



# Chapter 5

## *Active listening*

**Objectives:** This chapter aims to help trainees

1. Understand what active listening is and the importance of active listening.
2. Practice active listening skills.
3. Practice active listening to understand and support children in difficulty.
4. Practice active listening for conflict solving.



# What is active listening and why is it important?

Good communication is key in developing and maintaining good relationships between parents, teachers and children. When we think of communication, most of us think of the verbal side of communication, of speaking and talking. But speaking is only one part of communication. Listening is another critical and integral part of communication, one that is perhaps even more important than speaking, especially when new relationships are being established or when children are facing difficulties. As children become teenagers, having adults that listen to and understand them becomes increasingly important.

Everybody wants others to listen to him or her. When others listen to you, it means that the listener wants to understand you and believes what you are saying is worthy of their notice. It is no different for children: they want to be understood, valued, respected and loved (Chapter 1, Suggested Knowledge 2). But how can you make children see that you are listening actively, not just “hearing” but also “understanding”?

### **Active listening is:**

- Sincere listening, attentive and open
- Able to reflect content of the teller
- Able to reflect feeling of the teller

For example:

Your son comes back home and says, “I hate Minh. He does not let me play with him and share the toys”. After hearing that, how should you react?

Some parents might say: “What’s the problem? You can play with your other friends!” In this case, the parents have ignored or dismissed their child’s feelings. Their response implies that “There is nothing the matter with you; I know what you need to do.”

On the other hand, parents could say, “Do you feel angry with Minh because he did not let you play with him?” This response shows that you are following an active listening approach. Through this reflected response, you have encouraged the child and maybe he will tell you more. For example, “Yes. Yesterday he let me play but today I did not bring my own toys”. This in turn allows you to continue to explore the child’s feeling and thoughts. “So Minh wants you to bring something that you and he can play together.” “Yes, I think so.” This is a more effective method for getting to the root of the problem.

Active listening takes time but a thoughtful attitude of acceptance of children's feelings helps children to drop their defensive attitudes, opening the opportunity for a more positive type of communication. In active listening, non-language signals are particularly meaningful. Listeners should be careful about expressing their own feelings and their reactions to what the speaker is saying and concentrate on just listening. At times, the listener may need to reflect some of the content or feelings of the speaker. Just a nod or small sound can acknowledge that the listener recognises and understands what the speaker is saying. All too often, we listen without hearing in the same way we look but cannot see.

Open questions, such as "Why are you sad?" "If you were in your friend's situation, how would you feel?" "What would you do?" "Are there any other ways to address this problem?" can be very useful as they encourage children to extend their thinking and look at the matter from a different point of view, allowing them to explore various solutions to the problem. Reflecting what children want to share is also very important in enabling them to speak out clearly and to make sure that the listener understands the matter thoroughly. Reflection includes questions such as: "Do you mean that...?", "Did you say that...?" Or "I heard you mention ...".

Active listening is a good way for parents and teachers to understand their children and pupils. It fosters respect and care for each other and strengthens relationships in schools and families. Active listening also helps to prevent and solve problems arising in schools and families, particularly within the challenging context of parent-child or teacher-pupil relationships. Active listening can help parents and teachers to identify and address children's difficulties and concerns in a timely manner, which is more effective and does not require punishment.



# Activity : What is active listening?

**Objective**

To practise and understand what active listening is

**Target audience**

Parents, teachers, caregivers and people who are working with children

**Time**

25 minutes

**Method**

Group work

**Materials**

One soft, small ball that fits in a palm and can be thrown to other people in a circle.

## Process

### Step 1 (10 minutes)

Ask all participants to stand in a circle. The trainer starts by saying a short sentence to which participants actively listen. For example, you may say: "Sometimes he beats me very badly." Reflections of active listening (depending on the non-language signals of the trainer) might be: "You don't like being beaten by him; You are sad when he beats you so badly; You are angry when he beats you badly" and so on... (*reflect both content and feeling*)

### Step 2 (10 minutes)

After participants fully understand the activity, ask all of them to get involved: The first person says something they are worried about (For example, I was a little worried about attending this training; I'm worried when my child goes out), then throws the ball to a second person. The second person will then reflect the content and feeling of the first person before making his or her own statement and throwing the ball to a third person. Continue this process for about 10 minutes.

### Conclusion (5 minutes)

Active listening means listening with one's ears, eyes and heart: sincere listening, open and non-judgemental, then being able to reflect content and feelings of the speaker.



# Barriers to active listening

## *Things to be avoided*

1. **Not paying attention, dismissing the speaker's concerns.** For example: "Please talk about other things. Don't think about this anymore."
2. **Judgment, criticism, scolding.** Such as, "You are such a..."; "How many times have I told you that, you should not/must not...". "Why did you do that?" "Aren't you ashamed to do that?" "That's a really silly thing to do. Are you stupid or something?"...
3. **Blame the child without clarifying the root cause of the misbehaviours.** For example: "You are always quarrelsome"; "You are the one who created this situation"; "It's your own fault"...
4. **Denigrate and belittle the child.** For example: "Is that the best you can do?" "You are so useless." "You can't do anything right."...
5. **Interrupting the child.** For example, many adults often use words like "But...", "How about...", "Why it is that..." to interrupt children rather than letting them tell the story in their own time.
6. **Giving advice, solution, and moral lecture immediately or dismissing their concerns.** For example: "I know what you should do. Firstly you should...". Don't be silly, it's not important". "That's what I told you already"; "You must...".
7. **Showing excessive sympathy and pity.** For example: "That's terrible! Why do so many miserable things happen to you?" "You are always unlucky." "Poor you. Have you been scolded by teacher again?" Comments like these only make children feel weaker and less confident.
8. **Giving orders, threatening.** For example: "You must finish the work right now." "If you continue talking to me like that, I will beat you." "I will never forgive you if you make the same mistake again."...

***Let's try: "I talk, you listen" or "the child talks, the adult listens"***

- When you turn away from me or interrupt, I feel disrespected and do not want to share my opinions.
- When you give advice, I feel that you are not in my position so you do not really understand. You seem to think that you are more intelligent than me. Your advice is not suitable for my situation.
- When you oppose me, I feel annoyed and uncomfortable.
- When you feel pity for me, it makes me feel weak.
- When you show your agreement excessively, I feel over confident and that my behaviour is justified so I will not try to solve the real problem.

***Communication between adults and children***

COMMUNICATION PROCESS

***Awareness – Feedback – Response***

THE WAY LEADING TO COOPERATION

***Exploration – Understanding – Participation and Cooperation***

THE WAY LEADING TO NON-COOPERATION

***Investigation – Judgement – Correction***



# Activity : Barriers to active listening



## Objective

To practise three rounds of active listening while facing different barriers



## Target audience

Parents, teachers, caregivers and people who are working with children



## Time

50 minutes



## Method

Group work



## Materials

NA

## Process

Participants are divided into small groups of three people numbered 1, 2 and 3. Two people sit face to face and the third person will observe them separately. One person will play the role of listener, one person will be the speaker and the third person will be observer. It can be played three times so everybody has a turn to be the speaker, listener and observer.

### Step 1 (5 minutes)

	<b>Person 1</b>	<b>Person 2</b>	<b>Person 3</b>
Round I:	Speaker	Listener	Observer
Round II:	Listener	Observer	Speaker
Round III:	Observer	Speaker	Listener

In Round 1, the speaker can share a positive thing.

In Round 2, the speaker can talk about one thing which makes him or her angry.

For Round 3, the speaker can talk about one thing that makes him or her sad or embarrassed.

### Step 2 (7 minutes)

**Round 1:** In each group, the speaker prepares his or her own story (for example, he or she can play a role of a child or pupil and has something, such as a new drawing, to share with his or her parent or teacher). The listener is secretly tasked, outside the main room, to be a 'bad listener' who does not pay attention to the speaker and is always distracted - looking at his or her watch or cell phone, looking out the window and so on. Ask the listener to return to the main room and start the exercise. The third person will be the observer with the responsibility to take note of what is happening in the group but is not involved in the conversation.

**Step 3**  
*(8 minutes)*

After all groups finish Round 1, ask the observers what they have noticed. (Focus on the process and response between the listeners and speakers, rather than the details of the stories.) After that, you ask the speakers what they felt. You may conclude that: When we do not pay attention to the speakers, they may feel that they are not respected, listened to or understood.

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**Step 4**  
*(10 minutes)*

**Round 2:** Ask the listeners to leave the room and give them instructions that they should be a listener who always makes subjective and biased comments and judgement about the speaker and the story. The other two people in the group then take their roles. The speaker plays the role of a child or pupil who has something which makes him or her angry to share with his or her parent or teacher. After finishing the exercise, ask the observers what they have observed. Ask the speakers what they felt. Then you may conclude that: when we listen and make subjective comments and judgements about people, we make them feel bad about themselves. Not only do not we help them but we can also make them feel even more unhappy and stressed.

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**Step 5**  
*(10 minutes)*

**Round 3:** Ask the listeners to go out of the room and give him or her a task that he or she should be a listener who always gives advice to the speaker (what they should do, what they should think and how they should feel). The speakers will play a role of a child or pupil who has something that makes him or her feel sad or embarrassed to share with his or her parent or teacher.

After finishing the exercise, ask the observers what they have noticed. Ask the speakers what they felt. Then say: sometimes when we try to help the speaker and give them our advice, the advice may not really help them but just make them feel that they are not understood. The speaker may feel exhausted and powerless to solve his or her own problem.

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**Conclusion**  
*(10 minutes)*

There are many barriers to active listening that we should be aware of if we want to create better communication between adults and children. Summarise those barriers (write on the board or use transparency or PowerPoint) based on the Suggested Knowledge 2 (Barriers and the "I say, you listen" tips). Finish by presenting the diagram about communication between adults and children.

Suggested  
knowledge

3

## Four steps to active listening to support children in difficulty

**Step 1: Reflecting the content and emotion of the story** as well as the feelings of the speaker. Children should understand that you are listening to and understanding them.

**Example 1:** Speaker: "I feel scared when I have to see the dentist." or "Mom, I don't want to see the dentist."

Feedback: "You feel scared going to the dentist."

**Example 2:** Speaker: "I feel very scared when making presentations in public"

Feedback: "You are scared when making presentations in front of a lot of people?"

**Step 2: Validating the feeling.** The listener should say something to make the speaker know that their feelings are natural and acceptable. Sensitive children should know that they are not the only ones who are facing such a difficult situation.

**For example 1:** "Many people also have that fear. Getting a filling can be really painful".

**For example 2:** "Many people have the same feeling. Before becoming a teacher, I was also scared when speaking in front of a lot of people."

**Step 3: Encouraging the child.** The listener should think about strengths and previous success in handling the difficulties of the speaker and use them to encourage him or her. Children need encouragement to become stronger.

**For example 1:** "You are very brave"; "Do you remember you used to..."

**For example 2:** "Do you remember the time when you joined the group of singers?"

**Step 4: Helping the child to find a solution.** After active listening, make the speaker feel that his or her feelings are acceptable and that many other people in such a situation also have similar feelings, let them calm down and encourage them to find the strength to solve the problem.

**For example 1:** "Next time, what will you do to help you not feel so scared?" "Have you tried...?"

**For example 2:** "How do you think you can overcome this?" "How will you prepare?"

# Activity : Four Steps of Active Listening to Support Children in Difficulty

**Objective**

To practise the four steps of active listening to support children in difficulty at home and in school

**Target audience**

Parents, teachers, caregivers and people who are working with children

**Time**

30 minutes

**Method**

Plenary in a circle

**Materials**

One soft and small ball that fits in a palm and can be thrown to other people in a circle.

## Process

### Preparation (3 minutes)

Ask: what do you usually do when you feel sad, angry or when you are facing a problem? How do you feel when other people listen to you? How do you reduce your anger, stress and worries?

Active listening is a skill for handling difficulty, stress, anger and conflict. Active listening is also a way to encourage children to exchange their ideas, share and address any problems relating to the relationship between parents-children or teachers-pupils.

### Step1 (4 minutes)

Similar to activity 1. Ask participants to make a circle. One person will share his or her own story. After that, throw the soft ball to anybody in the group. The catcher will be the listener and give his or her reflection of the story as well as the feelings of the speaker (step 1). Repeat several times till everyone understands and has developed the skill.

Example 1: the sharing person says: *I feel angry when my father comes home late and smells of alcohol.*

Feedback: *you feel worried when your father drinks alcohol and comes home late, so you are angry?*

### Step 2 (5 minutes)

When you feel that the participants are skilled in Step 1, then move to Step 2: Validating the feeling. In the above example, the listener may say: "Many people in your situation also have the same feeling." Repeat several times till everyone understands and has developed the skill.

**Step 3**  
*(5 minutes)*

After validating the feeling, comes encouragement. The listener should find some positive points in the speaker's feelings and actions in order to give him or her encouragement.

In the example given above, the listener could say, "You are very kind to care for your parents." Repeat this process several times till everyone understands and has developed the skill.

**Step 4**  
*(5 minutes)*

After participants are good at encouragement, move to Step 4, helping the speaker to solve their problems.

In the example above, the listener could say, "What can you do to help your father? Have you ever tried to help him before?"

**Conclusion**  
*(8 minutes)*

Summarise the four steps of active listening to support children in difficulty based on Suggested Knowledge 3

End with homework: Positively listen to your children or pupils. Before starting the next session, ask some people to share their experiences with the plenary.





Suggested  
knowledge

4

# Active listening and solving conflict

Conflict is an integral part of the life that can occur in school and at home. Adults should consider conflict, or even contradiction, as not only a problem or a threat but as an opportunity for better mutual understanding and a motivation to change for both parents, teachers and children. As conflict is unavoidable, it is both necessary and desirable to learn some skills for solving conflict.

Conflict between adults and children and, in particular, teenagers, usually relates to discipline and rules (see Chapter 4, part 2), for example, study-related issues, peer relationships, how to spend free time, housework, hygiene issues, and so on. Conflict between children, on the other hand, usually relates to study and recreation in school or at home.

Every parent or teacher will have found himself or herself in conflict with a child at some point. Ask yourselves "have you ever been a mediator for any conflict between your children or your pupils? What did you do? Was it effective? Did you encounter any difficulties?"

We can also use active listening skills to solve conflict between children. Children, too, can learn and apply this skill to enable them to solve conflict themselves.

### ***Principles for mediator in conflict solving***

1. Raising questions during the conflict solving process.
2. Careful and active listening of each child.
3. Guiding and encouraging children towards mutual listening.
4. Encouraging children to repeat what the other child said.
5. Appreciating and encouraging children's efforts in listening and communicating with each other.
6. Avoiding bias.

### ***Principles for children who need help in solving a conflict***

1. Willingness to listen.
2. Willingness to find a mutually acceptable solution.

Recall the barriers to communication mentioned in Suggested Knowledge 2, including: judgement, criticism, denigrating, dismissing, disregarding, giving advice/solution, avoiding moral lectures and avoiding excessive sympathy and pity.

Children usually find it difficult to listen to each other when in conflict. Encouraging children to perform active listening – in particular, reflecting the speaker's feelings - is critically important. In many cases, a conflict can be resolved as soon as children are able to exchange how they feel.

**Below is a four-step process to help a teacher help two students to solve their conflict:**

*Teacher: "Hi, what's happened? Do you need some help?"*

If one or both students say "no", the teacher may ask both of them to see the headmaster for solving the conflict. If both say "yes", follow the steps below:

<b>WHAT HAPPENED? (Problem identification)</b>	<p>To child 1 (if you don't know his or her name) What's your name?</p> <p>To child 1: Please tell me what happened?</p> <p>To child 2: Please tell me what happened?</p>	<p>To child 2 (if you don't know his or her name) What's your name?</p> <p>To child 2: Please repeat what (name of child 1) said.</p> <p>To child 1: Please repeat what name of child 2) said.</p>
<b>HOW DO YOU FEEL? (Reflecting their feelings)</b>	<p>To child 1: What did you feel when it happened?</p> <p>To child 2: What did you feel when it happened?</p>	<p>To child 2: Please repeat what (name of child 1) said.</p> <p>To child 1: Please repeat what (name of child 2) said.</p>
<b>WHAT DO YOU WANT? (Suggest and select a solution)</b>	<p>To child 1: What do you want (name of child 2) not to do anymore?</p> <p>To child 2: What do you want (name of child 1) not to do anymore?</p> <p>To child 1: What do you want (name of child 2) to do instead?</p> <p>To child 2: What do you want (name of child 1) do instead?</p>	<p>To child 2: Please repeat what (name of child 1) said.</p> <p>To child 1: Please repeat what (name of child 2) said.</p> <p>To child 2: Please repeat what (name of child 1) said.</p> <p>To child 1: Please repeat what (name of child 2) said.</p>
<b>SEEKING COMMITMENT</b>	<p>To child 1: Can you do this (the solution)?</p>	<p>To child 2: Can you do this (the solution)?</p>



Ask both children: "Do you promise that you will try to behave in the agreed manner?" If both say 'yes', praise and encourage them for their active listening and solution.

If one of them says 'no', ask each of them to think of what he or she wants both of them to do in order to solve the problem. Ask them to think of any initiative that both agree to be a good solution.

If both children are angry and in bad moods, the mediator should first help them to calm down before starting to resolve the conflict. When children are hot-tempered and there is someone at whom they can vent, they often try to speak as much as they can and tend to consider only their point of view. In this case, you should set up a rule about speaking in turn and listening to each other before starting Step 1: Problem Identification.



# Activity: Active listening and solving conflict

**Objective**

To practise active listening and to resolve a conflict between two children at home and in school

**Target audience**

Parents, teachers, caregivers and people who are working with children

**Time**

30 minutes

**Method**

Three person group work

**Materials**

Small things for role playing

## Process

**Step 1**

**(2 minutes)**

Arrange three chairs so that all participants can listen to and follow the activity. Ask two volunteers to play the roles of pupils or children at home who are in conflict (for example, snatching another's toy, hair pulling, fighting, assuming that one has stolen the other's pen, using the other's bicycle without getting permission).

**Step 2**

**(10 minutes)**

Follow the process in *Suggested Knowledge 4*. After finishing, ask participants if they have any questions or comments. If yes, the trainer will discuss with the whole class and give answers based on the knowledge given in section 4. Otherwise, move to Step 3.

**Step 3**

**(15 minutes)**

Divide participants into groups of three people. The groups will practice the process of resolving conflict. If time is available, each group should do all three rounds so that everyone can be the mediator at least once. If necessary, you may ask one or two groups to present their role-plays in front of the whole class. Then you may wish to give feedback

**Conclusion**

**(3 minutes)**

Active listening is a useful skill for solving conflict. Both adults and children can learn and apply this skill.

# Handout

## *I talk, you listen. The child talks, the adult listens (reference)*

- When you turn away from me or interrupt, I will feel disrespected and will not want to share my opinions.
- When you give advice, I feel that you are not in my position so do not really understand. I feel that that you have placed yourself in a higher position to me and are being prescriptive. The advice might be wrong or inappropriate.
- When you dismiss my feelings, it makes me feel bad.
- When you pity me, it makes me feel weak.
- When you agree with me, it makes me feel stronger and I will not try to solve the problem.



## *Positive listening to support children in trouble/difficulty (reference)*

**Step 1:** Give feedback (repeat) the story as well as the feelings of the speaker  
For example, the speaker says: I feel very scared when the dentist drills my tooth  
Feedback: you are scared when you have to have a tooth out.

**Step 2:** Recognising the feeling, making the listener see that their feelings are natural and acceptable. To continue the previous example, many people also have that fear. Getting a filling can be really painful.

**Step 3:** After recognising the feeling, it is time for encouragement. The listener should highlight the speaker's good points and give him or her encouragement to face his or her fears. Example: you are very brave

**Step 4:** After active listening make people feel that their feelings are acceptable and that many other people in similar situations have similar feelings, let them calm down then encourage them to try and find a solution to their problem for use in the future. For example 2: "Next time, what will you do or say to yourself?"

