
Active Listening

The Most Important Skill of a Good Mentor



People tend to think of listening as something passive, or they tend not to think about it at all. But listening is actually a skill. It is a valuable skill that can be practiced and learned.

WHEN YOU TALK WITH YOUR MENTEE, TRY TO REMEMBER TO:

- Clear your mind of unnecessary thoughts and distractions, so you can give her or him your undivided attention.
- Make eye contact even if your mentee is not looking at you.
- Be aware of your body language.
- Pay attention to your mentee's facial expressions, gestures, and body language.
- Read between the lines for your mentee's feelings. Learn to say, "how did that make you feel?"
- Ask open ended questions. Don't ask, "how was school today?" Instead ask, "what did you do in school today?"
- Paraphrase- restate in your own words what you think the child or youth has said. When paraphrasing is accurate, your mentee will feel understood. If it is off the mark, it invites him or her to clarify and also reminds you to listen more closely.
- Ask questions when you don't understand.
- Put yourself in your mentee's shoes and try to understand the world from his or her perspective.
- Acknowledge that you are listening by occasionally nodding your head and saying things like, "I see."
- Give your mentee the same respect that you desire for yourself when you are talking to someone.

HOW TO KILL A CONVERSATION:

- Tell your mentee that the way they feel is wrong, "it is silly to feel that way."
- Don't look at your mentee when speaking.
- Sit slouched over, look distracted, drum your fingers on the table, or use some other body language to signal to the mentee that you are not really interested.
- While the mentee is speaking, you are thinking about your reply. It is not possible to form your own words and concentrate on the mentee's words at the same time.
- Be judgmental and challenging. Do not put your mentee on the spot. "Why didn't you do better on the test?" "Why did you say that to her?"
- Interrupt the mentee when speaking and finish his or her sentences.