



Want To Really Listen? Here's 5 Tips To Improve Your Listening Skills

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Listening. Seems simple, doesn't it? We all do it, and we've all done it for years. But would you be surprised to know that research suggests that we only remember between 25 and 50% of what we hear? That's not much, is it?

Listening is one of the most important skills we can have, and how well we listen has a major impact on the quality of our relationships with others. We listen for a variety of reasons – to learn something new, to understand something or someone, or even for enjoyment.

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In a relationship when we don't listen well, the outcomes are often conflict and misunderstanding. So what can you do to become a better listener, and in turn hopefully avoid conflict and misunderstanding?

1. **Become present and focus on listening**

Make a conscious effort to be present and hear what the other person is saying. Then importantly, attempt to understand the message that the person is trying to give you. So become present when the other person is speaking by listening to their words, giving them your undivided attention, and noticing their facial expressions and body language (don't allow yourself to become distracted by anything else that may be going on around you, or by formulating your response in your head while they're talking, or getting bored, or losing focus).

2. **Acknowledge that you're listening**

A simple nod of the head, an "uh huh", or a smile or frown at the right time can let the other person know that you're hearing them. Also use body language to acknowledge that you're listening – face the person front on and lean in, don't fold your arms or turn away.

3. **Don't interrupt**

This can be really challenging for some people, and it can be challenging in our fast paced world where we might think that everything has to be done quickly! By interrupting you're probably making the other person frustrated, and you're also giving the other person a message that you're impatient, or that you already know what they're saying ... which you may not. Stay present and make sure you're listening to the other persons whole story or point of view.

4. **Clarify and understand**

Often when we listen, we're listening with an agenda, or we're listening through our own assumptions, judgements, or beliefs. All of these can distort what we hear. As a listener you are listening to understand. To understand fully what someone else is saying, you may need to ask questions, or maybe you can repeat back to the other person what you've heard to ensure you've got the right message. If you're trying to understand more you might say "What do you mean when you say ..." or

"Can you tell me more about ...". To clarify you might say "What I'm hearing is ..." or "It sounds like you're saying ...". If something someone says feels personal and you're finding yourself becoming emotional, you could say "I'm not sure if I'm understanding you correctly, and I'm taking what you said personally. What I heard you say was Is that what you mean?".

5. **Respond mindfully**

When you've taken the time to be present with what the other person is saying, and you feel like you've understood what they're saying, in turn this should create a mindful, considered and honest response. And let's face it, attacking or putting someone down won't add to a conversation ... it might actually end the conversation. So be open and honest, state your opinions respectfully, and treat the other person the way you think they would like to be treated.

Remember that old habits are sometimes hard to break, so you'll need to be aware and present to listen better. Let the other person know that you're hearing them, and set aside any judgements or beliefs that you might have. Ask questions and reflect back to the person what you think you've heard. And finally, respond mindfully.

However, if these strategies aren't enough, and you still find that not listening, not hearing and/or not understanding are affecting your life negatively, seeking professional assistance could be useful.

If you would like help with your thoughts, feelings or behaviours, please contact us on 0488 954 195, amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au or [click here](#)

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