

Introduction to Active Listening

Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding.

- Often when people talk to each other, they don't listen attentively.
- They are often distracted, half listening, half thinking about something else.
- When people are engaged in a conflict, they are often busy formulating a response to what is being said.
- They assume that they have heard what their opponent is saying many times before, so rather than paying attention, they focus on how they can respond to win the argument.
- Active listening is a structured form of listening and responding that focuses the attention on the speaker. The listener must take care to attend to the speaker fully, and then repeats, in the listener's own words, what he or she thinks the speaker has said.
- The listener does not have to agree with the speaker--he or she must simply state what they think the speaker said. This enables the speaker to find out whether the listener really understood. If the listener did not, the speaker can explain some more.
- Often, the listener is encouraged to interpret the speaker's words in terms of feelings.
- Instead of just repeating what happened, the active listener might add "I gather that you felt angry or frustrated or confused when". . .[a particular event happened].
- Then the speaker can go beyond confirming that the listener understood what happened, but can indicate that he or she also understood the speaker's psychological response to it.

Benefits:

- Active listening has several benefits:
 1. First, it forces people to listen attentively to others.
 2. Second, it avoids misunderstandings, as people have to confirm that they do really understand what another person has said.
 3. Third, it tends to open people up, to get them to say more. When people are in conflict, they often contradict each other, denying the opponent's description of a situation. This tends to make people defensive, and they will either lash out, or withdraw and say nothing more. However, if they feel that their opponent is really attuned to their concerns and wants to listen, they are likely to explain in detail what they feel and why. **If both parties to a conflict do this, the chances of being able to develop a solution to their mutual problem become much greater.**

Active Listening Skill Sheet

Active Listening:

Support the speaker to feel heard...understood...valued. "Give them back to themselves" by reflecting back what you hear.

Guidelines

1. Be present

- Centered (breath)
- Focused
- Emotionally available
- Eye contact

2. Reflect back without judgment

- "What I hear you saying is..."
- "So you were..."

3. Confirm understanding

- "Is that correct?"

4. Ask deepening questions

- Support them to go further into their "content," thoughts, feelings or assumptions