

Tips On Becoming an Active Listener

It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break, and if your listening skills are as bad as many people's, then you'll need to do a lot of work to break these bad habits. There are 5 key elements of active listening. They help ensure that you hear the other person, & that the other person knows you are listening to what they say.

1. Pay attention

- Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message.
- Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly. "Listen" to the speaker's body language.
- Look at the speaker directly, in the eye, if culturally appropriate.
- Put aside distracting thoughts. Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors.
- Refrain from side conversations when listening in a group setting.

2. Show that you are listening

- Use your body language and gestures to convey your attention.
- Nod occasionally, smile, and use other facial expressions.
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like "Yes" and "Aha".

3. Provide feedback

- Our filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect on what is being said and ask questions.
- Reflect on what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is" and "Sounds like you are saying" are great ways to reflect back to the speaker.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say", "Is this what you mean?" Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.

4. Defer judgment

- Don't Interrupt. It frustrates the speaker & limits full understanding of the message.
- Allow the speaker to finish. Don't interrupt with counter-arguments.

5. Respond Appropriately

- Active listening is a model for respect & understanding. You are gaining information & perspective.
- You add nothing by attacking the speaker or putting him/her down.
- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Be curious and interested in what the speaker has to say.
- Assert your opinions respectfully & treat the other person as you would want to be treated.

Reference: MindTools.com



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