

## Listening Skills

A simple and effective way to listen in order to understand

The goal of listening is to understand someone else's perspective. What are they trying to tell me? What does that mean to *them*? What are other aspects of their experience that I might not already be aware of? Can I really see things from their perspective to be able to understand what they are saying and why they think/feel that way?

Many of us may have heard the idea that a problem with communication is that we listen to respond rather than listen to understand. We listen until we have something to say in response or until we hear something we don't agree with. When we don't listen to understand, the impact is that people feel unheard, misunderstood, or invalidated. And when people feel unheard, they are often not in a mental space to be able to listen to understand you. Thus, difference of opinion, hurt feelings, and conflict escalates and goes unresolved.

Understanding someone's perspective doesn't mean you have to agree with their perspective. It doesn't mean they are right and you are wrong. It is simply about seeing things from their point of view. We often think we 'understand' someone, however, we might not really understand unless we can truly see things from their perspective.

Imagine if I told you the picture below represents a face. Seeing it from the perspective of the image, you might disagree and think I'm crazy for saying it. Then, click on the link...



<https://youtu.be/T3LOICdjcW0?t=49>

So...how do we listen to be able to shift our perspective to be able to truly understand the other person? The three simple steps below can help. Keep in mind that you wouldn't use this with every person in every conversation. It might be particularly useful when listening to someone you care about, when trying to talk through a conflict, or when you really just don't understand what the other person is trying to say.

### 1. Reflect

The idea here is that you simply say back to the other person what you heard them say. This is done by paraphrasing the message you heard, which gives the other person the chance to say either, “yes, that is what I was trying to say” or “no, that isn’t what I meant.”

For example, if my partner tells me, “I need some space.” I might say, “Okay, I heard you say you need some space from me.”



### 2. Be curious

Being curious is all about asking questions to try to deepen your understanding. This is the part where you actively try and shift your perspective until you are able to see it from their point of view (remember the video above?).

For example, I might ask, “Do you need space from me or from everyone?”

“Does space mean just physical space or are you asking for less communication overall?” “Any sense of why you need space now, when you didn’t before?” “Do you know how long you might need space?”

It is important that I ask these questions specifically seeking to shift around to their perspective, not to debate or disprove their ideas or feelings.

### 3. Validate

Validation means communicating to the other person that you truly understand what they are saying from their perspective. Again, it isn’t saying their perspective is correct or that you agree. It is communicating back to them that in the realm of possibility, you can understand how they might see things or be feeling the way they do.

For example, once I’ve been curious enough to understand my partner’s need for space, I might say, “I think I get it...you feel blanketed by me right now at a time when you are trying to concentrate on school so you can do well.” (or whatever reflects the perspective they shared with you)

Sometimes, when people we care about are expressing a difficult or intense emotion, we might have a desire to talk them out of how they are feeling because we don’t want them to be hurting. In an effort to reduce their suffering, we might tell them they shouldn’t feel that way or that it could be worse. We might immediately offer them a different perspective before we validate how they are feeling. We often try and solve their problems for them.

Sometimes what people we care about need in that moment is for us to just listen (and validate). Check out the video for a funny example.

