



Where You Can Free Yourself to Be Yourself

*a Healing Soul, Ltd.*

## Helpful Hints for Active Listening

1. **Care about the speaker.** Get beyond cultural, sociological, or psychological assumptions. Make a conscious decision to suppress biases or other attitudes that could impair your ability to listen fully to their ideas or message. For the best communication, go beyond impartiality to actively caring about the speaker as a person.
2. **Want to listen.** Almost any message can be interesting if you want to get something out of it.
3. **Listen to understand; share responsibility for understanding.** Do not listen just for the sake of listening; listen to get a true understanding of the message. Be active; use your paraphrasing and clarifying skills.
4. **Relax and stop talking.** Create a relaxed atmosphere; give the speaker a full opportunity to talk. Don't be 'chomping at the bit' to get in your two cents worth at the first opportunity.
5. **Resist external distractions.** Ignore external noises while you focus on what the speaker is saying (both verbally and non-verbally). Put down any papers, pencils etc. that you have in your hands. Turn away from the computer and focus on the speaker.
6. **Resist internal distractions.** The brain can think at 500+ words per minute, while people generally speak at about 100-150 words per minute. Use this difference to think about the message instead of using it to think of other things. Also, set your own emotions (fears, worries, problems, etc.) aside while you are listening.
7. **Show that you are listening.** Be alert, face the speaker, sit up straight, lean forward in your chair. Keep your arms uncrossed. Use good eye contact. Let your face radiate interest; smile and/or nod in agreement when appropriate.
8. **Empathize with the speaker.** Try to put yourself in their place so that you can see their point of view.
9. **Pay attention to all nuances of the message.** Actively focus on the words, the ideas, and the feelings related to the subject. Remember to be aware of the two levels of the message: the factual content and the feelings/relationship/implied meaning. Pay attention to non-verbal clues; they often are more meaningful than verbal clues. Similarly, pay attention to paralinguistic clues (tone, rate, and intensity of voice). Also, 'read between the lines.' Sometimes the message is in what people leave out.



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10. **Let people tell their story.** Give the speaker “space” and time to tell their story fully.
11. **Get the main points (the big picture).** Concentrate on the main ideas; the supporting material (examples, statistics, etc.) are helpful for understanding the story but they are not the main points.
12. **Don’t argue mentally.** When you are trying to understand the other person, it will interfere if you are mentally setting up your counter-argument. Use the time instead to try to understand their point of view, and why they feel that way.
13. **Assume nothing and avoid hasty judgments.** Wait until all the facts are in and you have clarified the message before making any judgments.
14. **Ask questions.** When you aren’t sure that you fully understand, when you need further clarification, or even just to keep yourself interested in the message.
15. **Offer feedback, both verbal and non-verbal.** Encourage the speaker to share their story by using your skills in empathic listening responses...silence, head nods, or saying “Mm hmm”, “Go on”, or “Tell me more about that.”
16. **Take notes, if appropriate.** Most people remember only between 25-50% of what they hear, so take enough notes so that you can recall the important parts of the message later.
17. **Don’t antagonize the speaker.** Antagonizing the speaker will cause them to stop before they have revealed the full message. Try to be aware of your actions, and avoid the five negative response types. Also, be aware of the speaker’s personal space. Don’t stand too close (or too far away) and if you are in their office, respect their personal items (don’t pick up their special paperweight unless you are invited to do so).
18. **Listening is fun!** Make a game out of it to see how much you can learn.