

Top Tips to Be an Active Listener

Eleven steps to improve your listening skills adapted from Caleb Storkey

1. A good listener is attentive. They make good eye contact, do not interrupt what the other person is saying and show an interest in what is being communicated. There is always something incredible you can hear in anyone's story.
2. A good listener does not look over the shoulder of the person that is speaking, waiting for someone more interesting to come along.
3. A good listener gives their undivided attention, and does not look at other things while listening (e.g., their watch, lesson plan, diary)
4. A good listener is not waiting for their chance to get a word in, treating the 'period of listening' as a pause in their 'monologue.' Being so focused on trying to get one's view over is insensitive and misses the real value of the conversation.
5. A good listener uses positive body language; leaning forward and showing an enthusiastic, relaxed nature. They do not fidget, cross their arms, look elsewhere or express inappropriate shock or disbelief at what is shared.
6. A good listener does not hurry somebody but asks good questions to guide the sharing. They guide and help shape what is being shared, but if the other person feels cut off or squashed, they have failed.
7. A good listener does not approach a conversation with prejudice, expecting to know what is going to come out of the speaker's lips. They do not listen with a pre-formed opinion but attempt to have an open mind to what is being communicated. It is amazing how much time is wasted with the belief that people understand what someone means without taking the effort and time to listen.
8. A good listener cares. They show empathy for what the other person has to say. It is genuine, and authentic and comes from a place of truthful concern.
9. A good listener identifies areas of agreement with the speaker whilst avoiding the cliché statement: "I know exactly how you feel." Because you do not. It ends up sounding insensitive, trite, or self-centred. Everyone loves to be understood. No one likes to be patronised.
10. A good listener remembers. They remember and follow up on conversations wherever possible. They treat what is shared with respect and where appropriate ongoing interaction.
11. A good listener knows how to treat what is shared with confidentiality. They are trustworthy and sensitive with information and never look to use anything that is shared for any purpose other than good