

The difference active listening makes



When we have a good chat with someone, that buzz can really stay with you.

We all want to communicate well.

One of the game-changing ways we can consistently have improved conversations is how well we listen.

It all comes down to active listening. Rachael Longmire-Hunt, CiC's Head of Clinical Global Specialist says "The art of being listened to without judgement with full attention is a powerful experience, especially when so much competes for our attention in our life. When someone can reflect back to us what we might be struggling with, in such a way as to make us feel truly heard, it can help us feel less alone and more in charge of our self and our circumstances."

Feeling heard and understood is a powerful motivator when it comes to communication and building our personal and professional relationships.

What is active listening?

[MensLine Australia](#) describes active listening as paying attention to the speaker's words, tone, and non-verbal cues and responding in a way that shows you understand and are engaged in the conversation.

Listening is an essential part of enhancing our communication – especially when it comes to [having tough conversations](#).

Through the act of listening, we hear what someone has said and understand that it is serious, important, or true, according to [Merriam-Webster](#).

When we really absorb what someone is saying to us, we can remember it better – equally as importantly, we are actively showing we appreciate its importance to the speaker.

According to [MindTools](#), we do this by:

- Paying attention by ignoring other distractions, keeping eye contact and your thoughts focused.
- Showing you're listening through facial expressions and body language.
- Providing feedback by asking questions, summarising and reflecting on what has been said.
- Avoiding being judgemental by letting the speaker finish each point and not talking over them.
- Asserting your opinions or responses respectfully.

When we listen, we are learning to put distractions and pre-emptive judgments (well-intended or not) aside.



The benefits of active listening

Active listening skills go a long way towards addressing misunderstandings and establishing healthier relationships.

While it benefits the person speaking, there are also [mutual benefits for the listener](#) as well.

When we listen, we are learning to put distractions and pre-emptive judgments (well-intended or not) aside.

This improves our attention to detail and helps us block out unnecessary interruptions when we need to focus on important tasks.

This can improve our productivity and our ability to influence, persuade, and negotiate – as well as avoiding misunderstandings and conflict.



Recognising the need for improved listening

Not being heard and not feeling heard is something that can affect us at any age – as a child, adolescent, or adult.

This can often come through in the form of frustration, talking faster, louder or over the top of other people.

These can make us feel neglected, ignored, unloved or not valued.

Think about a previous situation where you didn't feel heard – it could be a work meeting, a phone call, negotiating with someone, or giving feedback.

- How did it affect your body language? Your tone of voice? Your response? Your thoughts?
- What did you need in that situation in order to feel heard? E.g. to not be spoken over, for engaging body language to not feel ignored, no shouting, to be able to express your feelings, not defaulting to anger or defensiveness or knowing quick ways to calm or regulate yourself etc.

Think about a situation where you were speaking with someone, and they misunderstood what you said.

- How did it affect your body language? Your tone of voice? Your response? Your thoughts?
- What did you need in that situation in order to be better understood? E.g. for both of you to be seated and focused on the conversation and not multi-tasking, to have the conversation in a quieter location, no distractions, not bringing up past events or being given the silent treatment etc.

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You can use a variety of techniques to rectify these feelings and build better relationships. [Khiron Trauma Clinics](#) recommend:

Tips for employees

- **Reinforce your understanding with some phrases** – If you need to, you can use phrases to help reinforce or clarify your understanding of something, such as “If I understand you correctly/ what you’ve said correctly, is...”.
- **Use “I” statements** – these are a techniques for expressing your feelings in a way that comes across as non-accusatory. E.g. saying “I feel sad when you...” doesn’t place the blame on the other person like “you always...” does.
- **Focus on listening** – when you’re listening, be aware of how you focus on what’s being said, don’t let your thoughts stray, keep your eyes from wandering and keep a fidget toy on you if you need one to focus.
- **Set boundaries** – politely asserting yourself with phrases like “please do not speak over me”, asking for space to avoid an argument or reassurance after a disagreement.
- **Take a break** – if the conversation gets heated, you can take a break or choose to reschedule for another time or place that is suitable for you both.

Tips for employers

- **Start conversations gently** – a “soft start” of expressing how you feel without being critical will help lower the risk of the person you’re talking to feeling attacked.
- **Find the right words** – there are better ways to communicate effectively and constructively. [Asana](#) suggests not giving any feedback without thinking it over first, provide actionable feedback and use “I” statements.
- **Think about your own behaviour** – perhaps a contributing factor to not feeling heard in a personal or professional relationship is that you are approaching the person you need to talk to at inconvenient times.
- **Check with the person if they’re understanding you** – we all have different experiences and viewpoints, what seems like a logical or straightforward way to communicate for you may not be entirely clear for the other person.
- **Take turns talking** – begin by expressing your point, and then pause and let the other person respond. It can also be helpful during this process to allow each other an opportunity to summarise your understanding of what the other has said, to ensure you are not missing anything.

Sources

- [Active listening – MensLine Australia](#)
- [How to have better conversations – APM](#)
- [Listen – Merriam-Webster](#)
- [Active listening – MindTools](#)
- [6 phrases that demonstrate active listening – Hubspot Marketing Blog](#)
- [Why you don’t feel heard – Khiron Trauma Clinics](#)
- [How to give \(and take\) constructive criticism - Asana](#)