

Active Listening... Some Helpful Hints

Things to Try

Put the focus of attention totally on the speaker.

Repeat conversationally and tentatively, in your words, your understanding of the speaker's meaning.

Feed back feelings, as well as content. (Probe, if appropriate e.g. *"How do you feel about that?"* or *"How did that affect you?"*)

Reflect back not only to show you understand, but also so the speaker can hear and understand his or her own meaning.

Try again if your active listening statement is not well received.

Be as accurate in the summary of the meaning as you can.

Challenge powerlessness and hopelessness subtly (e.g. try *"It is hopeless"* instead of *"It seems hopeless to you right now."* Try *"You can't find anything that could fix it?"* instead of *"There's nothing I can do"*).

Allow silences in the conversation.

Notice body shifts and respond to them by waiting. Then, e.g. *"How does it all seem to you now?"*

Things to Avoid

Avoid talking about yourself.

Reject introducing your own reactions or well intentioned comments.

Try not to ignore feelings in the situation.

Avoid advising, diagnosing, baiting, reassuring, encouraging or criticising.

Dispense with thinking about what you will say next.

Avoid parroting the speaker's words or only saying *"mm"* or *"ah, hah"*.

Don't pretend that you have understood if you haven't.

Avoid letting the speaker drift to less significant topics because you haven't shown you've understood.

Avoid fixing, changing, or improving what the speaker has said.

Don't change topics.

Resist filling in every space with your talk.

Don't neglect the non-verbal content of the conversation.



Active Listening for Different Purposes

SKILLS PURPOSES	Non-verbal Skills	Following Skills	Reflecting Skills
<p>To Gain Information</p> <p>to find out the details of what another is saying.</p> <p>to clarify instructions and to gain information.</p>	<p>Use appropriate body language – nodding, noting, recording, watching.</p> <p>Focus your concentration, block out distractions.</p>	<p>Ask many questions.</p> <p>Write notes.</p> <p>Use memory joggers.</p>	<p>Confirm your understanding by repeating key points.</p>
<p>To Give Affirmation</p> <p>to show empathy and give acknowledgement.</p> <p>to help the speaker hear and understand his or her own meaning.</p>	<p>Choose a non-distracting and comfortable environment. Is privacy needed?</p> <p>Remove inappropriate physical barriers e.g. large desk</p> <p>Consider moving closer to the speaker.</p> <p>Adopt an open, encouraging posture with welcoming gestures, and appropriate eye contact to show attention and involvement.</p>	<p>Use minimal verbal encouragers – such as "mm" and "ah hah".</p> <p>Ask only occasional questions.</p> <p>Allow attentive silences.</p>	<p>Reflect back both feelings and content.</p> <p>Use your own words to feed back your understanding of the speaker's meaning.</p> <p>Summarise the major concerns.</p> <p>Use a tone of voice that shows warmth and interest.</p>
<p>To Respond To Inflammation</p> <p>to let the speaker know you've heard the complaint, the anger and/or the accusation.</p> <p>to defuse the strong emotions.</p>	<p>Avoid defensive or aggressive posture and gestures.</p> <p>Consider extra distance to make you feel safe.</p> <p>Use attentive eye contact and an assertive stance.</p>	<p>Use obvious verbal indicators that you've understood – a clear "yes", a strong "OK".</p> <p>Ask questions to understand the basis of the attack.</p>	<p>As for listening to affirm (above).</p> <p>In reflecting back, try to put some heat in your voice (not a flat tone), gradually reducing it as the speaker "cools" down.</p>

