

# 21 Tips On Being A Better Listener

It's not a secret. When your partner is talking to you, it's likely you're listening, but... not really. You're thinking about how to respond. It's okay - you can admit it. But in doing so, you're missing the point of listening. It's more than just hearing their words - it's hearing their tone, emotion, and context.

Taking time to reflect on what's being said reassures your partner that you care, and it's a cornerstone of effective communication. Imagine saying to them, "you're important to me," without moving your lips.

That's what you say when you listen well!

As time passes, couples become less attentive to one another. They're less sensitive to their partner's words, and expression of feelings. Being able to listen to your partner when they're afraid, hurt, sad, or angry creates a different pattern in the relationship — a positive pattern.

Also, picking up on what your partner isn't saying will be rewarding for both of you. The following listening tips require effort and practice, but you'll become a better listener because of them.

## **1. Be Present**

Being present — emotionally present — is bringing your focus into the conversation. Thoughts like "when will this be over" or "all they have to do is try this," handicaps being fully there. Being present creates the safety your partner needs to take the risk of opening up.

## **2. Pause First**

Pause before you respond. This allows you to become aware of the emotions and thoughts you're experiencing at that moment. It offers you the opportunity to consider a better way of responding.

Pausing also gives you time to reflect on your partner's words and tone. You have time to consider what they're saying which slows down those knee-jerk reactions that come from being frustrated.

## **3. Ask Open-ended Questions**

Being curious about your partner's experience shows concern. They know you're listening. It gives you the opportunity to understand what's behind their emotions, and the events that have escalated them.

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Curiosity will help avoid judging your partner's emotions as "out of control." Genuinely trying to understand can help it make sense.

## **4. Look Into Their Eyes**

Do you want your partner to know you're listening? Face them. Look them in the eyes. Doing so offers a level of engagement that suggests, "this is necessary, and I'm here for it." Your partner "feels felt" when they see you're emotionally present and responsive.

## **5. Prepare**

You can prepare for difficult conversations. Anticipating that you may not like what you hear puts you in a better position to listen better. You're less likely to turn every point your partner makes into a debate. Going in prepared will encourage imagining the situation from your partner's perspective.

## **6. Schedule a Time**

Scheduling time brings structure to difficult conversations. It helps you avoid the "I don't want to do this right now" response. Listening to your partner's feelings isn't as overwhelming when your emotions are settled.

## **7. Summarize**

Responding to what you think your partner said is common. To avoid hearing an incomplete message, it's helpful to ask: "Is there more you need to say about that?" If there's no more to say, summarize - in your own words - what you heard. And check-in: "Is that what I hear you saying?" They need to know that you get their perspective.

## **8. Validate**

Validating your partner is important. It lets them know you understand the logic behind their emotions. For example, "I see what you're saying..." or "That makes sense to me, considering..." Agreeing 100% with what your partner is saying isn't necessary, but it's critical that you "see" their experience. Your partner's experience is their reality. It's true to them. Validating their viewpoint isn't ignoring your own.

## **9. Empathy**

When your partner is expressing their emotions, try to focus on what they're feeling. Be careful not to get lost in figuring out if the facts line up. Consider what they may not be saying. Commit to becoming better at understanding their experience.

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You could say: "It seems to me you're feeling (helpless, sad, angry, hurt, exhausted...)." Check for accuracy by asking: "Is that what you're feeling?" Allow them space to correct you, if you missed it. Expressing empathy by feeling what they feel and understanding their perspective communicates "I'm listening."

## **10. Withhold Judgment**

Emotions have a purpose and they may be telling us something. Asking: "why are you crying about that" or saying: "stop being so sensitive," says to them what you're feeling isn't important. Criticizing the expression of emotions prompts your partner to feel worse for having them. Validate the emotions without trying to change them.

## **11. Let Your Partner Exist**

When you think (or say): "that reminds me of my cousin" or "I went through the exact same thing as a kid," you deny your partner space to really exist at that moment. Bringing it back to your opinions, thoughts, emotions, or experiences denies your partner the space to be different. It also brings you into focus when the focus should be on them.

## **12. Don't Get Ahead**

Thinking you've already gotten the point before they finish doesn't help. Listening is nearly impossible if you keep interrupting.

## **13. You Don't Need to Agree**

Agreeing with everything isn't necessary. You're not listening to agree, you're listening for their pain points. Listen for what's hurting them. Listen for what they need from you.

## **14. Show Compassion**

Allowing your partner to open up about their concerns shows compassion, and invites safety and trust into the conversation. Showing compassion during tense conversations can be difficult - slow down, and pause before responding.

## **15. Hold Back Opinions and Suggestions**

You don't like to see the person you love hurting. Encouraging them may be your attempt at calming them down — or easing their pain. But, it's hard to be fully present if you're thinking about the advice or encouragement they "need."

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Giving advice creates distance and interferes with what your partner needs in the conversation. Your opinions and suggestions can be discussed in a different conversation.

## **16. Take Responsibility**

Pride is a barrier to listening well. It will cause you to continue a fight even when you know you're wrong. Under the influence of pride, you're slow — excruciatingly slow — to take responsibility. You're not required to own up to all of the problem, only your part of it.

## **17. Non-defensive Listening**

This takes work. Getting defensive is understandable when you feel overwhelmed by your partner's emotions. Taking some responsibility is helpful: "Yea, I could've handled that differently."

## **18. Take a Break**

Sometimes you'll be emotionally tired during the conversation. Taking a break gives you the opportunity to calm down. During the break, do something that calms you. Go to the gym. Go to Target. Take a bath. Watch the game. Do what is necessary to return to the conversation relaxed and focused.

## **19. Look Beyond**

Being able to see beyond your partner's reactions softens your response. You're able to be more attentive to what they're really saying. You're more likely to hear the hurt underneath their anger. Or the embarrassment underneath their frustration.

## **20. They're not the Bad Guy**

It may feel that way. But your partner is not your enemy. Allow your partner to be angry, sad, exhausted, confused, or whatever emotion they're feeling. Handling difficult emotions is hard. Give them the benefit of the doubt — you know what it's like.

## **21. Are You Hungry?**

Yes, "hangry" is real. And it will negatively impact how well you listen. Eat first!

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