

# How to

## ...listen actively



If you speak and no one listens to you properly, it can be upsetting and frustrating. Listening actively means paying attention to other people so that they feel you understand what they are saying.

How can you show that you are listening actively?

- Stop doing other things so that you can concentrate.
- Turn towards the person, so that you can see each other comfortably.
- Use eye contact and 'open' body language, such as leaning forward.
- Be quiet - if you don't interrupt, it will encourage the other person to speak.
- Nod your head and accept what they say. Use expressions like 'I see', 'Yes' and 'Mmmm'.
- Check your understanding from time to time. Say, 'So you mean...?'
- Ask 'open' questions, which will help the person express themselves.

In the distance, Clare saw the old gentleman beckoning her over. He wanted to chat to her, no doubt, but he wasn't the only person wanting attention. There were other customers. She would just go over for a quick word and then she could get on, knowing she'd made him feel better. As she approached, she hummed a bright tune to cheer herself up.

'What a lovely tie,' she said.

Alf started to speak. 'It's been...'. Clare was having none of it. 'No, don't thank me. Just you sit there and enjoy having a rest. Shopping is exhausting and I know your wife has been in here for ages.'

'But—' Alf began.

She'd gone. He looked helplessly at the nearby ladies' toilet and wondered what on earth could have happened to his wife since she went in there almost an hour ago.

### Try this!

Read the case study on the left, and answer the following questions.

- 1) What mistake did Clare make when she heard the gentleman calling?
  - a) She complimented him on his tie and hankie.
  - b) She put the needs of other customers first.
  - c) She didn't look at him.
  - d) She didn't look at him or give him time to explain his problem.
- 2) What should Clare have done first?
  - a) Said, 'What's up?'
  - b) Smiled and asked him how she could help him.
  - c) Smiled, looked at Alf and asked how she could help.
  - d) Sat down quietly beside Alf.

Avoid the following in active listening:

- giving a quick reassurance, such as 'Don't worry - it'll be fine.' This may make the other person feel that what they are saying seems trivial to you
- asking 'Why?', as this might make the person feel defensive or that you don't believe them
- telling the other person what they should do
- asking for information that the person may not wish to give
- making judgements.

### Try this!

Read the following extract and then choose the most suitable word or phrase to complete the sentences below.

Anne Warfield, author of *Communicating More Effectively*, says this about listening.

- Listening is the art of truly hearing what a person is trying to say, not just what's said. The best listeners hear the words and see the body language so they capture the whole message.
- If you learn to use active listening skills to hear and comprehend the thoughts, feelings and concerns behind the words, you'll make a speaker feel respected and also create an understanding that leads to progress and mutual benefit.
- Active listening takes concentration, effort and the ability to put your own agenda aside, for the moment, so you can understand the other person's viewpoint.

<http://12.42.224.225/healthyliving/mindbody/jan03mindbodylistening skills.htm>

#### 1) Listening is:

- a) hearing what's being said
- b) paying attention to the person's body language
- c) hearing the whole message a person wants to give
- d) an important part of communication.

#### 2) It's important to make the speaker feel:

- a) relaxed
- b) respected
- c) mutual benefit.

#### 3) It's important to:

- a) concentrate on the speaker
- b) make an effort
- c) listen carefully and try to understand the other person's point of view.