



# Developing Effective Listening Skills

Being an engaged listener is one of the most important communication skills you can have.

Think of one person who you feel doesn't listen to you. How do they make you feel?

Here are 5 strategies you can practice that will improve your listening skills.

- 1. Slow your listening down. Take a minute to breathe and think about listening and to be aware and present. Listen from your head to your toes. Listen as if what you are hearing could change your life.**

*Factoid: We speak an average of 120 words per minute, but listen four times faster. Your mind fills the gap by thinking of other things and wandering off. Stay focused. Slow down your listening and listen more than you talk.*

- 2. Pay attention.**

*Stay focused. Don't get distracted, but rather offer a statement of observation. For example: say, "It sounds like you're angry" (or sad/upset/frustrated, etc.). Listen and watch for the tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions of the person you're talking to.*

- 3. Get clarification. Listen first, then, ask questions. Find a way to understand their story – their facts, their feelings, and their perceptions.**

*Say, "Tell me more," or clarify by saying, "help me understand," or "do you mean to say that...?" If you still don't understand, ask again in a different way. Sometimes you may need to ask for different words. My daughter may say something like, "the thing didn't work and it's just not fair!" I may have to ask her to find a different word to use for "thing" to understand what she is trying to communicate.*

- 4. Validate the speaker. Show some compassion for how they are feeling.**

*Say things like: "It sounds like you are feeling left out," or, "It sounds like you are feeling tired and don't want to go."*

- 5. Paraphrase. Repeat in your own words what was said to make sure you understand. Try this paraphrasing technique: "What I hear you saying is..." or "So you are saying that..." And then check for understanding. Say, "Is that right?"**

*After listening carefully, respond genuinely. Don't fake it. An insincere response is worse than no response. Give non-verbal communication. Use eye contact and head nods to show your concern and interest. And, here's a tip: a response that demonstrates you really weren't listening is not a good response.*

A simple change in the way we listen will change the way we understand and how we respond. Active listening will increase the odds of success at understanding what the real issue is.