

Active listening

What is it?

A process to help people to demonstrate that they have listened attentively to others and understood what is being said.

What can it be used for?

- To check understanding of what has been said by summarising and clarifying.
- To demonstrate empathy for the speaker or speakers through words and body language.

Active listening is helpful in any situation where people are conveying their thoughts and ideas to others, whether one-to-one or in group situations. It helps to capture people's feelings and emotions as well as the factual information that they transmit.

How to do it:

There are three key techniques...

1. Summarising

- Providing a shorter version of what the speaker has said in your own words:
- So what you are saying is...Using your own words is acceptable, as it provides the speaker with an opportunity to check your understanding.

2. Clarifying

Probing for clarification on certain key points. Useful phrases include: Tell me more about...

- What happened next?
- What other option did you consider?
- What was the outcome?
- Give me another example

3. Interpreting

Checking your understanding of what lies behind the words (feelings and emotions):

- You seem to be concerned that ...
- You think there is a risk that ...

Tips and guidelines

Improving listening skills takes practice. These skills can be practised in your day-to-day interactions with others at work.

Do...

- Look interested
- Create a supportive atmosphere
- Note non-verbal cues – tone of voice, gestures
- Be aware of your own verbal and non-verbal cues
- Check understanding regularly – ‘So what you’re saying is...’
- Summarise what has been said – give a shorter version
- Paraphrase what has been said – put it into your own words

Don't...

- Stop listening when you think you know what is about to be said
- Interrupt
- Try to change others' views by arguing – although it may be appropriate to challenge
- Pass judgement or moralise
- Give false reassurances
- Confuse fact with opinion

When you are practising active listening, other people should be doing most of the talking.