

Active Listening

What is active listening

- It is a communication skill that involves going beyond simply hearing the words that another person speaks but also seeking to understand the meaning and intent behind them. It requires being an active participant in the communication process.' ([Verywellmind](#))
- It includes:
 - the non-verbal and verbal messages that a listener sends back to a speaker to show them that they are listening
 - the ability to reflect back to the speaker what has been received – not just the words but an understanding of what has been said

Why is active listening important?

- It is vital for effective communication
- It forces us to slow down communication (providing time to calm if needed)
- It helps prevent miscommunication and misunderstandings
- It can reduce stress and frustration
- It can take the 'heat' out of situations that has, or could, escalate into conflict
- It helps the person speaking feel seen, heard, valued, and validated
- It fosters collaboration
- It breaks down defensiveness and encourages connection

Fundamental elements of active listening

- Giving your full attention and being fully present in the conversation
- Being patient
- Withholding judgment and advice
- **Active listening skills will be ineffective if these fundamental elements are not obvious to the speaker**

Listening (verbal and non-verbal)

- **Listen** to what is said **AND** also **look** out for their non-verbal cues: their facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures can tell you more about how they are feeling than the words they use:
 - are they smiling, are their arms crossed defensively, or are they rubbing their eyes as if they're tired or upset, or are their feet pointed towards the door
 - is their voice subdued or upbeat, high pitched or flat, quick or slow?
 - **Body language doesn't lie so pay attention to what they are saying with their non-verbal cues**

Non-verbal and verbal strategies for responding

What to do?

- Use eye contact and body language to connect:
 - Eye contact is important in conveying your interest but it should be used wisely:

Information Note

- Too much eye contact can be intimidating so remember to blink and break eye contact
- When looking away, look to the side or up, looking down can look like disinterest
- Keep your body language open
 - Avoid crossed arms or legs, this can come across as being 'closed' or defensive
 - Leaning forward, tilting your head, or resting your head on your hand can all convey you are interested
- Show that you're listening
 - Nod your head, smile and make small noises like "yes" and "uh huh"

What not to do?

- Don't interrupt
 - Letting them speak will make it easier for you to understand their message
 - Interruptions can cause them to stop speaking or sidetrack the conversation
- Don't react physically or emotionally, or jump to conclusions
 - Try not to react to what's being said (they'll be attuned to your body language)
 - Don't assume that you know what's going to be said next
- Don't start planning what you are going to say next
- Don't look at your watch or fidget

Verbal strategies to try:

- Ask questions – open and closed to find out what's happened and explore what they were thinking and feeling
- Focus on emotions – explore and name (they may need help with this)
- Reflect back – to show you are listening and understand what they have said
- Encourage – them to keep talking using non-verbal and verbal prompts such as nodding, leaning forward, and expressions like uh huh, tell me more....
- Summarise – what's happened, how they felt and connect the two - express in your own words
- Clarify – to check understanding, help them explore other points of view, perhaps check for misconceptions

Practice, practice, practice!

Additional helpful resources and information

Related Modules: Attunement, Window of Tolerance, Relationships Matter, Relational Approaches, The Brain and Emotional Regulation, RRRR, Self-Regulation, and Co-Regulation & De-escalation

Active Listening: Techniques, Benefits, Examples <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-active-listening-3024343>