

## **Effective Communication Skills: Active Listening**

*“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”*

Active listening is the ability to capture and understand the messages that others are communicating whether these messages are transmitted verbally or nonverbally, clearly or vaguely. It is not simply the ability to repeat the other person's words. It includes being present physically, psychologically, socially and emotionally. The keys to active listening:

1. **Paying attention.** Force yourself to pay attention, to focus on the speaker and not become distracted. Use nonverbal cues to let them know they're being heard.
2. **Body Language and Non-Verbal.** Direct eye contact, facing the person and adopting an open body position to indicate involvement and availability and leaning slightly toward the person. Others tend to react to our nonverbals before our verbal messages.
3. **Use listening responses.** An occasional “yes” or “uh huh” shows the speaker that you are paying attention and invites the speaker to continue.
4. **Listening for the whole message.** Look for meaning, ideas, feelings and intentions, as well as simply facts. Recognize what is important to the other person.
5. **Observing and reading the other person's nonverbal messages within context.** Notice the feedback they are giving you with their body language, facial expression and eyes.
6. **Hearing before evaluating.** Listening without drawing premature conclusions. Biases and prejudices can get in the way of you really hearing someone.
7. **Paraphrase or restate the words of the other person in your own words.** Speak for yourself only after you have first restated the ideas and feelings of the other person to their satisfaction. Test relevant assumptions.
8. **Ask questions.** If you are not sure you understood everything or if you think you missed an important point, ask the speaker to repeat him or herself. If you don't clear up a misunderstanding, it may return to embarrass you later.
9. **Limit your own talking.** Contrary to popular belief, you cannot talk and listen at the same time.