



What is Active listening?

Communication involves both speaking and listening. Active listening is a skill that can be developed with practice. Although it can take time and patience to master. Active Listening means listening with all of your senses and giving your full attention to the speaker.

The key to effective active listening is to withhold your own assumptions, prevent jumping to conclusions and show a genuine interest in the person you are listening to and try to empathise with their position. Active listening takes concentration.

An active listener can show that they are paying full attention in a number of ways.

Non-Verbal Signs of Active Listening

Eye Contact

Good eye contact can show a person that you are listening, but it can be intimidating to some. You want to show people you are paying attention, but you need to be aware of how the person is responding. It may be that you need to adjust and use other methods such as smiling or body language to make them feel more comfortable.

Facial Expressions

You can use smiles to show a listener that you are paying attention and can be used to show you agree or are happy with the message they are giving. You can combine this with nods of the head to confirm you have received and understood what has been said.

Body Language

How you position your body can help to show that you are listening. Ensure your arms are in a neutral position and not crossed and leaning forward slightly can help too.

Mirroring

Reflecting the speaker's facial expressions can be a good sign of attentive listening. Can help you show sympathy or empathy. This should be natural. If it's forced then it can come across as mocking or being inattentive.

Concentration

An active listener doesn't allow themselves to be distracted so that they can pay full attention to the person speaking. This means they won't fidget, check the time, scribble on paper or play with their hair etc. Their attention will be fully focused on the person speaking.

Verbal Signs of Active Listening

Positive affirmation

Attentiveness can be shown by use of positive words of encouragement. 'Yes', 'I agree', 'I understand' etc. These should be done to show encouragement, but try not to do too many or you run the risk of distracting the speaker and overtaking the conversation.

Memory

Showing the person you are speaking to that you can remember key details of what they have discussed is a good way to show your active listening. Taking some brief notes to act as a memory jog can be beneficial, but try to do this after the discussion, wherever possible.

Questioning / Clarification

Asking relevant questions or seeking clarification can show that you are listening and understanding.

Reflecting

Paraphrasing what someone has said is a good way to show you are listening. It helps to reinforce the message and demonstrates your understanding.

Summarising

Repeating a summary of what has been said by the speaker. Towards the end of the conversation is a good way to show that you have understood the main points of what they have said and gives them the chance to correct any elements that are needed.

Respect

Let the speaker finish and allow them to maintain control of the conversation.

Benefits of Active Listening

- ➔ It can be useful in almost all fields. Workplace, Social settings, Counselling, journalism, management, medical, law etc.
- ➔ Makes the person speaking feel like they are being listened to and respected.
- ➔ Builds trust, confidence and stronger relationships
- ➔ Helps people to get to know and understand each other better.
- ➔ Can help people cope in emotional situations.
- ➔ Can help avoid conflict, misunderstandings and feelings of negativity

Ten tips to develop effective active listening skills

Face the person speaking, maintain eye contact

Give attention, be relaxed

Keep an open mind

Listen closely and visualise what they are saying

Avoid interruptions and avoid imposing your own "solutions"

For clarification, wait till the speaker has paused before asking clarifying questions.

Use Questioning to help with understanding

Show empathy, try to feel what the speaker is feeling

Provide feedback regularly to the speaker

Pay attention to what is being said as well as any non-verbal cues (i.e. facial expressions, posture)

Things to avoid

Interrupting

Fail to seek clarification and make assumptions

Talk too much / Take over the conversation

Fidget/ Be distracted / Focus on other things

Further Reading / Resources

<https://www.mindtools.com/media/Images/Infographics/listening-skills-infographic.pdf>

<https://www.coursera.org/lecture/wharton-communication-skills/active-listening-wPEgL>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-active-listening-3024343>