

# The Practice of True Listening - Overview and Tips

Adapted from Madelyn Burley-Allen's Listening: The Forgotten Skill

## Effective Listening Defined

(a) taking in information from speakers, other people or ourselves, while remaining non-judgmental and empathetic;

(b) acknowledging the talker in a way that invites the communication to continue; and

(c) providing limited, but encouraging, input to the talker's response, carrying the person's idea one step forward.

### **GOOD LISTENERS AVOID:**

- Stock Phrases (You'll feel better tomorrow; You shouldn't feel that way);
- Solving the talker's problem or doing the person's thinking for him/her;
- Taking the subject off in another direction;
- Personal biases and internal distractions;
- Criticizing or Judging;
- Focusing the conversation on themselves;
- Interrupting or Interrogating; and
- Overtalking, especially to fill moments of silence.

## Tips for True Listening

1. Be Comfortable with Silence: Stay in receiving mode as much as possible.

2. Be Attentive: When you are alert, non-distracted, have eye contact when possible, and offer acknowledgement cues ("Hum," "Uh-huh," "I see," "Interesting," Head-nodding, Facial Expressions that match the speaker) and invitations to say more, the other person feels important and more positive.

3. Notice Non-verbal Cues: The skilled listener hears more than the speaker's words – paying attention to pitch, rate, timbre, and subtle variations that the tone of voice is communicating. If listening in person or on zoom, physical non-verbals liked shrugged shoulders, tense facial muscles, a quivering lip, or lack of eye-contact can also convey vital information.

4. Be a Sounding Board & a Mirror: Keep an open mind as you allow the talker to bounce ideas and feelings off you while you reflect back what you think they are feeling/saying.

5. Ask Clarifying Questions: Using verbal feedback by asking what, when, where, how, who, and why can reduce misunderstanding and faulty communication.

6. Summarize: what you believe the talker said, as a check, to ensure understanding.

Matthew 18:20; NRSV  
20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

