

Active Listening

Communication involves the art of speaking and listening. Active listening is an invaluable skill in relationships. It helps us clarify what is being felt as it is said. It builds a bridge between you and a speaker.

Active listening is:

- listening to the speaker and hearing what he/she is **feeling**, not just what he/she is saying
- showing support and empathy
- reflecting upon what is being said
- asking open ended questions
- repeating back what was said
- demonstrating by your body language, attentiveness, and tone of voice that you are hearing and paying complete attention

Active listening is NOT:

- offering suggestions or advice
- comparing or sharing your similar experiences
- trying to make the person feel better by saying it's not that bad and that this too will pass
- telling the person he/she should not feel this way or that it could be worse
- making light by joking
- getting frustrated with the person's feelings or judging

Active listening looks like this:

Speaker: Today was horrible from the time I woke up in the morning until right now!

Listener: It sounds as if you had a very frustrating day. What happened?

Speaker: It began with my car that I just paid a fortune to get fixed not starting.

Listener: Wow, you took the time off to get it fixed, paid for it, and it wasn't running again today, that is irritating!

Speaker: Exactly. Then I realized when I got dropped at work by the repair shop I forgot something in the car I needed for a meeting today.

Listener: So, things went from bad to worse!

Speaker: Yes, a double whammy. Then I realized I left my lunch at home.

Listener: So, you kept coming up with goose eggs every time that you needed something - the car, your things for the meeting, and finally your lunch? No wonder it was a bad day.

Speaker: You got it! I began to wonder if the building was going to collapse before the day ended.

Listener: No kidding, I can understand why you kept peeking around every corner. I hope tomorrow is better!

Active listening does NOT look like this:

Speaker: Today was horrible from the time I woke up in the morning till right now!

Listener: Come on now, how bad could it have been?

Speaker: It began with my car that I just paid a fortune to get fixed not starting.

Listener: I've had that happen to me; you just have to go with the flow. Do you have Triple A? I use them all the time. Want their number?

Speaker: Then I realized when I got dropped at work by the repair shop. I forgot something in the car I needed for a meeting today.

Listener: So, you just tell your boss what happened, everybody can relate to things like that, and if they don't like it, tell them to reschedule the meeting.

Speaker: Then I realized I left my lunch at home.

Listener: I know three great places near your office that deliver. What a great opportunity to get a gourmet lunch!

Speaker: I didn't want to order in, I wanted what I had made for lunch. Are you even listening to me?

Listener: Sure I am. I just thinking you're making too big a deal out of your day. I mean, I've had days that would make your day look like a day on the beach - chill out! Let me take you out to dinner and we'll talk about fun things and you'll be over this in a flash.

Speaker: Go out to dinner by yourself; I don't want to be around you.

Listener: What did I do? I was just trying to be supportive.

Benefits of active listening

- Show empathy to the speaker
- Clarify what the speaker is thinking and feeling
- Avoid jumping to conclusions and getting mad, hurt, or frustrated
- Defuse the anger and frustration the speaker is feeling
- Deepen communication
- Build bridges in relationships
- Help build problem-solving skills
- Help develop the very important communication skill of listening
- You don't have to fix the problem!