

Active Listening





What is Active Listening?

Active Listening is the first skill set of effective communication. Active listening is the ability to focus completely on what the speaker is saying and not saying. An active listener confirms both the content of the message and the emotions underlying the message to ensure understanding is accurate.

Why is Active Listening important?

Coaching conversations are different from the conversations we have on a day-to-day basis. When coaching, the purpose of listening is to fully understand, to listen with a more thoughtful ear. The coach focuses on what the team member is saying and feeling, listening and encouraging the team member to speak and be understood. Through the use of open-ended questions and reflective responses, the coach encourages team members to openly share relevant ideas, opinions and feelings. Exploration of ideas and feelings enables a coach to establish trust and rapport with team members.

How does a coach help the team develop the skills and competencies to function independently?

Through active listening practices, the coach helps teams take effective action toward their goals as they develop their own listening, reflection, problem solving and decision making skills.

Key Skills for Active Listening:

- Listening for Understanding
- Observing Verbal and Non-verbal Cues
- Using Paraphrasing Skills
- Checking for Understanding
- Probing for Clarity
- Summarizing and Synthesizing
- Suspending Judgment

Through regular practice and reflection of the key skills, coaches model active listening strategies for team members, then support and provide feedback as teams become proficient in their own use of strategies. The coach celebrates team success as they use these skills.



Job Aids

Active Listening Skills At-a-Glance

Resources and References

Listens for Understanding

- This online video clip provides examples of *Listens for Understanding* active listening skills.
<http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/resources/videos/video-3-3>

Observes Verbal and Non-verbal Cues to Better Understand the Speaker

- This online video clip provides examples of *Observes Verbal and Non-verbal Cues to Better Understand the Speaker* active listening skills.
<http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/resources/videos/video-3-3>

Checks for Understanding

- This online video clip provides examples of *Checks for Understanding* active listening skills.
<http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connectmodules/resources/videos/video-3-4>

Uses Paraphrasing Skills

- *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups*, 2nd edition, by Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 2009. Chapter 3: Developing Collaborative Norms, The Seven Norms of Collaboration: *Paraphrasing*

Probes for Clarity

- *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups*, 2nd edition, by Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 2009. Chapter 3: Developing Collaborative Norms, The Seven Norms of Collaboration: *Probing for Specificity*

Summarizes and Synthesizes

- This online video clip provides examples of *Summarizes and Synthesizes* active listening skills.
<http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connectmodules/resources/videos/video-3-4>



Active Listening Skills At-a-Glance

This quick reference guide lists the specific sub- skills and behaviors associated with each of the key skills for “Active Listening”.

Listens for Understanding

Focuses on what the other person is saying

- Maintains eye contact with speaker
- Waits until the other person is done talking before responding

Observes verbal and non-verbal cues to better understand the speaker

Verbal / Aural cues

Observes the way in which a speaker hesitates in his/her speech

Observes the inflection of a speaker's voice (Which points are stressed loudly? Which are mumbled?)

Non-verbal cues

Observes facial expressions, body posture, hand movements, eye movements, breathing,

- Identifies speaker’s pitch, tone, juncture
- Requests verification of perceptions, when appropriate

Uses paraphrasing skills

To acknowledge & clarify content and emotion

To summarize & organize

To shift level of abstraction

- Signals intent to paraphrase
- Uses a brief statement in the listener’s own words – for example, “You would like to see...”
- Uses a statement that offers themes or containers – for example, “You seem to have two goals here: one is about ____ and the other is about ____.”
- Uses a statement that shifts the conversation to a higher level of abstraction (name concepts, goals, values, and assumptions – for example, “So a major goal here is to define fairness...”) or lower level of abstraction when concepts require grounding in details – (for example, “So fair might mean that we construct a needs assessment form for each department...”).
- Only includes ideas expressed by the speaker (when not shifting levels of abstraction).



Checks for Understanding

Confirms or further clarifies the message

- Asks speaker to confirm accuracy of the paraphrase

Probes for Clarity

Asks clarifying questions to construct shared understanding and increase meaning of what others are saying

Uses questions such as:

- "Better in which ways?"
- "Which students specifically?"
- "What do you think would happen if you ...?"

Summarizes and synthesizes key points

Brings together the facts and pieces of the problem to check understanding

- Uses phrases such as:
 - "So it sounds to me as if . . ." Or, "Is that it?"

Suspends Judgment

Listens openly and with empathy, and responds in a neutral (non-judgmental), interested way.

Presumes positive intentions

Uses phrases such as:

- "Could you tell me more about ...?"
- "What led you to that conclusion?"