

## What can I do to be an active listener?

- Maintain eye contact with the speaker while he or she is talking.
- Avoid distractions.
- Stop all other activities.
- Pay attention to what the speaker is saying.
- Ask for clarification.
- Summarize what the speaker has said.

The three the main techniques for active listening are paraphrasing, clarifying and summarizing.

- **Paraphrasing** is restating the speaker's thought, in your own words. For instance, "I think you're saying that..." or "It sounds like you're saying ...". This is so they know you understand, or don't understand, in which case they can clarify for you.
- **Clarifying** involves asking questions to make sure that you understand. For example, "Can you give me an example of that?" or "You just said that such and such is important, can you help me understand what that means to you?"
- **Summarizing** is accurately and briefly summarizing the intent of their message. For instance, "I think the main ideas here are ...".

## Active Listening Guidelines

- Put the focus of attention on the speaker
- Paraphrase and clarify
- Summarize
- Don't discuss your own reactions or give well-intentioned comments like, "I know what you mean.", "Oh yeah, that same thing happened to Me.", or "I don't agree because..." This is not a time to articulate your own view points or turn the attention back to yourself.
- Don't ignore the speaker's feelings
- Don't pretend that you understand their meaning if you don't. It's perfectly fine to ask for clarification. For example, "What did you mean by...?" or "Can you tell me more about...?"
- Don't ignore the non-verbal content. People's body language, facial expressions, gestures, pitch, tone, can give you clues about what they are thinking and feeling.
- Don't think about what you will say next. (Probably the hardest guideline to follow) It seems it is our default response when we are getting into a rather heated conversation with somebody, we're just holding our breath until we can get a chance to insert our opinion, and that is the opposite of what we want to do.

From Chang, V., Scott, S., & Decker, C. (2013). Developing helping skills: A step-by-step approach. CA: Brooks/Cole