

Listen

When I ask you to listen to me

and you start giving advice, you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me

And you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problems,

You have failed me, strange as that may seem.

Listen! All I asked was that you listen. Not talk or do – just hear me.

And I can DO for myself; I'm not helpless. Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.

When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself,

You contribute to my fear and inadequacy.

But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational,

Then I can quit trying to convince you and can get about the business of understanding

what's behind this irrational feeling. And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.

So, please listen and just hear me, and if you want to talk, wait a minute

For your turn, and I'll listen to you.

Anonymous

Active Listening

When you are with a friend and are focussed on just listening, letting them know you whether you are following or not, you will find a surprising fact. They can tell you a lot more and also find more inside themselves, more than can ever happen in ordinary conversation.

If you only use brief expressions such as, "Yes" and, "I see" or, "I can see how you feel" or, "I lost you, can you say that again please?" you will find the conversation will deepen.

In ordinary social conversation, we nearly always stop each other from getting very far inside. Our advice, reactions, encouragements, reassurance, and well-intentioned comments actually prevent people from feeling understood. We often model our listening style on our parents, or other significant people in our lives.

- Active listening is being an echo. (Echoes help us hear ourselves)
 - If you want to be an echo, there needs to be a clear boundary/space between you.

- Active listening is being a mirror. (Mirrors help us see ourselves)
 - If you want to be a mirror, sometimes you will need to clear away stuff inside you that gets in the road. (Our history, biases, emotions)

- Active listening involves empathy, not sympathy. (Empathy means walking in another person's shoes but not washing their dirty socks.)
 - Empathy is being able to hear and understand: it requires a boundary of the level of involvement.

When to use Active Listening

Use active listening when you are willing to be present for the other person. It is a tool for opening yourself up to what someone is saying, even if (in your opinion) it is boring, biased, confronting, unpleasant or illogical. Active listening is a way of *being*, a gift of your full attention and – when at its best – your open heart. Active listening is a tool used when you don't have anything at stake yourself, except to help.

Sometimes it is focussed in the following ways:

1) Gaining information/ getting a clear picture

Ask questions to find out about the needs, instructions, context. Check back to be sure you have heard and understood the relevant details. Make sure you both have the same framework/ agree on the facts.

Aim of the speaker: to tell what they want/need

Aim of the listener: to find out and confirm what they are saying

2) Affirming / acknowledging / exploring / deepening understanding

Tune in to what the person is trying to convey, careful to use silence when appropriate, listening for the core message. Reflect back what you have heard, being

willing to back-track, try again, or just gently move back to respectful silence until the meaning becomes clearer.

Aim of the speaker: to convey feelings, ideas; to explore problems or questions

Aim of the listener: to help them hear what they are saying

3) Responding to a complaint or attack on you/ your beliefs

When someone is telling you that they are unhappy with you, criticising you, complaining about you or getting it off their chest, the best thing you can do is active listen. It is important to keep breathing, to be consciously making the choice not to react and to attend to the other person's upset.

Aim of the speaker: tell you that you are the problem

Aim of the listener: let them know that you've taken in what they are saying so they feel heard. This will help defuse the strong emotion. (You may need to debrief later with a friend to deal with your own feelings)

Active Listening Skills

Attending Skills:

Non-verbal

- Relaxed body posture
- Open body posture
- Slight forward lean
- Eye contact
- Responsive facial expressions
- Nods
- Reflective Listening (Empathy)

Verbal

- Permission to talk
- Verbal encouragers : Uh-huh, mmmm, oh, yes, sure, I see...

Reflective Listening: Empathy

Checking Content: It is often helpful to tentatively relate back to them regularly (maybe every 5 to 10 sentences) what you have heard by saying a sentence or two in

summary. Check if you have got it right. Let them correct it, add to it, try again. Often your reflections will be almost questions about what they have said.

The purpose is for **them** to hear **themselves**.

Checking Feelings: The stronger/ more significant the feeling, the more cautious you need to be in your reflections. You are in heart territory, so walk with soft footsteps, shoes off, for you are on sacred ground! The same principles as for content.

Summarising: Reflecting back the main points/ideas/concerns.

Active Listening

How do you know if you are listening well?

- *When people go further into their problems.* The person may say, "No, it's not like that, it's more like...um...." Then they feel further into it to see how it actually feels.
- *When the person sits silently, satisfied that you have got it so far.*
- *The person may express a release in their body, a relaxing "Yes, that's what it is" embodied response.* It could be a deep breath, a shift in the body. Be silent at these times. Still.

How do you know when you've missed the mark?

- *If the person keeps repeating the same thing (unless they are delirious!) it means the person does not feel you have got it yet.* Try again, adding, "But that's not quite it, not quite what you are saying?"
- *As you respond they will give you body clues:* tightened face, tense, confused. They may hold their breath.
- *If the person changes the subject to something less personal,* it means they have given up on getting the more personal thing across to you. You can go with them and allow it to come up later, or you can indicate that you are willing to try to understand again.

You will get what they are saying sooner or later. It's OK. People know when you are really trying to tune in, and when you respectfully back away.

There is a presence, a way of being centred which is easier to recognise after a while. It flows.