

# Are you an active listener?

## Three main components of successful active listening:

1. Listening for total meaning.

There are two meanings to gather when someone is conveying a message: the *content* and *the feeling or attitude* underlying the message.

2. Respond to feelings.

When a response is appropriate, the listener should respond to the feeling of what was said. This way, the speaker feels understood and empathy is established.

3. Nonverbal cues include the tone of voice, facial or body expressions, and the manner and speed of the speech. All of these taken together provides the listener much deeper meaning than merely the content of what was said.

## What is active listening?

- **Validating** – to acknowledge the worth of the person.  
“I see how important this issue is for you...”
- **Verbalizing emotions** - to show you understand how the other person feels.  
“I can see how upset you are about this...”
- **Balancing** – help the speaker evaluate their own feelings  
“Tell me more about XX that made you frustrated...”
- **Encouraging** – to convey interest and encourage the person to talk.  
“...and what else?” “How can I help?”
- **Clarifying** – to help clarify what was said and to get more information. Also, help the speaker see other points of view.  
“What’s the real challenge here for you?”
- **Restating** – to show that you are listening and understanding.  
“I hear you want the behavior to stop, is this right?”
- **Summarizing** – pull together important ideas and establish a basis for where to go next.  
“This is what I heard you say what is important to you..., and this is what you would like to happen...”

## Examples of how to start questions to ask others:

1. What's going on for you right now?
  - Good for understanding why someone seems to have checked out of the conversation.
  - When you want to understand why the temperature of the conversation is getting hotter.
  - When you think there's something important on someone's mind, but they haven't shared it yet.
2. What will working this out mean for you? How is this situation affecting you?
  - This question helps during moments that aren't taking the conversation productively. It helps to redirect the attention away from the distraction and focus on what's important.
3. What is the problem you're trying to solve here?
  - Helps to ask when someone is stuck on the hamster wheel and reengages in listening to focus on the problem.
4. I know you can't ... but if you could...?

Sometimes we stop listening because we are hopelessly deadlocked. It can help reengage the speaker to and invites them to think beyond the no.

  - "I know you can't agree to that idea, but if you could, what would make it possible?"
  - "I know you can't agree to a solution that increases your expenses right now, but if you could agree, how could that happen?"

UCOP Office of the Ombuds

Adapted from Tammy Lewinski's "Disagree better" and Positive Psychology.com "How to practice Active Listening: 16 Examples and Techniques"