



Listening Summary

Why Listening?

Your child's/teen's success depends upon their ability to listen and understand what you and others are communicating. Listening skills can support your child's/teen's ability to engage in healthy relationships, to focus, and to learn.

Tip These steps are done best when you and your child/teen are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and actively building a healthy parenting relationship will support these steps.

Step 1. Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *"What does it mean to truly listen to someone?"*
- *"How do you know that the person is truly listening to you?"*
- *"How do you show that you are truly listening?"*
- *"What are ways to convey that you are listening to someone?"*
- *"How do you feel when someone doesn't listen to you?"*

Tip During a family meal, explore the question: *"What does it take to listen well?"* Allow each family member to respond. Model listening by allowing each person to complete their thoughts without interruption or judgment.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model listening while interacting with your child/teen. Notice your body language. Ask: *"How am I demonstrating that I'm listening? What am I doing that I want my child/teen to do?"*
- Listen for thought and feeling. In addition to listening to the content of what your child/teen says, also see if you can identify the unspoken thought and feeling behind the content.

- Learn listening strategies together by trying them out.
 - Get curious. Don't stop asking questions when you get one word answers. Try: *"Say more, what was fine about it?"* or *"What was difficult about today?"* or *"What went well?"* or *"Let's start at the beginning,"* or *"What made you laugh today?"* Don't give up!
 - Find opportunities to share. Model what it is like to share about your day. If your child/teen asks you how your day was, be sure to not respond with a superficial or one-word answer. Engage them about a conflict you had or a struggle you faced. See if they can help offer suggestions.
 - Actively listen. One person listens to fully understand what the speaker is saying and waits until the speaker is finished talking before responding.
 - Paraphrase. Echo back to the speaker a summary of what they've said to check how accurate your listening is and also to confirm that you have heard them (*"I heard you say that..."*).
 - Seek clarification. If you are listening with the intent of learning something from the speaker, seeking clarification on details is important to make certain you understand. *"What did you mean when you said you were upset at school? What happened?"*
 - Practice questioning and commenting with empathy. Instead of responding to a speaker with your own experiences, focus solely on the content of what has been communicated. Your child: *"Today Mrs. Smith started a new writing project. We get to write an essay on any topic we are interested in. I can't wait."* You: *"Sounds like you are excited about this project. That's great! What thoughts have you had about what topic you are going to choose?"*

Tip As your child/teen gets older, it can be challenging to entice them into meaningful conversations. "Fine" might be all you get in response to *"How was your day?"* So, turn down the car radio. Hang around them without your phone. Offer plenty of chances to listen when they are ready to talk.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow to Skills and Develop Habits

- Use "Show me..." statements and ask them to demonstrate listening. You could say, *"Show me a few different ways you can convey that you are listening as we talk about our day."*
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements: *"I notice how you listened fully to your sister and didn't interrupt her. That's so helpful to her."*
- Offer practice by using riddles, discussing song lyrics/short clips, playing Twenty Questions.
- Read together. When you read stories together, you engage in a listening activity that can be deeply connecting for both of you.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's/Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions to actively see how your child's/teen's listening is going. *"I notice that you are having a hard time listening to me as I tell you about my day. What do you think is going on for you?"* or *"What are things you might need to do or say to yourself to help yourself listen?"*
- Learn about your child's/teen's development. Each new age will present different social challenges.
- Stay engaged. Working together on ideas for new and different listening strategies can offer additional support and motivation for your child/teen when tough issues arise.
- Engage in further practice. Create more opportunities to practice when all is calm.
- Apply logical consequences when needed.

Trap When your child/teen does not listen to you or is clearly focusing elsewhere, you might be tempted to scold or nag but be sure and give them additional chances. Everyone loses focus sometimes. Seek clarification on what they heard and did not hear, and then review what you said again to help them refocus their attention.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. *"I notice you not only listened to your sister, you conveyed to her what you understood about what she said. I know that makes her feel cared about. That's so important."*
- Recognize small steps along the way. Find small ways your child/teen is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Include hugs, high fives, and fist bumps as ways to appreciate one another.

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