



Active Listening

One essential part of a non-violent communication is active listening. This kind of listening gives your communication partner the feeling that s/he is being heard with all her/his feelings and needs, that you are interested to understand her/him and that you intensely and attentively follow her/his speech. Moreover active listening ensures that you fully and correctly understand all your partner has said. Thereby you avoid misunderstandings.

This way of listening is called “**active**” because it does not mean that you just sit silently and listen passively with open ears but that you actively **encourage** your partner to talk, that you **repeat** what s/he said with your own words, that you **name her/his feelings and needs** and that you **ask** for clarifications if needed.

This way of listening is like a mirror for the person who talks. The talking person can see what information arrived in the listener’s mind and what needs to be more clarified. The talking person also gets the feeling of being understood and welcome. This opens the talking person more and more up to express her/himself. For that reason it is also important not only to repeat what the talking person has told you but that you also **describe the underlying feelings and needs** you noticed when you listened to this person.

The following guideline shall give you an idea about what to do and what to avoid when you want to be a good listener.

A) How to Listen Actively:

- **Encourage** the talking person to speak: Send Signals that you follow the speech and that you want to hear more.

Example:

- Ask: “What happened next?” or “Can you tell me more, please?”
- Nod sometimes during talk.
- Say: “Yes” or “Mhm, well ...”
- Ask: “What did **you** think / do / feel / need then?”

If you can not follow the other person anymore than you may politely and shortly interrupt her/him:

Example:

“May I shortly repeat what you just said to make sure that I really understood you. ...”

- **Repeat** what the person told you with your own short words:

Example:

- “I want to make sure, that I understood well: **You said** that you do not like this...”
- “So **you** basically say **you want** this and that ..”
- “Let me summarize: **You say** it is like this ..”
- “I have heard that you need more acknowledgement from your friend. Is this correct?”



- **Name the feelings and needs of the talking person** s/he expressed during talking:

Example:

- “So **you** are angry that you did not get more attention?”
- “**You feel** relieved that this did not happen...”
- “Is **your need** to get more respect?”
- “Is it possible that **you felt frightened** in that situation and that you **needed more security and help** from your friends?”

B) What to Avoid During Active Listening:

The main mistake is to take yourself more important than the person you want to listen to. So be aware of your limited role: **You** are not the main person. Your role is to watch, listen, observe, but not to occupy the floor. Do not put yourself in the center of the talk. So try to avoid the following **examples for “bad” listening:**

Disrespect

- **You take most of the time** for talking yourself
(You should allow most time to the talking person not to yourself. Thus you show respect and limit your role to listening.)

Impatience

- **You try to have answers ready** when you partner is still talking
- **You interrupt** the talking person
- **You finish the sentence of the person** who is talking

Lack of real attention and willingness to receive the full message

- **You think about other things** than the person is talking about
- **You just filter out and listen only to those things you want** to hear

Temptation to add something to the things that have been said and to bring in your point of view

- **You give judgements** on what the person said

(Example:

“What you did was wrong.”

“It is not as bad as you say. You will easily solve the problem.”

“You are strong. Do not worry, you will make it!”

- **You try to downsize the problem** the person is talking about
- **You come up with own recommendations or advice or with your own experience**

(Notice: Active Listening does not mean that you share / agree with the said things!)



C) Example For A Talk Based on Active Listening:

Person **A** talks.

Person **B** **listens actively** thus helping A to formulate clearly his/her problems and to find an **own** solution.

A: Oh, this was a horrible meeting. I really do not know why these other people always think they are so important.

B: This was a very uncomfortable meeting for you. You are angry and frustrated about this meeting.

A: Yes, they are talking and talking all the time and repeat the same things.

B: Some have talked very much, but not said something really new. This has made you frustrated.

A: Yes, sometimes they mention good ideas. But they just talk too much. By this other persons do not get a chance to come up with their own good ideas.

B: The surplus talking has blocked others from talking. You are angry, because you would have liked to say something.

A: Yes, I had a good proposal to make, but I simple did not get a chance to speak about it.

B: You feel that it should have been possible to raise your proposals.

A: Yes, a good moderation would give the chance for everybody to contribute something and would avoid these endless repetitions.