

5-Steps to Better Active Listening

How-To Guide





Active Listening

Active listening is the process of using all your senses to engage in mindful communication with another person, whether it's a work colleague, a partner, a friend or your teenager. The purpose is to comprehend the meaning of words spoken by another.

When we listen actively:

We don't allow our own personal filters, assumptions, judgments or beliefs to distort our interpretation;

We gain information and perspective that encourages respect and understanding;

The person speaking is more likely to open up, to think clearly and to work through challenges productively.

This 5-step how to list will help you become more skilled at active listening.

1

Pay Attention

- ✓ If you're distracted by your own thoughts (e.g., "I'm too busy for this"), other factors in the external environment (e.g., cell phone, other people) or your own physical state (e.g., hunger, fatigue), change something or ask the person to delay the conversation until you can be more present
- ✓ Notice the other person's body language, this may tell you even more than what the person is expressing verbally
- ✓ Put your electronics in a place where they won't distract you (turn off your computer screen, turn your phone to DND, etc.)





2

Show that you are listening

- ✓ Look at the speaker directly – make eye contact (unless, of course, it's a culture where this is not appropriate)
- ✓ Use body language, facial expression and other cues (e.g., small verbal responses such as “yes”, “mm-hmm”, “I see”)
- ✓ See if you can tell what the other person is feeling, and if you can access that feeling in yourself – this is the precursor to true empathy
- ✓ Focus on what's being said, even if it triggers an emotional response for you (e.g., frustration, boredom, anger, etc.). And, if you find you can't, go back to #1!

3

Check for understanding

- ✓ Ask questions – “What do you mean when you say...?”
- ✓ Paraphrase meaning– “What I’m hearing is... is that accurate?”
- ✓ Reflect feelings – “It seems like you are confused about what to do next - is that accurate?” This establishes emotional rapport and helps the speaker feel heard at a deeper level.





4

Resist judging or interrupting

- ✓ Pay attention to your own emotions and reactions to what is being said – resist jumping to conclusions. If you find yourself doing so, go back to #3!
- ✓ Allow the speaker to finish before asking questions or introducing counter arguments.
- ✓ Know yourself! If you are a quick thinker and talker, know that you may need to slow down. And if you tend to be more methodical pay attention to cues that the other person is becoming impatient.

5

Respond appropriately

- ✓ Assert your opinions respectfully, e.g., “I really appreciate you telling me this. I have a different point of view and I’m wondering if we can explore this more together so we can get to an agreement on how to move forward.”
- ✓ Ask for permission before offering solutions, e.g., “How can I help?”; “Would you like some suggestions?”; “What do you think you’ll do next?”
- ✓ Always end the conversation by acknowledging the other person – it reinforces good communication going forward. E.g, “I really appreciate you talking through this with me....”

