

Let's Talk About... REALLY LISTENING

Before interacting with others, prepare to be a good listener.

- **Attitude of respect and acceptance** –Listening is never effective if you are judging or finding fault in the speaker. Respect their viewpoint and listen openly.
- **Availability as a listener** –Our busy lifestyles and many distractions may make unavailable as a listener. Make sure to put other issues aside, so the speaker does not feel neglected.
- **Understanding listening blocks**–All of us use listening blocks at sometime. This can include things like rehearsing what we are going to say next in our mind, trying to read the mind of the speaker, jumping into problem solving too quickly, or interrogating the speaker. If we know what blocks us from communicating effectively, we can have more conscious control over how and when these blocks are used in future interactions.

Use **nonverbal cues** to show that you are interested and paying attention.

- **Facial expression**—friendly and relaxed. Adjust facial expression to match what the speaker is saying.
- **Gestures** –a simple head nod can indicate attention and interest. Small head nods show continued interest, and large head nods demonstrate agreement.
- **Posture** –Maintain an open position (arms and legs uncrossed), lean slightly forward to communicate attention and face the other person squarely.
- **Proximity** –Don't be positioned too close or too far away from the speaker. How close you are depends on the relationship with the person and may vary for different cultures.
- **Gaze and eye contact** –Maintaining eye contact with the speaker demonstrates interest and allows the listener to collect facial information. The meaning of eye contact may also vary depending on culture.
- **Avoid distractions** –Actively move away from distractions so that the other person has your full attention.

Encourage the speaker to continue and to assume control over the direction of the interaction using maintenance skills that foster effective listening are door openers and minimal encouragers.

- A **Door opener** non-coercive invitation to talk. This may be something like “you look as though something is troubling you” or “I've got time to talk if you need to talk”, or maintaining silence to give the person time to collect their thoughts. For close relationships where frequent disclosure has occurred in the past, door openers may be more concise like “what's up?”
- **Minimal encouragers** allow the listener to stay active in the process while still giving the speaker the freedom to direct and control the interaction. They should primarily show the speaker that he or she is being heard and that the listener is willing to continue attending. Most common are things like “mm-hmmm”, “Right”, “And?” or “Go on”.

Reflect what the speaker is saying to show the speaker that you understand what they are saying.

- **Paraphrasing** involves the listener making a clear and concise summary in your own words about what the speaker has just said. If you have paraphrased effectively the speaker will usually say something like “yes, that's right”. If you haven't, it gives the speaker an opportunity to correct you. This allows conversations to flow better and achieve complete understanding of the other person's point of view.
- **Empathy** is our ability to ‘put ourselves in their shoes”. This involves responding to the speaker's emotions, not just their words. When focused on feelings think about the strength of the feeling, and the existence of mixed feelings. Your ability to use empathy relies heavily on your ability to reflect feelings accurately. There are five features of effective reflecting:
 - *Focus on the main feeling*
 - *Use simple concise words and phrases*
 - *Reflect the feelings in your own voice and body messages*
 - *Reflect upon on the feelings if appropriate*
 - *Check for understanding*

Asking Questions

- *Open questions* allow a person to speak in more detail about a particular problem. They are helpful in the beginning of conversations because they give an opportunity to share thoughts and feelings about an issue.
- *Closed questions* usually restrict answers to a simple yes or no. They are more commonly used at the end of a conversation.

Remember, keep your eyes focused on the person you are listening to. If you're having trouble focusing, be honest and let the speaker know. Suggest you both move to a less distracting place to speak. Better still, don't start the conversation until you know that you'll be able to give the speaker the attention they deserve.

At the end of the conversation, before you walk away or move on to what you have to do next:

- ✓ Check in with the speaker.
- ✓ Take a minute to summarize what you've been told and ask the speaker to confirm that this is what they have been trying to communicate.
- ✓ If in the course of the conversation either of you have agreed to do anything, make sure you both agree what that is, who is to do it, and when it will be done.

- ✓ If the conversation needs to be continued set a definite time and place for that to happen. Put a reminder on to your smart phone.

- ✓ Finally, let the speaker know how much you value what they have been telling you, even if it was hard to hear or painful. A hug, a reminder of how much you love or care about them no matter what never hurts.

- ✓ Remember, like anything else you learn, using active listening skill require practice and intention. Don't try to do it all at once. Pick out one skill to practice in the course of the day in all of your conversations. Over time and with practice the pieces will fall into place.

Material from this Pocket Reference came from <https://www.archguelph.ca/effective-communication>

[Nine Nonobvious Ways to Have Deeper Conversations](#)

[To Process Grief Over Covid-19 Children Need Empathetic Listening](#)

[Grieving the Losses of Coronavirus](#)

[A List of 9 Books to Help Teach and Reinforce Active Listening](#) (for younger children)

[How to Use Active Listening with your Kids](#)

[Listening is a Skill](#)

[Ten Steps to Help with Active Listening](#)

['When I Was Your Age' And Other Pitfalls Of Talking To Teens About Stress](#)

Find additional parenting resources at <http://www.supportingparentsessexnj.org/>.