



In times of crisis, we usually find comfort in the connection we have with others. Unfortunately, in this crisis, we must maintain the discipline to practice social distancing. That is, avoid any unnecessary gathering. In all likelihood, most of our connections over the next few weeks will be happening electronically. We must do all that we can to heighten the quality of communication.

Active Listening

For close relationships, we need to use the phone, Skype, Zoom. That is, we need to make an effort to hear each other's voices and, if possible, to also see each other, to further enhance the quality of communication.

I will describe an approach called Active Listening. When you first try it, you will likely feel a little awkward. This is normal because it's different from what you're accustomed to. After you try it, you will probably appreciate the result. Here are a few pointers on how to do it.

Taking turns

First, you need to keep in mind that the two of you need to take turns, one being the Talker while the other is the Listener. And then you'll switch.

In ordinary life, we tend to multitask. That is, we prepare our own arguments while we are listening. This might work well enough in everyday conversations, but it is not enough when there is more emotional content. So you need to make a plan. For instance, if you're going to be talking for half an hour, you decide that one of you is going to be the Talker for the first 15 minutes, and the other will be the Talker for the next 15 minutes. An effortless way to avoid any feelings about who starts is to toss a coin.

Focused on understanding

The second point is that the Listener needs to be focused on trying to understand the Talker. Keep in mind that, if you understand somebody, it does not mean you have to give up your own opinion. As the Listener, you are just trying to understand the Talker's point of view from their point of view. You don't have to agree.

Summarizing

The third characteristic of Active Listening is that, as the Listener, you give the Talker a summary of what you've heard. You don't wait until the full 15 or 20 minutes to do that. You do it every couple of minutes. Sometimes it could be just a minute or so. There's a natural rhythm that the two of you develop over time.

Taking it in

The fourth characteristic is that the Talker pays attention to the summary and takes it in. The Talker either nods in approval, says yes, or amends it by adding something that was not picked up by the Listener.

By the way, it's quite OK if the Talker adds something to what you, the Listener, have said. Very often, this helps the Talker better understand what it is that was important to them. So, either way: either the Talker keeps nodding to what you're saying, or it's an opportunity for them to find something else. In both cases, it's fine. And you continue this way: talking, listening, summarizing, taking it in, until the end of the allotted time for the Talker. Then, you switch.

Pausing

The fifth characteristic of Active Listening is that it involves pausing. This is not a rapid-fire, *yackety yack*, type of conversation. Pausing allows the new, the unformed, to come up. This is what this kind of communication is about.

So, as the Listener, you take a pause before giving your summary to the Talker. As the Listener, you don't jump in every time the Talker pauses. You give them a chance because maybe they're just waiting to say something more. As a Talker, don't feel like you have to fill the air with words. It's OK if you take time without words while you're trying to sense what comes up next.

You don't have to do it right

A final point about Active Listening is that you don't have to do it right. The format encourages thoughtful give-and-take as part of the process. Over time, the two of you will learn, by trial and error, better ways to do Active Listening.

© 2020 Active Pause®. All rights reserved. The source (ActivePause.com) should be properly cited when these contents are used in any form.