

# Building Healthy Relationships: Learning to Listen

Grade  
**7**

## Alberta Education Health & Life Skills Program of Studies Outcomes

The student will...

R - 7.5 Examine the characteristics of healthy relationships, and develop strategies to build and enhance them.

### Teacher Background

Communication is key to having healthy relationships, and becoming a good listener is one key element of communication. Many teens are eager to express their own ideas, but may not have developed skills to hear what the other person has to say. Learning to listen is an important skill and one that will benefit teens into adulthood.

### Objective

By interviewing each other, students will learn and practice three primary listening skills:

- Paying Attention
- Active Listening
- Staying Neutral

### Materials

- Each student requires a paper & pencil
- Sticky notes for each student
- Handout: *Guide To Good Listening*
- Poster paper or whiteboard with the following headings:
  1. Non-verbal communication: paying attention
  2. Non-verbal communication: inattention
  3. Active listening



## Get Ready

- Ask students: Why is learning to listen important?
  - To gather information
  - To understand another’s point of view
  - To enjoy others
  - To learn new things
- Ask students to name someone who they think is a good listener. Brainstorm why they chose that person - What makes them a good listener? How does it feel when someone listens to you?
- Ask students “What is the goal of a good listener?”
  - To hear and understand what the other person is saying
- Remind students that communication is key to healthy relationships and that they need to learn not only how to express themselves effectively but also how to listen attentively to other people. It is a learned skill that requires practice.

## Activity 1: Exploration: Do You Think You Are A Good Listener?

- Ask students to pair up (preferably with someone they don’t know well).
- Instruct students to interview each other on one topic from the list below: (List these questions on poster paper, as they will be used in another activity)
  - Use of cell phones/i-phones in the classroom
  - Parents allowing teens to have their own cell phone
  - School dress codes
  - Closed campus at lunch break
  - Use of backpacks in school
  - Social networking versus in-person conversation
- Discuss the following questions with the class:
  - To the interviewers: What was it like to interview your partner? What made it hard to listen? What made it easy?
  - To the interviewees: What were some things the interviewer did that showed that they were listening? What were some things they did that made you think they were not listening?

## Activity 2: Three Key Elements of Good Listening

### Paying Attention

- Tell students that one of the elements of good listening is the non-verbal cues they project to the other person.
- Break the class into groups of 5-6 students each. In their small group, ask students to use sticky notes to list different forms of non-verbal communication that signals to another that they are paying attention to what is being said. Once completed, assign one student from the group to put their sticky notes on a large poster paper labeled “Non-Verbal Communication: Paying Attention”.
  - Non-verbal communication gives the speaker signals that you are paying attention without interrupting what the other person is saying.
  - Examples of non-verbal signals: nodding your head, maintaining eye contact, facial expressions that are congruent with what the speaker is saying (smiles, grimace, pucker, frown, etc.), sitting up straight, leaning towards speaker, uncrossing your legs and arms.
- In the same groups, have students do the same exercise except, this time, listing non-verbal communication that conveys inattention or disrespect. Once completed, assign one student from the group to put their sticky notes on a large poster paper labeled “Non-Verbal Communication: Inattention”.
  - Many times, people are unaware that their non-verbal actions communicate inattention or disinterest.
  - Examples of non-verbal signals that show inattention or disinterest: shrugging your shoulders, looking away from the speaker, crossing your arms and/or legs, sitting slouched over, rolling your eyes, tapping your fingers, walking away.

### Active Listening

- Another element of good communication is active listening. Active listening is a way of eliciting information and emotions from the speaker. The more someone knows about a person, the more information they will have upon which to build a relationship. Plus, everyone wants to feel heard!
- In the same groups, have students provide examples of active listening on another poster paper labeled “Active Listening”. Examples are listed below:

- Open-Ended questions

These type of questions require more of an answer than a yes or no. They encourage the speaker to say more about a subject. The following examples should help teens understand the concept:

Closed: Are you feeling bad today?

Open: How are you feeling today?

Closed: Do you think he/she likes me?

Open: How do you think he feels about me?

Closed: I think it's okay to date when you're 12, don't you?

Open: When do you think it's okay for a teen to date?

Summarizing:

- Summarizing is a process whereby the listener checks to make sure they are hearing what the speaker is saying. This is done by paraphrasing what the speaker has said or by summarizing the main points from time to time. For example:

Speaker: I wish I could date, but my parents say I need to wait until I'm 16 years old.

Listener: It sounds like you are frustrated because you can't date until you are 16.

### **Staying Neutral**

- Ask students if they have ever been in a conversation that turned into the other person taking over with their own thoughts and opinions. How did it make them feel? Remind students that stating one's opinion or offering advice without being asked is a sure way to kill conversation and jeopardize the relationship. For example:

Speaker: I wish I could date, but my parents say I need to wait till I'm 16.

Listener: That's stupid. My parents don't care if I date.

### **Activity 3: Tapping Into the Three Key Elements of Listening**

- Have the students choose a new partner. Let them decide on a new topic from the list provided in Activity 1 that they will use to interview their partner. Allow enough time for both students to interview. Remind them to conduct the interview keeping in mind the principles of listening just discussed.
- Following each interview, instruct the students to provide each other feedback regarding their use of the key elements of effective listening by going through the checklist in their handout "Guide To Good Listening".
- Optional: Introducing a Talking Stick. The person who is speaking starts with the stick. When that person feels like they are done, the listener restates in his/her own words what he/she heard. If the speaker is satisfied with what the listener reiterated, then they pass the stick.

- At the end of the Activity, ask the group:
  - How they felt in each role (speaker and listener). Is one role easier for them than the other?
  - Do they think they know their partner better because of the exercise?
  - How do they see this activity connecting with their real life?

## **Conclusion**

Communication is key to any healthy relationship and being a good listener is one element of communication. There are 3 listening skills: paying attention, active listening and staying neutral. Practicing these skills will enhance one's relationships now and into the future.

## **Take Home Activity & Follow-up Classroom Discussion**

Provide each student with a letter to the parents (template provided) to take home. Review the letter with them. Remind students to bring the completed checklist back to school for classroom discussion.

Ask the class to share the feedback they received from their parent following their interview.

## **Assessment Strategy**

- Students will complete the Take Home Activity with a family member/significant other.
- Students will contribute to the follow-up classroom discussion.
- Students will be able to identify the 3 key listening skills and provide examples for each.

# Guide To Good Listening

| <b>Paying Attention</b>  | <b>Active Listening</b>   | <b>Staying Neutral</b>   |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ nodding head</li><li>✓ making eye contact</li><li>✓ facial expressions that match what the speaker is saying</li><li>✓ sitting up straight</li><li>✓ leaning toward speaker</li><li>✓ uncrossing legs and arms</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ open-ended questions (questions that require more than a yes/no answer)</li><li>✓ reflection (listener checks to make sure they are hearing what the speaker is saying)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ limiting the expression of their own thoughts and opinions</li><li>✓ not offering advice without being asked</li></ul> |

Dear Parents:

**As part of our lessons on mental wellness, we are learning about becoming good listeners.**

- Communication is key to any healthy relationship and becoming a good listener is one key element. We are learning that many of us are eager to express our own ideas, but not necessarily eager to hear what the other person has to say. Learning to listen is an important skill and one that will benefit teens into adulthood. We encourage you to participate with your son/daughter in the following activity:
- Your son/daughter will be interviewing you using the following question:  

**What are your thoughts and opinions regarding teens and their use of technology?**
- After the interview, fill out the table below with your son/daughter. Provide them with positive feedback and some examples of how they could have listened better. Talk together about how you felt during the interview. How does this activity connect with your family life?
- Did your son/daughter use any of the following listening skills:

| <b>Paying Attention</b>   | <b>Active Listening</b>  | <b>Staying Neutral</b>  |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ nodding head</li> <li>✓ making eye contact</li> <li>✓ facial expressions that match what the speaker is saying</li> <li>✓ sitting up straight</li> <li>✓ leaning toward speaker</li> <li>✓ uncrossing legs and arms</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ open-ended questions (questions that require more than a yes/no answer)</li> <li>✓ reflection (listener checks to make sure they are hearing what the speaker is saying)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ limiting the expression of their own thoughts and opinions</li> <li>✓ not offering advice without being asked</li> </ul> |