

Worksheets – Socialising (4): Active listening**Lead-in game: The Power of Active Listening****Student A**

You are going to talk for two minutes about a time when you didn't know anybody and had to try to build relationships with strangers. Your story could be a success (i.e. how you managed to build relationships) or a failure (i.e. how you failed). If you can't think of a true story, use your imagination to invent one.

Use some of the following ideas to help you plan your story. Remember: you will need to speak for two minutes.

- Where were you? Why were you there?
- Who were the other people?
- Why didn't you know anyone?
- What did you do? Did it work?
- How did you feel?
- What did you learn?

Student B

Student A is going to tell you a story for two minutes. You are going to try to change student A's mood just by the way you listen to the story. Here's how you're going to do it:

- For the first minute, listen to student A's story, but don't react in any way. Just look at student A with a neutral expression on your face.
- For the second minute, gradually start to appear more interested in student A's story, so that by the end of the second minute you seem to be fascinated.

Student C

Your job is simply to watch your classmates as they take part in an experiment. You have to work out what the experiment is, and how effective it is.

Be ready to report back to the class on what you observed.

Active listening quiz

1. What are the differences between the ways you listen and respond in the following situations?
 - a. You have met someone for the first time, and are finding it difficult to keep the conversation going.
 - b. You are engaged in a good conversation with someone you've just met.
 - c. A friend is telling you a personal story, such as a sad or unpleasant experience.
 - d. A boring person is telling you a dull story, and showing no interest in giving you the chance to speak.

2. Imagine you are a counsellor or therapist. When one of your clients is telling you a personal story, what is the best and the worst thing to do with ...
 - a. ... your face?
 - b. ... your head?
 - c. ... your hands?

3. What "listening noises" can you use to encourage the other person to keep talking? Are there any dangers with these listening noises?

a. Really?	e. Right.	i. Oh.
b. Mmm.	f. I see.	j. Uh-huh.
c. Wow!	g. Go on.	k. A-ha.
d. OK.	h. Oh dear.	l. Oh no!

4. Imagine you are a counsellor or therapist. Your client has just finished telling you about a problem they have had. What is the best way to respond?
 - a. Explain what the person did wrong, e.g. *Do you know what you did wrong?*
 - b. Suggest a solution to the problem, e.g. *I think you should ...*
 - c. Tell a story about a similar problem you once had, e.g. *A similar thing happened to me a few years ago. I was at the ...*
 - d. Comment on the story, e.g. *That must have been really disappointing.*
 - e. Ask for more details, e.g. *Where did this happen?*
 - f. Summarise the story in your own words, e.g. *So, in other words, ...?*
 - g. Ask about the underlying reasons for someone's behaviour, e.g. *Why do you think she behaved like that?*
 - h. Ask about the speaker's emotional reaction, e.g. *How did that make you feel?*
 - i. Explain that you know how the other person feels, e.g. *I know exactly how you feel.*

Active listening quiz – Commentary

1. In situation (a), you will probably need to ask as many questions as possible in order to encourage the other person to talk. You should resist the temptation to fill the conversation with your own monologue. In situation (b), you can relax, and bring in more of your own stories. A nice strategy is to find things that you have in common with the other person. This is very different from situation (c), where you should listen and encourage the other person to speak, and keep the conversation focused on that person for as long as he/she feels the need to speak. Of course, listening to another person speaking for too long can be very boring, so if you find yourself in situation (d), you'll need to find a way out, either by turning the monologue into a dialogue, or simply by making an excuse to walk away. Just make sure you do it in a way that doesn't upset the other person.
2.
 - a. Eye contact is very important – if you start looking around the room, it's a clear sign that you're not really listening. You can also show that you are concentrating on the other person's story by furrowing your brow, i.e. tightening the muscles above your nose.
 - b. Nod your head slowly to show that you are listening. Don't nod too fast – it makes you look impatient for the other person to finish. You can also try tilting your head at an angle to show that you are curious.
 - c. Keep your hands still while you are listening – it might help if you're holding something like a cup of tea. And whatever you do, don't fold your arms – it shows that you are closed to what the other person has to say.
3. All of these listening noises can be good or bad, depending on how you say them (your intonation or tone of voice) and the situation. Neutral sounds such as *mmm* and *uh-huh* are safest, as they show you are listening without expressing an opinion. *Go on* is useful for encouraging the other person to continue. Most of the other listening noises can be said in at least two ways: an emotional way to express surprise (e.g. *Really?*, *Wow!*, *A-ha!*) or disappointment (e.g. *Oh dear*, *Oh*, *Oh no!*) or in a neutral way, expressing understanding without an emotional judgement. In general, this neutral way is better if you want to encourage the other person to speak. *OK*, *right* and *I see* can show that you're listening, but they are also often used to show that you want to move the conversation forward, i.e. that you have heard enough, so be careful with your intonation.
4. Of course, the 'best way to respond' will depend on lots of factors, such as the personality of the other person and the type of story they have told. But for many people, it can be very annoying to receive advice (a) or, even worse, criticism (b), when in fact all they really wanted was someone who would listen to their story. The best way to show that you've really been listening is to paraphrase the most important parts (f). Another very common mistake is to turn the other person's story into a story about yourself (c). As discussed in question 1, there's a time for finding things in common, and a time for staying quiet and listening. It's better to show that you are trying to understand the other person's feelings (d) rather than relating everything to yourself (i). Questions are a good way of showing you've been listening, but the speaker may be frustrated if you only ask fact-based questions (e). It's better to ask about emotions (h) or, to encourage the speaker to think about the reasons for what happened.

Therapist game

Tell me about a time when you were scared.	Tell me about a time when you failed (e.g. an exam).	Tell me about a time when you felt unwelcome.
Tell me about a time when you were late, and everything seemed to go wrong.	Tell me about a time when you were angry with someone.	Tell me about a time when you were disappointed.
Tell me about a time when someone was angry with you, but it wasn't your fault.	Tell me about a time when you were embarrassed.	Tell me about a time when you had an accident.
Tell me about a time when someone was rude to you and you didn't know why.	Tell me about a time when you felt guilty.	Tell me about a time when you lost something important.