



Tips for Active Listening

Active listening is the art of mindfulness in conversation. It is listening with your whole body, mind, and heart. Once you've trained your body to give the cues of listening, and learned to quiet the mind of internal chatter, your heart can really hear the person's story. And there is no greater gift than being asked to witness another person's story. Here are some tips for active listening:

Body

- Face the speaker
- Uncross your arms
- Make eye contact
- Hold your tongue except for encouragers ("Oh," "Uh-huh," "And?")
- Nod when you understand
- Let your face express your feelings (confusion, surprise, etc.)
- Save questions for later (they will probably answer them if you let them keep speaking)

Mind

- Avoid making judgments
- Avoid jumping to conclusions
- Paraphrase in your mind to stay focused on their words
- Think about what they're saying (not what you're planning to say)
- Avoid offering solutions (that would be problem-solving rather than active listening)
- Stay focused

Heart

- Feel your compassion
- Embrace your empathy
- Exercise patience
- Be comfortable with small silences

At the end of a heavy bout of active listening you will be tired. You have used mental, emotional, and even physical energy to stay present and focused on the speaker's story. You should be able to paraphrase their key points when they are finished speaking. You may have clarifying questions or wish to reflect what's in your heart. This is also an important part of active listening. Just be sure to give them some space (a small silence) before you begin responding. They may actually need more time to continue speaking. And you may need a mental rest.