



Did you ever hear in school, “You have 1 mouth and 2 ears so listen up”! Even though one of our very first senses to develop is LISTENING, what is the first thing we are taught as babies – TO TALK. As we grow and develop we have to be taught how to listen to others and truly understand what the other person is trying to communicate with us. This is essential to being a good caregiver. We must employ **ACTIVE LISTENING** to better understand our loved ones’ needs and desires. And we don’t have to have big ears like the bunny in the picture above to accomplish this!

What is Active Listening? Wikipedia states **ACTIVE LISTENING** is the practice of being fully present and engaged when someone else is speaking. It involves listening to understand, rather than just to respond. It is one of the most important communication skills for caregivers because you are fully focused on what the person in your care is saying and feeling. It is recognizing that the conversation is more about the other person than about you.

Why is **ACTIVE LISTENING** important for you as a caregiver?

- Builds Trust.
- Reduces Misunderstandings.
- It makes the other person feel heard and valued. It shows them that they matter to you.
- Promotes Empathy.

How do I **LISTEN ACTIVELY**?

Pay attention. Give the speaker your full attention and acknowledge their message. In other words, put down the phone and tablet, ignore distractions, avoid daydreaming, and shut down your internal dialogue.

Show you’re listening. Use eye contact and body language to show you’re engaged in the conversation. Sixty-five (65%) of a person’s communication is unspoken. To show the person you’re truly tuned in, use open, non-threatening body language. This involves not folding your arms, smiling while listening, leaning in, and nodding at key junctures.

Keep good eye contact. This tells the other person that you are present and listening to what they say. It also shows that you aren't distracted by anything else around you. Follow the 50/70 rule to keep it from feeling "weird". Maintain eye contact for 50% to 70% of the time listening, holding the contact for four to five seconds before briefly looking away.

Ask questions. Ask open-ended questions (not questions with a yes/no answer) to encourage the speaker to continue. This signals a genuine interest and curiosity in the other person. Examples include:

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

What did you think about that?

What do you think is the best path moving forward?

Paraphrase. Restate what the speaker has said in your own words to confirm your understanding. Examples include:

In other words, what you are saying is.....

I'm hearing that you're frustrated with this situation.

If you'd like to better understand something the person has said, ask for clarification.

Avoid interrupting. Be patient and give them time to explain what they are thinking.

Don't try to finish their sentences for them. Listen to understand, not to respond with your own thoughts and ideas.

Listen without judgment. Remain neutral in your responses and this enables the other person to feel comfortable with sharing their thoughts. It makes the conversation a "safe zone" where they can trust they won't be blamed, criticized, or shamed.

Being an **ACTIVE LISTENER** for the person you are caring for will build their trust in you and empathy in you for their situation. The better we listen, the better we will be able to assist our loved ones as we do our very best to care for them well.

PREPARE TO CARE