

Active Listening Skills

When two people are in conflict or one person needs to share sensitive and vulnerable information with another one, “Active Listening” can be extremely helpful. The process most likely feels stilted and foreign at first but when you practice enough and follow the guidelines you will realize its benefits.

For the purpose of this hand-out, I have labeled the person who speaks first FP, for first person, and the person who does the active listening SP, for second person. Here is how it works:

1. Both of you have to agree that you will use this tool.
2. Decide together who is going first (FP) and who will active listen (SP).
3. FP: stick to **one** topic/event. (This is very important since SP cannot respond to a laundry list of issues. Both of you would get bogged down.)
4. FP: talk in bite-size chunks. That is, tell your partner only as much as s/he can comfortably remember and repeat to you.
5. SP: repeat or paraphrase what you have heard FP say to you **without adding any interpretation or any of the things you need to say**. You will get your turn! If you feel defensive, just notice that. We all do at times. It is not necessary to do anything about it.
6. FP: check whether SP really understood what you tried to communicate. If not, give more detail. Remember to talk in bite-size chunks.
7. SP: repeat again what you have heard.
8. Repeat this process until FP feels completely heard on this **one** issue.
9. Now switch! SP now talks about what is going on for him or her **regarding the same topic**. Do not introduce a new topic! SP: remember to talk in bite-size chunks. FP: you now become the Active Listener. Follow this process until SP feels completely heard.
10. At this point more stuff about the same topic may have come up for FP again. Continue to engage in active listening to each other until you either completely understand each other or can accept each other’s positions.

Note: If either one of you tends to go on and on as a style of talking, please check yourself or ask your partner to help you monitor yourself. Going on and on tires listeners and is not productive.

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