

Active Listening Starters

The basic idea of active listening is to demonstrate to the other person that **(a)** you are listening to them; **(b)** that there is room for them to correct themselves if you've heard it wrong; and **(c)** to make them feel heard. Active listening takes practice. Here are some lead-in phrases that might help you to summarize, paraphrase, rephrase and acknowledge:

- * I'm picking up that...
- * As I get it, you felt...
- * Sort of a feeling that...
- * Sort of saying...
- * Kind of a feeling like...
- * If I'm hearing you correctly...
- * To me it's almost like you're saying...
- * Sort of hear you saying that you...
- * Kind of made you feel...
- * The thing you feel most is...
- * So, as you see it...
- * As I get it, you're saying...
- * What I guess I'm hearing is...
- * I'm not sure I'm with you but...
- * I somehow sense that maybe you feel...
- * You feel...
- * I really hear you saying...
- * I wonder if you're expressing a concern that...
- * It sounds as if you're indicating a concern about...
- * I wonder if you're saying...
- * You place a high value on...
- * It seems to you...
- * Like right now you believe...
- * You often feel...
- * You feel, perhaps, that...
- * You appear to be feeling...
- * It appears to you...
- * As I hear it, you...
- * So, from where you sit...
- * Your feeling now is that...
- * I read you as saying...
- * Sometimes you...
- * Your message seems to be, "I...
- * Listening to you it seems as if...
- * I gather...
- * So your world is a place where you...
- * You communicate a sense of...

Open and Open-Ended Questions

- * Tell me more about how you see this...
- * How do you perceive the situation...
- * Help me understand the situation...
- * Can you tell me more about...
- * What are alternatives that you've thought about...
- * How did you decide that...
- * What do you mean by...
- * What are some good things about that idea...
- * How can I help you do something about that...
- * In what ways is this important to you...
- * What are some things you'd like to tell (Name)...
- * If you were to do things over again how would you do them differently...
- * What other possibilities are there...
- * Where would that lead...
- * What might some of the consequence be...
- * What were the things that led up to this...
- * How did you come to decide this...
- * What have you done so far about that idea...
- * Explain this to me again...I'm having a hard time understanding...
- * Where would you like to go with this idea...
- * What are some other ways you've thought about...

The Listening Attitude

1. Be interested and show it. Genuine concern and a lively curiosity encourage others to speak freely. Interest also sharpens your attention and builds on itself.
2. Tune in to the other person. Try to understand his\her viewpoint, assumptions, needs and system of beliefs.
3. Hold your fire. Avoid jumping to conclusions. Hear the speaker out. Plan your response only after you are certain that you've gotten the whole message.
4. Look for the main ideas. Avoid being distracted by details. Focus on the key issues. You may have to dig hard to find it.
5. Watch for feelings. Often people talk to "Get something off their chest." Feelings, not facts, may be the main message.
6. Monitor your own feelings and point of view. Each of us listens differently. Our convictions and emotions filter -- even distort -- what we hear. Be aware of your own attitudes, prejudices, cherished beliefs and emotional reaction to the message.
7. Notice nonverbal language. A shrug, a smile, a nervous laugh, gestures, facial expressions and body positions speak volumes. Start to "read" them.
8. Give the other person the benefit of the doubt. We often enter conversations with our minds already made up, at least partially, on the basis of experience. Pre-judgements can shut out new messages.
9. Work at listening. Hearing is passive. Our nervous system does the work. Listening is active. It takes effort and attention.
10. Get feedback. Make certain you're really listening. Ask a question. Confirm with the speaker what he\she actually said.