

Exploring Leadership

COMMUNICATION: ACTIVE LISTENING

Contrary to popular belief, speaking is not the only important communication skill. Even the most distracted and self-involved people amongst us spend more time engaged in listening than any other form of communication. Active listening is one of the most important communication skills young leaders can learn. This activity will allow participants to observe and practice active listening from three different perspectives.

CONVERSATION STARTER:

With a book or paper in your hand, excitedly shout "Hey! Listen to this!" then wait for group to quiet down. Wait 30 seconds (or until someone speaks) then ask "What were you all doing in that quiet moment?" "Listening! You all know how to listen. Now, let's learn how to be active listeners!"

"Yeah, yeah I hear you!"

If you've ever said that after being accused of not listening, then you may not know what it means to listen actively. It involves much more than just remaining quiet and being able to hear the other person's voice. When you listen actively, you not only hear the person, but you also observe what they do, empathize with how they feel, and sense what they mean, even if they don't actually say it. Active listening is a way of showing that you care about what the person is saying.

- Review the Handout/Display: Strategies for active listening. (Appendix A)

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Improve active listening skills.
- Observe/Evaluate others in a listening situation.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Handout or overhead display: Active Listening (see Appendix)
- Timer/Stopwatch
- Paper/Pencils (for observer notes)

EXPLORATION ACTIVITY:

Ask participants to choose a problem or challenge they have (past or present) to discuss. Provide some examples, forgetting assignments, fighting with a sibling, not making a team or getting a desired role.

Divide participants into groups of three and explain the roles in this activity.

- **Solution Seeker:** speak for 60-90 seconds about the topic you chose
- **Active Listener:** listen actively using the strategies for active listening
- **Evaluator:** observe and make note of which active listening strategies were used
 - Group members will fill the 3 roles and practice using the active listening strategies found on their handout
 - Have participants switch roles until each person has had a turn taking part in each of the roles.
 - Have each person in the group talk for one minute about what they observed when they were the evaluator and which active listening skills they observed.

FACILITATOR TIP:

- Express the importance of understanding that the role of an Active Listener is to actively listen to whatever the speaker says, not to try and solve the speaker's problem.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- As the solution-seeker, how did you feel after telling the listener your problem?
- As the active listener, was it difficult to listen actively without contributing?
- As the evaluator, were you able to become more aware of your own listening strengths and weaknesses?
- Overall, what did you learn about your listening skills?

APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- How might active listening improve your relationships?
- Why is active listening especially important for leaders? What happens when leaders don't listen?



CONCLUSION:

Active listening makes people feel valued, which means they are more likely to continue contributing to the team's goals. Practice active listening to improve communication in all of your relationships and help you retain important information.

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REFERENCES

- <https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>
- <https://youtu.be/t2z9mdX1j4A>
- <https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/ActiveListening.htm>
- https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/department_4-h_youth_development



APPENDIX A:

STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

- Let the speaker have the spotlight.
 - Pay attention.
 - Don't interrupt or think ahead to how you're going to respond.
- Focus on the speaker's message, not presentation.
 - Ignore negative aspects (nervousness, blushing, "um" & "uhhh").
 - Don't make judgments.
- Look at the speaker.
 - Show you are listening.
 - Listen with your eyes as well as your ears.
 - Be alert and attentive.
- Encourage the speaker with nonverbal cues.
 - Lean forward.
 - Make eye contact.
 - Nod and respond appropriately.
- Confirm your understanding to the speaker.
 - Provide feedback (but not solutions!).
 - Say "I see" or "I understand".
 - Paraphrase the speaker's words: "What I hear you saying is...."
 - Ask clarification questions if necessary: "Do I have that right?"
 - End the conversation by summarizing what has been discussed.