

Tips for Being a Good Active Listener

1. **Decide you want to Listen:** Remember the old adage about having two ears and one mouth. Maybe we're supposed to listen twice as much as we speak. Whatever, it starts with the decision to listen.
2. **Face the speaker.** Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show your attentiveness through body language.
3. **Maintain eye contact,** to the degree that you all remain comfortable.
4. **Listen 75%, Speak 25% of the Time:** This is a powerful tip unless you are giving a speech. Try to allow the other person to speak more than you and listen to them.
5. **Minimize external distractions.** Turn off the TV. Don't use your cell phone, computer, or other electronic devices while you are listening to the person.
6. **Respond appropriately** to show that you understand. Murmur ("uh-huh" and "um-hmm") and nod. Raise your eyebrows. Say words such as "Really," "Interesting," as well as more direct prompts: "What did you do then?" and "What did she say?" When you respond, speak at the same energy level as the other person. This will help the person who is speaking that they really got through to you and will not have to repeat what they said.
7. **Focus solely on what the speaker is saying.** Try not to think about what you are going to say next. The conversation will follow a logical flow after the speaker makes her point.
8. **Let the Speaker Finish the Point they Were Making:** Our brains speed along four times faster than when we speak. Try not to finish their sentences or interrupt. Wait for Pauses. When the speaker pauses, you might be able to jump in and ask a clarifying question. If there are not good long pauses, then wait until the speaker has completed speaking their idea.
9. **Minimize internal distractions.** If your own thoughts keep hornning in, simply let them go and continuously re-focus your attention on the speaker, much as you would during meditation.
10. **Keep an open mind.** Wait until the speaker is finished before deciding that you disagree. Try not to make assumptions about what the speaker is thinking.
11. **Engage yourself.** Ask questions for clarification, but, once again, wait until the speaker has finished. That way, you won't interrupt their train of thought. After you ask questions, paraphrase their point to make sure you didn't misunderstand. Start with: "So you're saying..."
12. As you work on developing your listening skills, you may feel a bit panicky when there is a natural pause in the conversation. What should you say next? Learn to settle into the silence and use it to better understand all points of view.
13. **Be Respectful:** Let them know you take their views and ideas seriously. Be willing to communicate with others at their level of understanding and attitude by adjusting your tone of voice, rate of speech and choice of words to show that you are empathetic and trying to imagine being where they are at the moment.