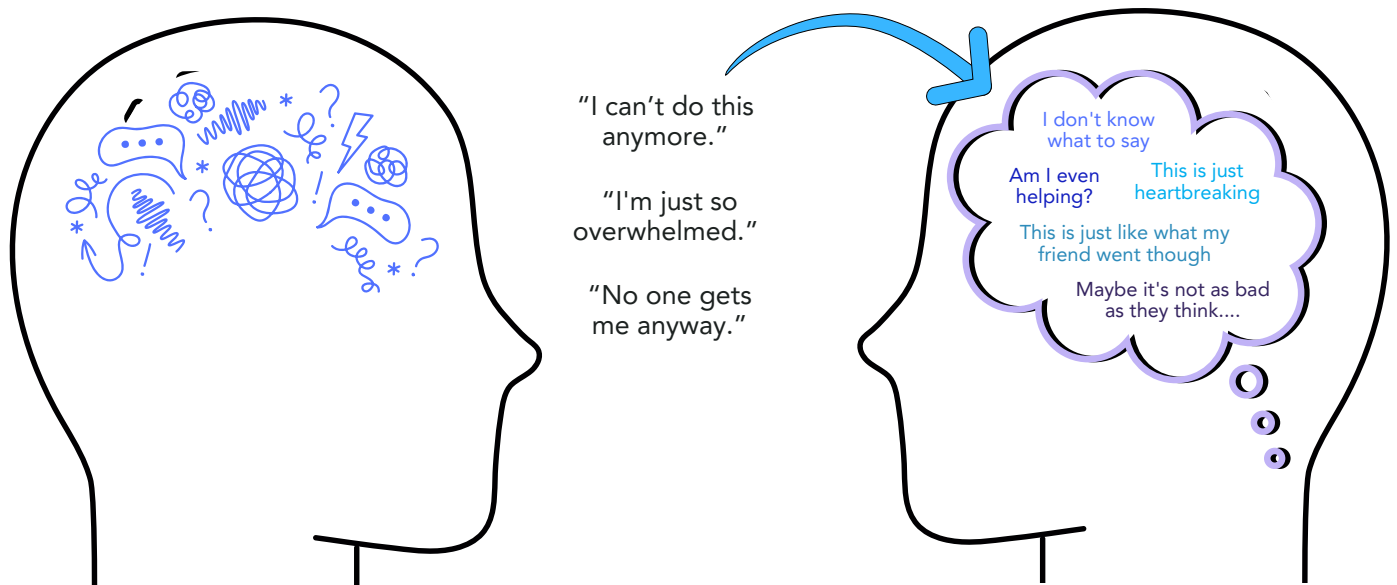




# Obstacles to Effective Communication

Communication is the cornerstone of human connection. Yet, many factors can hinder our ability to effectively communicate and, more importantly, truly listen. At Samaritans, we emphasize the importance of acknowledging what the person is thinking and feeling—whether we fully understand it or not. It's about focusing on the individual, not their crisis, illness, or problem.

One of the most important aspects of communication is centering the conversation on the person you are speaking with, rather than allowing personal judgments, biases, or discomfort to steer the direction of the conversation. By being mindful of how we engage and how we shape conversations, we ensure that we're truly supporting the other person in a meaningful way.



**The definition of sensitivity is the ability to receive signals.**

# Obstacles to Effective Communication

- **"Blue Skying":** Overly focusing on positive outcomes without acknowledging present difficulties, which can seem dismissive of real concerns.
- **Steering Away:** Shifting the conversation away from sensitive topics to lighter ones, often to avoid personal discomfort and sidestep difficult topics or issues.
- **Generalizing:** Taking one behavior, situation, or problem and applying to explain everything the person is saying, feeling and going through.
- **Minimizing:** Downplaying or dismissing another person's feelings, experiences, or concerns, leaving them feeling undervalued or misunderstood.
- **Relativizing:** Diminishing the importance of someone's experience by comparing it to another's, often implying that it could be worse.
- **Making Assumptions:** Be mindful of your frame of reference and remember *perception is everything*. It's not about what something means to you, but to the person you're trying to support.
- **Talking Too Much:** Dominating the conversation, quickly filling silences and not giving the other person the space to speak.
- **Anticipating:** When we complete someone's statements before they finish them or fill-in what they are saying, we not only stop listening, but we also interfere with their thought process and their ability to express themselves.
- **Trapping:** Setting up questions and scenarios that lead someone toward an outcome you deem best. While our intentions may be good, like suggesting professional support. This approach can feel manipulative, pressuring the individual and undermining their autonomy, which may decrease their willingness to engage.
- **"I know how you feel":** When we tell someone we know how they feel, we deny them the individuality and truth of their own experience.
- **Mind Reading:** Assuming you know what the other person is thinking or feeling without them expressing it. This reduces a person's thoughts to your frame of reference.
- **Yeah-But-ing:** Implying agreement ("yeah"), only to reverse course and undermine what the other person has just said. This often serves to invalidate the person leaving them feeling dismissed rather than understood. Instead, try **"Yes, And"-ing**, where you acknowledge the other person's point and build upon it, thereby holding space for their experience and contributing positively to the conversation.