

## Active Listening Skill Procedure

ACTIVE LISTENING SKILL PROCEDURE In order to connect with anyone, they must perceive that you at least honestly respect them as a person, or that you believe their thoughts, feelings, and ideas are of value to you. If you cannot get this across, no interrelating can start to develop, no sharing of minds will be possible. It's not necessary that there is agreement, only a perception of being heard.

Active listening is hearing the other person's words, feelings, meaning, and intent before you express ANY of your own. In other words, it's to completely understand the other person's point of view or frame of reference. If you have indeed actively listened, the other person should feel completely heard on "all" levels.

Of course there is a risk in actively listening, if you really hear the other person's point of view you may be influenced by it or even come to understand what she or he is saying. We will work with three steps in active listening:

1. VALIDATE FEELINGS - Validate or confirm what is being felt, but never in a condescending way. Say things like:

"You're angry because..."

"Sounds to me like you're excited about..."

"You seem confused."

"I would have been really hurt too if..."

2. PARAPHRASE CONTENT - Retell what you just heard in your own words. Start by saying things like:

"You are certain that I ..."

"Are you saying that you want me to ...?"

"I see, you hoped I would ..."

"You're concerned about our relationship."

3. QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING - Ask questions that help you know what is being said or clarifies thoughts or feelings. Asking for example:

"What did you mean when you said, 'I need space?'"

"Confused about what?"

"When I talk too loud it makes you feel mad?"

"Can you help me understand better by telling me more about...?"

In normal conversation these three steps are not separated, but flow naturally together. In order to practice however we will work on each one of these independently or in groups of two.

### THE "I"-MESSAGE

After you have really heard the other person by using your active listening skills, it's important that you express yourself as clearly as possible. In order to do this you must first know what you are feeling, thinking, and believing. So, if you are unclear or confused about these stop and consider them, or talk with someone you trust to get straight in your own mind what you feel, think, and believe. Once you are clear in your own mind, then you are ready to express yourself to someone else.

## Active Listening Skill Procedure

Next, it's best if you can express your feelings, thoughts, and beliefs in a way that will be accepted by the other person. One way is to use what has come to be called an "I"-message or a statement that tells how "I" feel. The intent of such a statement is to take responsibility for how you think, feel, and believe, not blame the other person for how you think, feel, and believe. For example you might say:

"I feel mad when you say that."

"I think about my father putting me down when you shake your finger that way."

"I believe in equality for women and men."

"I feel uncomfortable with that."

A negative example of an "I"-message is called a "you"-message. The purpose of a "you"-message is to blame, criticize, or imply negative feelings, thoughts, or beliefs. This kind of a message tries to avoid responsibility for how you feel, think, and believe. For example you won't want to say:

"YOU make me mad."

"YOU stop shaking your finger in my face."

"YOU are a chauvinist pig."

These sort of statements only cause others to become defensive and want to strike back at you.

When it's the other person's problem use Active Listening, when it's your problem deliver an "I"-message.

BEFORE YOU USE AN "I"-MESSAGE, ASK YOURSELF:

1. What behavior needs to be changed?
2. Can that behavior be changed?
3. What will changing that behavior accomplish?
4. Is there a good reason for that behavior?
5. When is the best time and place to deliver the "I"-message?
6. Am I clear about what I want to happen?
7. How can I say it to best improve the relationship?

WHEN YOU GET AN "I"-MESSAGE, ASK YOURSELF, "SHOULD I CHANGE?", AND LISTEN FOR:

1. The source.
2. Level of importance.
3. Degree of emotion in delivery (Is what is said really meant or is it only high emotionality speaking?).
4. Consistency (Have you heard this before?).
5. What will it COST me to change?
6. How can I BENEFIT if I change?
7. Am I clear about what is being said? Any questions - ASK!

HELP FOR CONSTRUCTIVE NEGOTIATION

## Active Listening Skill Procedure

1. Pinpointing the issue. Talk with the other person about the problem you are trying to resolve. You say what you think the problem is, and ask HIM (or HER) how they would describe the problem. Come to an agreement on just WHAT THE PROBLEM IS.
2. Agree that you want to resolve the conflict, or problem. If you CANNOT agree to solve it together, agree to TALK ABOUT IT LATER. SAY WHEN: STATE DAY, TIME and PLACE.
3. Participate. Avoid getting one-sided, with one person doing all the talking and deciding. TAKE TURNS TALKING; learn to LISTEN all the way through the other person's message.
4. List options and ideas. After you are both agreed to resolve the problem, and both are participating, brainstorm for options and ideas as to HOW this conflict or problem can be solved. MAKE A LIST OF THEM.
5. Choose one option and idea. If you don't like any of the options and/or can't decide on any one of them, AGAIN DISCUSS THE PROBLEM. This will help both people come up with new options.
6. Trial period. Often you can try out a solution or idea for a period of time. Give it a fair trial, perhaps 2 or 3 days or a week.
7. Review your plan together. When the trial period has ended, GET TOGETHER and discuss how things are going in the problem, or conflict situation. LISTEN carefully to each other, ASK FOR CLARIFICATION if you think you aren't clear on what the other person means.

DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WHAT THE OTHER PERSON THINKS OR FEELS. ASK THEM. THEY'LL BE GLAD TO TELL YOU!

DON'T LIE.

DON'T YELL.

DON'T GIVE UP.

ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER.

SO HOW DO I SAY "NO"?

1. Listen attentively before you answer. Everyone has the right to be heard.
2. Don't lie about why you are saying "no". Everyone has the right to have his or her boundaries respected.
3. Give reasons for saying "no". This shows you heard and considered the request.
4. Provide alternative solutions whenever possible. Finding another way to meet a need can make your "no" easier to accept.
5. Delegate decision-making as much as possible. The less often you must say "no" the better. Besides you're not the only one who needs to practice saying "no".

## Active Listening Skill Procedure

6. When you say "no" don't add colorful adjectives such as, "Hell, NO!" A simple "no" stated in a firm, calm, controlled manner is more effective.
7. Don't procrastinate. When the information has been gathered, decide. Problems don't go away, but they do get more difficult to manage and cause resentments.
8. Adopt guidelines well ahead of requests. For close relationships, work together with others in establishing the guidelines. This can help prevent saying "no" many times later.
9. Set priorities by listing family commitments, life goals, obligations, work, recreation, and other pursuits that **MUST** be done. Then list in order what you would do if time were unlimited. Draw a line at a reasonable point through the list and say "no" to all items below the line.
10. Make periodic review of your priorities and goals. Feel free to make adjustments in where you draw your line after trial and error. A "no" yesterday may be a "yes" today or vice versa.

### SOME HELPFUL BOOKS TO READ:

- John Powell; Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?
- Mellody, et al.; Facing Codependence.
- Smith, Manuel; When I say no, I feel guilty.
- Virginia Satir; Peoplemaking.