

Special Foster Care & Therapeutic Respite Care

Tips, Tools & Resources

Active Listening

Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. Often when people talk to each other, they are distracted—half-listening, half-thinking about something else. When people are engaged in a conflict, they are often busy formulating a response to what is being said instead of listening to the other person. Assuming that they already have heard what their opponent is saying, they focus on what they can say to win the argument.

Active listening is a structured form of listening and responding that focuses the attention on the speaker. The listener must take care to attend to the speaker fully, and then repeat, in the listener's own words, what he thinks the speaker has said. The listener does not have to agree with the speaker, but merely restates what he thinks the speaker said. This enables the speaker to find out whether the listener really understood. If the listener did not, the speaker can explain further.

Often, the listener is encouraged to interpret the speaker's words in terms of feelings. Thus, instead of just repeating what happened, the active listener might add "I gather that you felt angry or frustrated or confused when..." This way the speaker both confirms he heard what happened and indicates he also understood the speaker's response to it.

When people are in conflict, they often contradict each other, denying the opponent's description or perception of what happened. This tends to make people defensive, and they either lash out or withdraw and say nothing

more. However, if the speaker feels that his opponent is truly listening to his concerns, he is more likely to explain in detail how he feels and why, greatly increasing the chances of developing a solution to the mutual problem.

Active listening has several benefits: 1) people listen attentively; 2) misunderstandings can be avoided; 3) people are encouraged to share more; and 4) trust is cultivated.

ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

1. **Attending** to the speaker by providing verbal and nonverbal (eye contact/posture) awareness of the other
2. **Restating** what is heard by responding to the speaker's basic verbal message
3. **Reflecting** feelings, experiences or content that has been heard or perceived through cues
4. **Interpreting**, tentatively, the speaker's feelings, desires or meanings and checking to see if they are valid/accurate
5. **Summarizing** or bringing together in some way feelings and experiences; providing a focus
6. **Probing** in a supportive way by asking questions for more information or to clear up confusion, without interrogating
7. **Giving feedback** by sharing perceptions of the speaker's ideas or feelings; disclosing relevant personal information
8. **Supporting** the speaker by showing warmth and caring
9. **Being quiet** and giving the speaker time to think as well as talk



<http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/active.html>
<http://crs.uvm.edu/gopher/nerl/personal/comm/e.html>

Name: _____

Date: _____

Parent Training Exercise

Describe how active listening works.

How can active listening improve relationships between people?

Give an example of a sample conversation where the people are not listening to each other and then give an example where they are practicing active listening.