

Listen to Understand

Communication is only as good as the listening skills used during an interaction. Misunderstandings, disagreements, and conflict frequently result from poor listening. Listening is an active process that requires intentionally listening to understanding, rather than listening just to respond.

Paraphrase:

A concise response that states the essence of the speaker's message in the listener's own words. Paraphrasing is used to show that you are listening and understanding, or as a way of checking your interpretation of the speaker's message.

To do this: Restate the basic ideas and facts of the speaker's message.

Example: "So, you would like to take some time off before beginning your new job."

Feeling Reflection:

A response that contains the emotion of the speaker's message. Feeling reflections are used to show that you understand how the speaker feels and to help them evaluate their own feelings.

To do this: State the feelings in the speaker's message.

Example: "You seem frustrated."

Learn to "hear" the feelings in a message:

- Listen for feeling words
- Observe body language
- Ask yourself: "If I were having that experience, *what would I be feeling?*"
- Infer feelings from the content

Clarification:

A question to gain more information, or a statement expressing your understanding of the speaker's message.

To do this: Ask questions; restate your understanding of the speaker's message.

Example: "When did this happen?" "This is what I heard you say..."

Clarification is important when what is being communicated is difficult in some way, such as discussing sensitive matters or listening to something complex.

Summarization:

A brief restatement of the main themes and feelings the speaker has expressed over a longer period of conversation.

To do this: Restate major ideas by tying together different topics into one theme, or by highlighting the covered topics.

Example: "These seem to be the key ideas you've expressed..."

Validation:

A statement that confirms the speaker's experience of a given situation.

To do this: Acknowledge the value of the speaker's experience of a given situation.

Example: "This project has been overwhelming for you, and you've hung in there."