

Listening so people feel heard

Easy · 10 min to read · Free

Listen for the feeling, not just the facts. Let them finish, restate what you heard ("It sounds like..."), ask a question to understand, and name the feeling you're picking up. Hold off on advice, rebuttals and your phone until they feel understood. In research, people who got this kind of listening felt more understood than people who got advice.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Your phone out of sight ☐ 10 quiet minutes

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Set it up.** Find a quiet place without interruptions and invite them to share what's on their mind.
- 2 **Show you're with them.** Make eye contact, nod, face them and keep an open, relaxed posture. Don't check your phone, and watch for facial expressions that look disapproving.
- 3 **Listen for feeling words, the situation and their body language.** Ask yourself, "If I were going through this, what would I feel?"
- 4 **Encourage them: "Can you tell me more?"**
- 5 **Paraphrase when they finish a thought: "What I hear you saying is...," "It sounds like...," or "If I understand you right..."**
- 6 **Ask instead of assuming: "When you say ___, do you mean ___?" or "When did this happen?"**
- 7 **Reflect and validate the feeling, even if you wouldn't feel the same way: "You seem really upset" or "I can see this is important to you".**
- 8 **Sum up before moving on: "So the main things are... and what you want is...".** Then ask whether they want ideas or just needed to be heard.

Watch out Don't rush to advice. Problem solving works better after both people feel understood. Don't interrupt with counterarguments or plan your rebuttal while they talk. Listening without judging or blaming is part of a healthy relationship.

DAD NOTE *Most people don't need you to fix it. They need to know you got it.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/people/clear-communication/listening-so-people-feel-heard/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: Greater Good Science Center, UC Berkeley; Kansas State University Counseling Services; UCSF Office of the Ombuds; National Institutes of Health.