

Mental Health

Mental Health - Active Listening

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Why is good communication an important skill?

Good communication is more than just talking. It involves active listening, being genuine, and having empathy. As part of communication, active listening is a structured way of listening and responding to others. When actively listening, your attention is focused on the other person in an attempt to understand, interpret, and evaluate what they are telling you. The key is to communicate without judgment. In a workplace setting, you may collaborate with people to set individual, realistic performance goals, establish dates for giving feedback, and measure progress toward reaching those goals. These techniques will help create a more effective and positive working relationship.

What are some tips for follow for active listening?

- Make eye contact. Note that in some cultures, excessive eye contact can be seen as inappropriate, aggressive, or rude. Be intent, but don't stare.
- Focus on what is being said. Do not do other activities at the same time such as monitor for e-mails, answer the telephone, etc.
- Listen and allow the person to speak. Do not interrupt. You may want to "fix" things, but if you have not heard the entire situation, you may be fixing the wrong issue.
- Allow pauses. Some people may need time to think about and formulate their answers. Do not pressure someone to answer quickly.
- Ask questions. If something is not clear, asking for more detail about it in a friendly and non-judgmental way shows interest and concern.

- Repeat for confirmation. When you repeat what you heard, you reduce the chance of misperceptions and confusion. Give the other person a chance to correct any misunderstanding of what you think you heard.
 - Reflect on what you heard.
 - Listen between the lines. Look for clues in body language that may reveal how the person is feeling about whatever you are talking about (posture, facial expressions, eye contact, etc.)
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What are tips when looking for body language?

Pay attention to:

- Proximity – standing too close or too far away
- Posture – disapproval or dislike versus interest
- Gestures – eye contact, hand movements
- Facial expressions – nodding, smiling, shaking your head
- Silence – interest, concern, stimulation of further talk; or disapproval, disinterest, disbelief
- Actions supporting the words that the person is saying

Don't forget that your tone of voice and body language are also part of the message.

Please see the OSH Answers on [Mental Health - Having Courageous Conversations](#) for more information about verbal and non-verbal communication.

What are other tips for positive communication in a workplace?

Other tips include to:

- Look for solutions. Do not rehash an old problem.
- Think about “what else” can be discussed or learned. If you give yourself time to hear the whole story, you are less likely to jump to conclusions or assumptions.
- Do not focus on providing solutions immediately. Time may be needed for both parties to come to a solution that works best for both sides. If the decision or solution is reached with consensus, it is more likely that people will be committed to its success.
- Allow a person to clarify their comments. Sometimes what we say is not what we mean. Take the time to clarify what you heard and determine if that matches what they intended to say.

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