



Active Listening

Active listening is a communication technique where various skills are mindfully utilised to help a person talking to feel “heard”. When we listen in an active way we verbally feed back what we have heard to the speaker to confirm what they have heard is correct. It helps a conversation to develop rapport, feel free from judgement and stripped from any agenda. Active listening utilises the following specific techniques:

Minimal Encouragers such as “Mmm-hmm”; & “OK” (not “yes!”). Minimal encouragers are neutral sounds we make that help a person realise we are paying attention to them. They enable us to maintain space and distance in the conversation.

Echoing is when we repeat the last word or phrase spoken by the other party. Echoing helps us suspend a response or opinion and can prevent them from feeling judged.

Silence. When attentive, silence allows space for the speaker to reflect on what they are saying and to continue talking. It also enables empathy to develop.

Reflecting feelings such as “it sounds like you are feeling...” or you seem to feel...”. When we reflect feelings back to the speaker it helps them to feel understood and for rapport to be developed. It also helps us to identify the internal experience of the speaker. We can also skilfully use reflecting feelings to highlight ambivalence and incongruence with what a speaker might be saying.

Reflecting facts or content such as “you seem to be saying...”; “it sounds as if...”; “what I am hearing is ...”; “what you continue to come back to is...”; “lets recap what you have covered...”; “as I have been listening to you, your main concern seems to be...” and so forth. Reflecting facts involves paraphrasing what a speaker is saying, preferably in their own words. This captures the essence of what they are saying and helps them to understand that we have actually heard them accurately. It provides a forum to clarify what has been stated or speak in more detail about an issue or an event.

Reframing which is when we reflect content or feeling back to the speaker, however we adjusted what they said to challenge self limiting and situation limiting dialogue.

Summaring occurs when we identify salient points and highlight relevant information to paint an overall- integrated picture. It enables the speaker to see fragments of their utterances gathered together in a meaningful way. It also helps to create a feeling of movement, particularly when being bogged down in details and can be a helpful method of terminating a long discussion.

Asking questions. Asking questions is an excellent way to clarify that you are listening to someone and care about what they are saying. Consider the purpose of the question- is it to clarify information, to develop rapport? This will determine what sort of questions you ask.