



## How can I practice active listening?

### Discussion Guide

### Discuss

1. Henry states that one of the first steps of active listening is preparing your body for listening. What does this mean to you? What are steps you take in order to be an active listener?
2. What are some active listening skills you need to work on the most? For example, do you have trouble staying focused? Do you want to jump in and solve the problem or offer advice? Do feel compelled to share your own stories? Are you frequently interrupted by texts or phone calls?
3. Recall an instance when someone actively listened to you. Describe how the listener handled the situation, and how it made a difference for you. How did this compare to an instance when the person you talked with left you feeling more frustrated?

### Practice

The best way to improve your active listening skills is to practice. Get into listening/thinking pairs. Take turns sharing for two minutes a topic of your choice. The person listening should not say anything until the speaker has finished talking. The listener should:

**Paraphrase.** Once the speaker is finished, repeat the essence of what you heard to make sure you understood and to show you were paying attention.

**Ask questions.** If you need more information or clarity about something said, ask them to elaborate.

**Express empathy.** If the speaker exhibits some emotions or voices feelings, validate those, even if you don't understand or think they are justified. An example is, "I sense you were feeling frustrated..."

**Use engaged body language.** Show engagement by making eye contact, nodding, being relaxed and open. Avoid distractions in the environment (turn off phones, etc.). Be mindful of facial expressions.

**Avoid judgment.** The goal is to understand the speaker's experience, perspective and feelings regardless of whether you agree or not.

**Avoid giving advice.** Focus on hearing from the speaker without rushing to advice or problem solving.

Once you have completed this exercise, switch roles and have the listener speak and the speaker listen keeping in mind the above bullets.

When both individuals have had a few opportunities to share, bring the group together and discuss the following questions.

- How did you know that your partner was listening to you?
- What did it feel like to really be listened to without being interrupted?
- What made this activity challenging for you?
- How can active listening help you resolve conflicts?