

2.6 Active Listening

Listen with full intent instead of waiting to speak.

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Often, when people engage in discourse, they unintentionally default to focusing on their own thoughts. Instead of listening, they spend their time waiting for the other person to stop speaking so they can say what's on their mind. As a result, they don't pay full attention to what is being said and don't internalize the speaker's message or fully connect on an emotional level. Even worse, they may respond in a way that makes it clear they have not been listening, which may irritate the speaker and make them feel unheard.

This style of conversation leads easily to miscommunication, conflict, and feelings of underappreciation. Active listening is a useful approach when you want to create respectful conversations in which you fully understand what is being said. It often leads to improved communication, fewer disagreements, and feelings of appreciation.

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- Having a better understanding of what people say to you.
- Other people feel heard and understood.

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- It can be hard to resist planning your reply instead of being fully present during a conversation.
- Sometimes random thoughts can grab you while you're trying to listen.

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When practicing active listening, you consciously maintain focus on hearing what the other person is saying. One way to do this is to silently repeat their words in your mind. If you notice your mind wandering, you can quickly bring your attention back to listening.

If you sense that your partner might feel misunderstood, you may want to try another step. When your conversation partner is done talking, paraphrase what they have said and repeat it back to them instead of replying right away. This is to assure them that you understand. Then, you can check in with them to be sure you understand correctly and fully. The other person may want to clarify things, correct you, or add some more details. Let them. And then you can offer your response.

When you're listening to someone and possible replies or questions occur to you, you may want to note them down on a piece of paper so they don't distract you while you are listening. At first, your conversation partner might not understand why you're taking notes and feel uncomfortable. To reassure them, it's a good idea to communicate ahead of the conversation that you may take notes in order to listen better.

