

Improving Your Listening Skills

Successful communication requires skill and practice. When engaging in conversation, try to listen carefully to what is being said. The goal of listening is to understand, not to be right or to win. If you're like most people, however, you need help developing these skills.



Listen Actively

If you learn to use active listening skills to hear and comprehend the thoughts, feelings and concerns behind the words, you'll make the speaker feel respected and also create an understanding that leads to progress and mutual benefit.

Steps to Active Listening

Stop what you're doing and give your full attention to the speaker. This shows respect and allows you to view body language. Lean forward, look directly at the other person, nod and make appropriate comments about what is being said to demonstrate your interest.

What to listen for:

- **Words.** Is the message clear and concise? What are the words alone trying to say?
- **Tone of voice.** The tone of someone's voice reflects the person's emotional state. Does the tone sound hostile or nervous, or does it sound friendly, relaxed and sincere?
- **Pitch.** A high-pitched voice usually indicates nervousness, fear or anxiety. A lower pitch signifies confidence.

Body language to look for:

- **Eyes.** Good eye contact signifies honesty and confidence. To create good eye contact, position yourself so you're at about the same eye level as the other person.
- **Facial expression.** A genuine smile expresses friendship, approval and relaxation. Sullen looks represent disinterest, disapproval or concern. Frowning conveys disapproval or disbelief.
- **Posture.** Standing tall and straight with arms relaxed at the side indicates confidence, while sloped shoulders suggest low self-esteem. Crossed arms can signal a person's anger or defensiveness.

To find out how well you listen, repeat what you think the other person has said before responding to it. If that person corrects you more than 20 percent of the time, you are hearing what you want to hear, not what is being said.

Listening actively pays off because mutual understanding in communication is essential for success, not only in your career, but also in your personal life.

Our dedicated consultants are available **24 hours everyday** to address your needs. Appointments can normally be scheduled within **two working days**. **After hours** and **weekend** sessions can be arranged, if needed. Crisis calls are always handled immediately. Services are **confidential** to the extent permitted by law. To access these services call First Sun EAP at 1-800-968-8143 or in Greater Columbia (803) 376-2668. For more information on this topic as well as the other benefits you receive from First Sun EAP, please see our website at: www.firstsuneap.com.