

# The Art of Active Listening



Opening up and talking about our concerns and feelings will often have a therapeutic effect. Many of us prefer not to talk about what's bothering us; however, reaching out, either to share our own problems or act as a sounding board for others in need of help, is a valuable, simple way of easing worries.

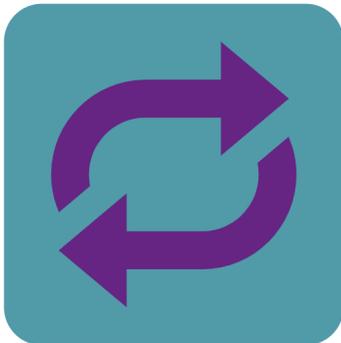
The ability to listen, to take in and digest what we're hearing, is a crucial tool when it comes to offering support. Listening effectively is something many of us can develop in order to benefit ourselves and those with whom we interact.



Given that we take in the spoken word at a much slower rate than we think, it is only natural that we struggle to concentrate fully on what other people are saying. That said, once we've taken the key first step of starting a conversation with some open-ended questions, the next part is easy.

The art of active listening is based on the three Rs: **repeat, reflect, respond.**

## Repeat

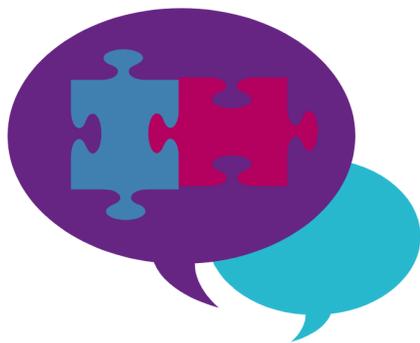


Repeating the things we've been told demonstrates, at the very least, that we're attuned to what we're hearing. It helps to show that we've understood and we can better do this by summarizing the other person's statements or repeating a word or phrase, prompting them to go on, safe in the knowledge that we are engaged listeners.

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## Reflect

We can maintain the conversation by reflecting on what we've heard, offering some basic insights into the other person's experiences. A question like "So, you're feeling hurt by the situation but you still enjoy working there?" allows us to delve deeper and provide more support. If people gloss over important details, we can try asking "Why not tell me more about that?" Either approach helps us clarify things for everyone involved.



## Respond

Don't feel obliged to remain impassive. Responding to what we're being told displays our interest; it signals to people that their issues are worthwhile. "That must have been terrible" or "I'm sorry to hear you've had an awful time" are straightforward, supportive statements, although, sometimes, silence

can also be fine. Concentrate on non-verbal responses. Nodding our heads, maintaining direct eye contact and staying quiet while the other person talks; all are cues that indicate our attention.

What you say shouldn't influence what the other person has to say. It just encourages them to talk. Let the person express their feelings and listen carefully to what they have to say. Listen without judgement and let them know you are there to help.

**For additional information and resources on Asking, Talking and Listening, visit [www.changeyourmindni.org](http://www.changeyourmindni.org)**

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