

COMMUNICATING WELL

SKILL 1: Active Listening

Active listening is a way of communicating that creates the important climate of empathy, acceptance and understanding. Active listening is a valuable skill because it demonstrates that you understand what your partner is saying and how he or she is feeling about it.

WHAT IS ACTIVE LISTENING EXACTLY?

- Making eye-contact and facing your partner when he/she speaks to you
- Saying things like “oh”, “I see” and “uh-huh”
- Reflecting back or restating in your own words, what the other person has said
- Asking questions as a way of checking whether your understanding is correct
- Holding onto your own opinions and listening to your partner until he/she has finished making their point

Examples of active listening

“You sound really stumped about how to solve this problem”

“It makes you angry when you find errors on Joey’s homework”

“It sounds like you are really worried about Wendy”

“I get the feeling you’re awfully busy right now”

Active listening does **NOT** mean you have to agree with the other person and their point of view.

Now it’s your turn to practice active listening. First, write an active listening response to each of the following statements.

1. Your partner says, “I had the worst day! The boss came up to me and gave me a hard time about calling in sick yesterday. He blamed me for the team missing that deadline and told me that if I called in sick one more time I’d lose my job. He’s had it in for me since the beginning!”

What would you say to show that you were listening?

2. Your partner says to you, “What happened to this house whilst I was gone? It looks like a bomb went off!”

What would you say to show that you were listening?

Now you are ready to practice active listening with your partner. Each of you should choose a topic that is relevant to yourself right at this moment. Decide who will go first in the speaker role; the other person assumes the active listening role. Try using the active listening skill for about 5 minutes before stopping the conversation and then discuss how it felt for each of you doing this exercise. Then swap roles.