

LISTENING SKILLS

Communications Domain

Listening is the conscious processing of the auditory stimuli that have been perceived through hearing.¹ For many people, it takes practice to create environments in which you are communicating for understanding, because listening is more than simply hearing the words that are spoken.

Active listening, a term popularized by Carl Rogers and Richard Farson,² requires the listener to fully concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is being said.

Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and without judgement³. According to Rebecca Shafir,⁴ the goal of mindful listening is to silence the internal noise of your own thoughts, so that you can hear the whole message, and so that the speaker feels understood.

Mindful listening means being present in the moment.⁵ The following tips will help you improve your listening skills:

- **Simply listen.** Listen carefully and attentively. Pay complete attention to the other person, and do not let other thoughts, such as what you are going to say next, distract you.
- **Convey interest.** Listening is a form of nonverbal communication.⁶ Use positive body language (make eye contact, use a relaxed posture, nod, and smile) as someone is talking to

you to let them know you are listening.

- **Reduce distractions.** Trying to listen while doing other tasks usually does not allow you to pay attention and clearly hear the message. By becoming aware of distractions, you can refocus and listen actively.
- **Listen for feelings.** As you listen to the content of what is being said, try to determine the feeling the person is conveying. Are they expressing joy, sadness, excitement, or anger—either through their words, body language, or both?
- **Repeat what you heard.** When a person has finished talking, paraphrase what you heard them say. This gives the speaker a chance to clarify meaning. For example, say “What I am hearing from you is...” or “It sounds like [the situation] was very upsetting [insert appropriate feeling] for you.”
- **Ask questions.** Questions can give the speaker opportunities to further explain, provide clarification, and ensure understanding.
- **Create silence.** Silence can provide time for both the speaker and listener to collect thoughts and process feelings.
- **Refrain from offering advice.** Sharing advice, especially when it was not asked for, can shut down communication. A person first needs to know they have sent their

message clearly to you and that you have understood them. Listen without the need to judge or respond with your own bias.⁷

Listening is more than just hearing words and seeing nonverbal behaviors. By practicing mindfulness and active listening, you see and hear what other people are doing and saying, allowing for better understanding.

Creating a Sense of Belonging:

Listen to understand within a cultural context. Ask yourself if you are interpreting what you hear accurately. Provide feedback to the speaker to build mutual understanding and strengthen the relationship. Confirm that the intended message was received.

References

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- ³Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hyperion Books.
- ⁴Shafir, R. Z. (2000). *The Zen of listening: Mindful communication in the age of distraction*. Theosophical Publishing House.
- ⁵Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156. DOI 10.1093/clipsy.bpg016.
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- ⁷Kabat-Zinn, J. (2014). *Meditation is not for the faint-hearted*. *Mindfulness*, 5(3), 341–344. DOI 10.1007/s12671-014-0307-1.

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