

Active Listening 101

Active listening is one of the most important things you will do to create a healthy, happy marriage. The truth is, most people are truly poor listeners and communicators. It's just not something we are taught how to do. These skills will radically change your relationship with your spouse, children, coworkers, and friends.

The first step in active listening is to gather information. This means we encourage the other person to keep talking. Usually, we do the opposite. When someone says something that rubs us the wrong way, we normally get defensive- we cut them off, talk over them, raise our voice, or sometimes completely shut down and want to flee. Active listening involves facing conflict and expertly diffusing it so we can honor the other person and get back to homeostasis. With active listening, we don't have to agree with the other person, but we convey honor and respect by listening and sometimes offering to help.

Step 1. Encourage the other person to keep talking by saying, **"Tell me more,"** or **"Go on."** Let them talk, even if they are criticizing you. We want to get to the heart of it, which usually means then you can stop having the same conversation over and over again.

Step 2. Clarify. Let's make sure you understand what the other person said. This is where you restate it. Then ask, **"Did I get it? Is there more?"** If there's more, just keep listening, restating, and asking until there is no more.

Step 3. When we feel like we have the full picture, let's validate. We do this by saying, **"It makes perfect sense that you would"** This is really important. We are not necessarily agreeing (although you can). We are seeing things from the other person's perspective, which is incredibly important for the relationship. When finished with this step be sure to ask, **"Do you feel heard?"** We need to know. If the answer is no, then ask and clarify so you know where you missed the mark.

Step 4. Interject a feeling reflection. **"You must be frustrated..."** "It sounds like you're disappointed..." "I'm hearing this situation has drained your energy..." If you are wrong let the other person tell you. We want to get the feeling right. You can ask, **"Am I on the right track?"**

Step 5. Offer support. **"What can I do to support you?"** or **"How can I help?"** Be genuine when asking. This really goes a long way in making the other person feel cherished. That's the goal. In marriage, the other person is your teammate. We want to support them as much as possible.

Tips for Success:

- When someone is talking, just listen. Don't prepare your answer in your head
- Maintain good eye contact. Touch the other person or try to hold their hand if possible during this exchange to stay connected
- Do not have distractions like tv in the background
- When bringing up an issue **always** try to ask if now is a good time
- Avoid getting defensive. Often, another person's triggers are not 100% about you. This is about getting to know the other person, so try not to take things personally
- This approach may seem foreign at first but keep at it and keep your handout nearby. It becomes more natural with time.