



COOL IT DOWN!

Be a better listener

Use words and gestures to say, “I hear you!”

You speak to two friends. One remains silent, with a faraway look in her eyes. The other person butts in all the time. Talking to such people can be frustrating. Neither listener is helping you to communicate. For a good conversation, knowing how to listen is as important as knowing how to speak.

When people do not listen properly, all sorts of things can go wrong. Friends quarrel, gangs attack each other and communities even go to war because of misheard messages. If all people were better listeners, we would have more peace in this world.

Good listeners know how to hear and also to respond with the right words and actions. Here are five ways to become a better listener.

Focus on hearing. Pay full attention to every word. Look for clues like facial expressions that give you a fuller picture. Don't do anything distracting – like playing on your smart phone – while listening. Also, listen without thinking about what you are going to say in reply.

Show that you are listening. Face the speaker; make eye contact. Nod your head and say “uh-hum”, “uh-huh” or whatever comes naturally to you to show that you are listening. Use brief, relevant words such as “**how sad**”, “**that’s amazing**”, “**great**” and “**oh, no!**” to let the speaker know that you are following the story. You can demonstrate your interest by asking, “**And, then what happened?**”

Know when to speak. Responsive listeners wait for the right time to say something – they do not barge in. If you really can't wait for the other person to finish speaking, then say something like “**Excuse me for interrupting.**”

Check your understanding. When you are not sure whether you understand, repeat the message in your own words and ask whether you've got it right. Before giving your reworded version, you could ask, “**Is this what you mean?**”

Affirm the speaker. To affirm means to encourage someone by telling him something good about him. Even when you disagree, affirm the speaker first.

Mention something that you liked in what he said. If you can't find a single plus point, make general statements like **“that’s interesting”** or **“you’ve given me a lot to think about”**.

To soften your strong statements, end by asking, **“What do you think?”** That, too, is affirming because you are saying that the person’s opinion matters to you.

Express your thoughts. When you feel like sharing your thoughts, go ahead. It is alright to disagree and to take a stand. But, avoid putting down anyone. Try this formula: start by affirming the other person, then express your view, and end off on a positive note.

For instance, one of your friends suggests cheating on a test because both of you need higher grades. You could reply, **“Yes, you’re right. We do need higher marks. But, cheating is wrong. I won’t cheat. Come, let’s think of a better way.”**

Do you see how the first two sentences affirm your friend? The next two sentences take a strong stand against cheating. And, the last sentence is positive and kind because the **“us”** in **“Let’s”** includes your friend.

Practice these skills and they will come naturally to you when someone speaks to you. However, using the right words and gestures works only when you sincerely want to hear what other people have to say. To be a good listener, you have to truly value having people who want to talk to you.

A GREAT LISTENER



Oprah Winfrey’s television talk show ran for more than 20 years and made her one of the world’s richest and most influential women. She came from a humble background and did not seem very different from ordinary folk. Many people wondered at the secret of her success. Experts who have studied her interviewing style say that one thing that made her special was her listening skill. After all, to ask good questions you also need to listen carefully to the person you are interviewing. When talking to people, she tried not to be too judgmental – even if

she did not think highly of a person, she tried not to show it. This could be tough, because she interviewed many people who had done horrible things. She treated all people as human beings with both positive and negative sides to their characters.

[Photo: Bill Ebbesen]

Activity

LET'S PLAY...

GET READY: Read "Be a better listener". Use the points mentioned there to make a list of Do's and Don'ts for good listening.

Five Do's	Five Don'ts
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

GET SET: Pick a crowded place such as your school's canteen during recess. Settle down at a table that gives you a close-up view of students chatting.

GO! Observe people. Using the table above, look for the do's and don'ts people commit when listening to one another. Jot down what you see. Stop when you have found one example for each of the eight do's and don'ts.

THINK ABOUT IT. In what ways did this activity help you to become a better listener?

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Thank you. — News For Kids, 5 April 022