

The Art of Active Listening – Tip Sheet

Active listening is all about building rapport, understanding, and trust. Are you a good listener?

Active Listening Skills

1. **Restating**

To show you are listening, repeat every so often what you think the person said — not by parroting, but by paraphrasing what you heard in your own words. For example, “Let’s see if I’m clear about this. . .”

2. **Summarizing**

Bring together the facts and pieces of the problem to check understanding — for example, “So it sounds to me as if . . .” Or, “Is that it?”

3. **Minimal encouragers**

Use brief, positive prompts to keep the conversation going and show you are listening — for example, “umm-hmmm,” “Oh?” “I understand,” “Then?” “And?”

4. **Reflecting**

Instead of just repeating, reflect the speaker’s words in terms of feelings — for example, “This seems really important to you. . .”

5. **Giving feedback**

Let the person know what your initial thoughts are on the situation. Share pertinent information, observations,

insights, and experiences. Then listen carefully to confirm.

6. **Emotion labeling**

Putting feelings into words will often help a person to see things more objectively. To help the person begin, use “door openers” — for example, “I’m sensing that you’re feeling frustrated. . . worried. . . anxious. . .”

7. **Probing**

Ask questions to draw the person out and get deeper and more meaningful information — for example, “What do you think would happen if you. . .?”

8. **Validation**

Acknowledge the individual’s problems, issues, and feelings. Listen openly and with empathy, and respond in an interested way — for example, “I appreciate your willingness to talk about such a difficult issue. . .”

9. **Effective pause**

Deliberately pause at key points for emphasis. This will tell the person you are saying something that is very important to them.

10. Silence

Allow for comfortable silences to slow down the exchange. Give a person time to think as well as talk. Silence can also be very helpful in diffusing an unproductive interaction.

11. “I” messages

By using “I” in your statements, you focus on the problem not the person. An I-message lets the person know what you feel and why — for example, “I know you have a lot to say, but I need to. . .”

12. Redirecting

If someone is showing signs of being overly aggressive, agitated, or angry, this is the time to shift the discussion to another topic.

13. Consequences

Part of the feedback may involve talking about the possible consequences of inaction. Take your cues from what the person is saying — for example, “What happened the last time you ...?”

Communication Blockers

These roadblocks to communication can stop communication dead in its tracks:

- **“Why” questions.** They tend to make people defensive.
- **Quick reassurance,** saying things like, “Don’t worry about that.”
- **Advising** — “I think the best thing for you is to move to assisted living.”
- **Digging for information** and forcing someone to talk about something they would rather not talk about.
- **Patronizing** — “You poor thing, I know just how you feel.”

- **Preaching** — “You should. . .” Or, “You shouldn’t. . .”
- **Interrupting** — Shows you aren’t interested in what someone is saying.

SOURCE: Excerpted and adapted from Lee Scheingold, “Active Listening,” McKesson Health Solutions LLC, 2003.

Six Simple Communication Courtesies

“Excuse me....”

“Pardon me...”

“One moment please...”

“Let’s talk about solutions.”

“May I suggest something?”

The Art of Questioning

The four main types of questions are:

LEADING For example, “Would you like to talk about it?” “What happened then?” “Could you tell me more?”

OPEN-ENDED Use open-ended questions to expand the discussion — for example, lead with: “How? What? Where? Who? Which?”

CLOSED-ENDED Use closed ended questions to prompt for specifics — for example, lead with: “Is? Are? Do? Did? Can? Could? Would?”

REFLECTIVE Can help people understand more about what they said — for example, someone tells you, “I’m worried I won’t remember. . .” Reflective Q: “It sounds like you would like some help remembering?”