

# Active Listening Guide

Actively listening to someone involves more than just hearing what is being said. Our ears listen to the dialogue, noting key words and phrases and changes in voice intonation. Our eyes look at body language, and facial expression.

We convey we are listening, really listening, to what is being said (and what is not!) and how the person may be feeling, by using skills of Reflection and Summary, whilst adopting appropriate body language.

- Face the speaker squarely (you are wholly available to them)
- Adopt an open posture (you are open and non-defensive)
- Lean forwards at times (demonstrating attentiveness)
- Maintain eye contact, without staring (you are interested)
- Remain relaxed (you are confident in what you are doing)

Using posture, gesture, facial expression and voice intonation we send non-verbal signals to the speaker that we are listening to them.

Using verbal skills we convey our understanding of what the speaker is saying, meaning and feeling.

## Reflection and Summary

The two main skills used to actively listen are: **REFLECTION** and **SUMMARY**

**REFLECTION** of dialogue confirms that the listener has heard what the speaker has said. By repeating back the speaker's words the listener conveys that their full attention is being given.

**REFLECTION** of feelings demonstrates that the listener has accurately understood what the speaker is feeling, and why.

e.g. “ **You feel ..... because .....** ”

**REFLECTION** of meaning communicates the listener's understanding of the speaker's 'key message', minimises distortion, and communicates respect.

e.g. “ **So what you're saying is .....** ”

**SUMMARY** is the listener's feedback to the speaker. Areas, which are considered to be of importance, are highlighted and significant 'threads' of the speaker's account are drawn together.

**SUMMARY** can be helpful in encouraging the speaker to further explore a particular issue, to focus and prioritise issues, or to sort arrange scattered thoughts and feelings.

## Active Listening Guide (continued)

### 'OPEN' and 'CLOSED' QUESTIONS

**CLOSED QUESTIONS** usually invite a “yes” or “no” answer, or only offer specific or limited answers.

e.g. *“Did you go out last night?”*

or *“What do you usually drink when you go out?”*

Whilst useful for gathering information these questions are likely to “close” the speaker down.

**OPEN QUESTIONS** have an almost unlimited number of responses and are helpful in encouraging the speaker to express their thoughts and feelings. They will also encourage the speaker to give their own account of a problem or to tell their viewpoint of their story.

e. g. *“How did you feel when .....*”

*“What do you think about .....*”

*“How would you.....”*

Useful phrases to encourage conversation:-

*“Would I be right in thinking.....?”*

*“It seems to me.....”*

*“So you’re saying that.....”*

*“In what way.....”*

*“You said you felt.....”*

*“What do you imagine you would feel if.....”*

*“What do you understand by.....”*

*“Have you thought about.....”*

*“Could you tell me what it is that.....”*

Many of these phrases allow reflection of what has been said so far. This will show the speaker that the listener is interested in what he/she is saying and is actively listening.

### “BLOCKS” to ACTIVE LISTENING

- Ordering, directing or commanding
- Warning or threatening
- Giving advice, making suggestions, providing solutions
- Persuading with logic, arguing or lecturing
- Moralising, preaching, telling clients what they “should do”
- Disagreeing, judging, criticising or blaming
- Agreeing, approving or praising
- Shaming, ridiculing or labelling
- Interpreting or analysing
- Reassuring, sympathising or consoling
- Questioning or probing
- Withdrawing, distracting, humouring, changing the subject