

Listening: Small Shifts That Make a Big Difference

Good listening isn't just about hearing words—it's about making people feel seen, valued, and understood. When we listen well, we build trust, reduce misunderstandings, and create a culture where everyone feels safe to communicate.

Listening goes beyond spoken conversations—some people communicate more through behaviour, body language, writing, art, or assistive communication tools. The best listeners learn to tune into all the ways someone might be expressing themselves.

Quick Wins You Can Use Today

Before the Conversation: Creating Space for Listening

Pause before responding

Give yourself a moment to clear distractions before engaging.

Minimise competing noise

Where possible, reduce background noise or move to a quieter space.

Use non-verbal cues to show openness

An open posture, a relaxed face, and eye contact (if comfortable) help set the tone.

During the Conversation: How to Show You're Really Listening

Give your full attention

Put your phone down, turn toward the person, and focus.

Use more silence

Give people time to process and respond without rushing to fill gaps.

Reflect back what you hear

"It sounds like you're feeling frustrated about..."

Ask open-ended questions

Instead of "Are you okay?" try "What's on your mind?"

Match their energy

If they're speaking softly, respond in a calm tone. If they're excited, engage with enthusiasm.

Watch for non-verbal cues

Facial expressions, fidgeting, or withdrawal can all communicate emotions.

Beyond Words: How to Listen Without Verbal Conversation

Notice changes in behaviour

A usually talkative student who suddenly goes quiet is telling you something.

Tune into body language

Crossed arms, fidgeting, or avoiding eye contact can signal discomfort.

Use assistive communication tools

Support those using AAC, picture cards, or written communication.

Acknowledge non-verbal responses

Nods, gestures, or facial expressions can be just as meaningful as words.

Respect silent forms of communication

Some people process best through writing, drawing, or even movement.

Create space for silent connection

Sitting quietly with someone can sometimes say more than words.

After the Conversation: Reinforcing That You Heard

Follow up when possible

A simple *"I was thinking about what you said earlier..."* shows care.

Acknowledge what was shared

Even a short *"Thanks for telling me"* builds trust.

Respect non-verbal communication

If someone shares through actions rather than words, respond in kind (e.g., a reassuring smile or small supportive gesture).

One Small Challenge

Choose **one of these quick wins today** and notice what happens. **Great listening isn't about doing more—it's about being fully present in the moments we already have.**

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