

Be a better listener



At **Include** we love to **talk, sing and sign** with each other. We also try to work on our **listening skills**, whether we are online or in person.



We **share stories** and find out what happens at people's **work, hobbies or home**. It can be **funny** things, **surprising** things and even **sad** things. We listen to them all.



Our member **Josh helped** us with this resource. He is a really good listener. We hope these tips will **help** show you **how** to be a **good listener** – or an even better one!



Have you heard about **The Big Listen?** On **24th July each year**, Samaritans raise awareness of their [24 hour, 7 days a week listening service](#) and also encourage people to become better listeners.

This guide is based partly on Samaritans' SHUSH listening tips. You can learn more on their website at samaritans.org/shush

How to be a more active listener: Show that you care



When **someone** is **talking** to **you**, it is **important** to pay attention and show that you are **listening**. Make sure your **phone** is **away**. Try to **see each other's face** *and hands*, especially if **signing** is used.



When you're having a chat pay attention to **body language** and **facial expressions** – what is this communicating?



Try not to **interrupt** or tell your **own story** when you're **being spoken** to. **Wait** until the other person is **finished** and ready to **move on**.



Listen carefully so that you **learn at least one new thing** about the person - something that helps you get to know them better. **Try to remember** it.

Be patient



It's **important** that the other person **trusts** you **not** to **judge** or **make fun** of them – just to **listen**.



Try not to **rush** the **conversation**. This can make the person **feel uncomfortable** and **unsafe**.



It is also **important** not to **assume** how the other person is **feeling**, or make them **think** their feelings are **wrong**.



They **don't** have to **answer** all the **questions** that you ask. They might **choose** to answer them **later on**.



Sometimes if people have **stopped talking** they are **processing** what you have said, or **thinking** about **what** they want to **say** back. A **pause** can be good – try to feel comfortable with it.

Adapt your question style



You may need to **vary your style of questions** depending on who you are listening to, or what mood they are in. Work out **which approach helps** the person express themselves.



Sometimes offering a **closed question**, that leads to a simple '**yes**' or '**no**' answer will **build trust** and get the conversation going. You can then **ask** them to **tell you more**.



Open ended questions can be good but might take some people **longer** to **think** about. Its **important not to rush** the person you're taking to.

Some people struggle to answer open questions and need you to offer you a **choice of possible answers** (maximum 2 or 3).



Some people will benefit from having **objects / pictures or symbols** to help them express themselves - as finding the right words can be very difficult.

Say it back



Repeat back what the person **said** to you to make sure you **understood** what they've told you.



Try not to give any **advice** or tell someone **what to do**, unless they **ask**. This can be **hard** sometimes especially if you are **trying to help**.



The **person** will know you were **listening** and **paying attention** if you are able to **go back over back** what they said. Try to **summarise in your own words** so people know you have really understood and aren't just copying their words.



Understand

You can run through their main points to **check** you haven't **misunderstood** or **forgotten** anything.

Have courage



If you find it **hard** at first that's **ok**, **don't give up**. It's **ok** if you **don't know** what to **say**, you can be **quiet** and **think** as well.



At first it can be **difficult** to **ask** people **how** they are **feeling** but it will get **easier** the more you do it.



Some people **don't like** to talk about their **feelings** and that's ok too. If you are **friendly**, they might **come back** and **talk** to you when they are **ready**.



There are **loads** of people out there that are willing to **listen** to **you** as well. No one is **alone**.

Know when to ask for help



It's not your job to solve everyone's problems. It's ok to **ask for help**. You are an important link in a chain of support.



You can **suggest** where the person might find the **right support**, or you can **ask** someone else - if you have **permission**.



If, while listening to someone, you **think** they, or someone else could be in **danger**, make sure you **tell someone** who can help, (even if the person you have listened to **asks** you **not** to).



You can find out more about **safeguarding** [here](#). Professional organisations and charities should have **someone who leads on keeping people safe**. You can ask who that is.

Set yourself a goal



Becoming a **better listener** can help you support **loved ones**. It can also help **improve your relationships** with **family, friends, and colleagues**.



This guide has covered lots of things. **Start with a small change**. Could you decide to do one of these things:

- Listen **without being distracted**
- Listen **without interrupting**
- **Check in with loved ones more** often and ask them how they **really** are
- **Wait your turn** when chatting in a big group
- **Be patient** and ask further questions if needed
- **Repeat back** what has been said to check understanding.

