



Tuning in – Actively listening to young people

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Being a caregiver and/or educator of children and adolescents can be a daunting task. The intentions we have to be the best adult role models for our younger populations is often sound, but sometimes the application of this intent is somewhat flawed or misguided. How can we give young people the best of ourselves?

One theme that comes up repeatedly in my work with families and educators is the importance of active-listening. It is a skill-set that often can repair and improve relationships between adults and youth rapidly, when the key principles are applied.

As the name suggests, active listening is active in its intent, not passive. We have what I call ‘surface’ level listening. Where we skim over the information we are hearing, but we do not delve any deeper, and we don’t see any reason to do so.

Surface level listening is perfectly valid for day to day listening tasks, such as listening to the radio while driving, but when it comes to relationships, especially with young people, we often need to be better tuned in to what is being communicated.

Key Benefits of Active Listening

Active listening demonstrates to young people:

- They are worthy of your love, care and attention;
- You are interested in what they have to say;
- You are willing to learn and understand the young person’s viewpoints and perspectives;
- You respect them

Implementing active listening can assist with conflict, address misunderstandings and foster a deeper acceptance, trust and connection.

How to Tune in and Implement Active Listening

- Remove distractions when possible, turn off the tv, put down your phone, pull over when driving. Your undivided attention sends a positive and powerful message of interest.
- Focus on the present moment, if your mind wanders bring it back. Practising mindfulness exercises can help with this aspect.
- Concentrate on what the young person is saying and on their non-verbal behaviour as they are speaking.
- Try not to interrupt until there is a natural pause to speak, also allow for silence when needed.
- Ask clarifying questions; How are they feeling? What do they need?
- Aim to be empathetic and considerate of the young person's experience.
- Avoid being predictive in what you think they will say next, you may be right or wrong, either way does not matter, you might miss information, whilst thinking of your own reasoning.
- Check and show your understanding by summarising the key points of what is being said. Example: You are hurt that Felix didn't invite you to his party this weekend, when your other friends are invited, I can understand that would be upsetting.

- Checking for understanding is an effective way of encouraging the young person to keep talking and provide you further insight and information.
- Avoid judgemental language and subjective viewpoints. Example: Well, Felix is just a bully, who cares about his dumb party!
- Avoid personal disclosure and opinion unless it is asked for. Shared experiences can be helpful, but not always, they can remove focus away from the young person.
- If the young person asks for support/help be willing to discuss and develop solutions together.
- Check in. When needed, do a gentle wellbeing follow up check in the hours or days ahead.
- If the issue is serious or not resolving, seek further professional support to assist.

Stay well in heart and mind,
Sophie

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