

Association of Scottish Community Councils



Active Listening

Facilitation Tool Kit

Introduction

Listening is something we often take for granted; of course we know how to listen! Yet to be a good listener is hard work. Because the brain works four times the rate that someone can speak, you have to actively intend to listen to understand someone's position, feelings, or attitude. Doing public involvement activities—whether interviews, workshops, or presentations—necessitates good listening and an active resistance to inserting our own opinions. As Community

Councillors who ask for input and people's responses we need to practice being a willing receiver and gatherer of information about a subject before moving to interpret it or react

to it. Especially in a controversial subject, everyone has a need to be heard to feel understood.

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- L** = Look interested - get interested
 - I** = Involve yourself by responding
 - S** = Stay on target
 - T** = Test your understanding
 - E** = Evaluate the message
 - N** = Neutralise your feelings

Definition

Making a conscious effort to hear, analyse, assign meaning to and respond to what another person is saying.

Essentials

Active listening requires expending energy. While it may seem like a passive activity, to be an effective listener requires inner discipline and processing. All too often, distractions, attitude, or personal biases interfere with the ability to clearly hear what someone is saying. Likewise, listeners tend to decide what the outcome is going to be and how they feel about it. This kind of judgmental awareness can prevent seeing alternatives. Non-judgmental awareness is being open to different and new ideas. The act of listening should make a person tired; it requires that much energy and attention.



- Changing body positions can help stop a drifting mind and enable greater concentration.
- It takes lots of practice to be a truly good listener.

How to Listen

1. Focus on the Speaker

Establish—and keep—eye and face contact with the speaker. Reinforce what is being said is being heard through non-verbal facial expressions. To paraphrase an old saying, good listeners are like poor boxers: they lead with their faces.

2. Use Receptive Language

Follow and encourage the speaker's train of thought by using receptive language; e.g., "I see," "Hmmm," "Un huh," etc.

3. Listen for Key Words

It takes continuous action to focus on the essence of the information being shared. The listener's mind should be actively gathering, sorting, sifting, evaluating, synthesizing, and ordering the data.

4. Respond

Verify with the speaker about the essence of what was said, especially if the thought is being captured on a flipchart or electronically for future reference. Ask questions for clarity but be cautious that the questions are not leading. Never, unless expressly requested, give an opinion on the presented information.

Listen Well If.....

- You need to gather information such as during a focus group or workshop.
- You need to challenge expectations and perceived opinions, whether your own or someone else's. Active listening can open new possibilities and ideas.



Do Not Use If....

- You are asked for your professional opinion, advice or direction. (The receiver should be 'listening well'!)

Degrees of Active Listening

