

ACTIVE LISTENING

1. What is active listening?

The practice of fully focusing, understanding, and responding thoughtfully when someone is speaking. Active listening strengthens trust, feelings of safety and builds deeper connections.

10 Key Active Listening Skills

1. Be fully present – no phones, computers, or distractions.
2. Maintain gentle eye contact.
3. Face the person – lean in slightly and use open body language.
4. Offer minimal encouragers – like “mm-hmm,” “I see,” or nod your head.
5. Speak in a kind and respectful tone of voice.
6. Allow pauses which can deepen reflection.
7. Pay attention to the speaker’s tone, pace, and body language. Sometimes what isn’t said speaks volumes.
8. Ask open-ended questions. Invite deeper sharing with questions like “what was that experience like for you?” or “what are your thoughts and feelings about this situation?”
9. Use empathy – Empathy is the ability to imagine and understand another person’s thoughts, feelings and experiences from their point of view. For example, “I imagine you must feel pretty disappointed and sad.”

10. Reflect and paraphrase what you hear. For example, “What I hear you saying is ...”

COMMON PITFALLS

1. Interrupting or finishing the speaker’s sentences.
2. Thinking about your response while the speaker is talking.
3. Getting distracted by phones, computers, or multitasking.
4. Judging or criticizing instead of listening.
5. Invalidating or minimizing the speaker’s feelings. For example, “You shouldn’t feel that way or it wasn’t that bad.” Or saying to someone in tears, “now stop crying; you’re being too sensitive.”
6. Relating everything back to yourself. For example, a friend says, “I’ve been feeling so stressed out at work lately.” You respond, “you think that’s bad, my job is way more stressful.”
7. Problem solving too quickly. For example, jumping in and offering unsolicited advice. Ask the speaker what ideas he/she has to solve the problem. Or ask, “Would you like my help with this?”
8. Talking too much or monopolizing the conversation.