Active Listening to Support Wellbeing

This resource offers a practical guide to active listening - a skill that can be used for everyday conversations at work and at home.

PSP | Leaders | Supporters | Tip Sheet | Active Listening

5 - 7 min read

Introduction

Listening is more than hearing words. It is a skill that helps us understand, support, and connect with others. This resource introduces active listening and provides practical strategies to strengthen communication and relationships.

How to Use

Use the active listening strategies in this resource during everyday interactions to help build connection, understanding, empathy, and compassion across the public safety community.

Who It's For

- Public safety leaders and supervisors
- Public Safety Personnel (PSP)
- Families, partners, and supporters of PSP

General Uses

- Routine check-ins at work or at home
- Conversations after a difficult call, shift, or long day
- Early signs of stress, withdrawal, frustration, or concern
- Parenting moments, family conflict, or emotional check-ins

Active listening is especially useful early, before concerns turn into crises.

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Why Listening Matters - At Work and at Home

Public safety work involves ongoing exposure to pressure, responsibility, and experiences that most people never encounter. Over time, this can affect communication, coping, and relationships—both on the job and with family. When people feel heard without judgment, pressure, or minimization, they are more likely to:

- Share concerns earlier
- Stay connected rather than withdraw
- Seek support when needed

Supportive listening sends a clear message: Stress reactions are human responses to demanding situations—not personal failures.

Steps for Active Listening

1. Pay Attention

Give the speaker your full attention.

- Minimize distractions
- Maintain appropriate eye contact
- Be present, even if the conversation is brief
- **Pause paper work and put down your phone when someone is speaking**

2. Show That You're Listening

Use body language and small verbal cues.

- Nodding, calm tone, open posture
- Short acknowledgements ("I hear you," "Go on")
- **Allow the speaker to finish without interruptions**

3. Summarize First, Then Ask

Reflect what you heard before asking questions.

- Use simple, non-clinical language and summarize what you just heard
- Focus on meaning and emotions, not details
- ***"It sounds like the pace has been wearing you down, not just one call."***
- ***"From what I'm hearing, your day was pretty overwhelming, not just frustrating."***

4. Defer Judgment and Fixing

Resist the urge to:

- Minimize ("That's just part of the job")
- Compare ("Others have it worse")
- Solve problems too quickly

Listening is often most helpful before advice or solutions.

- **Allowing silence so a worker can continue**
- **Sitting with discomfort before offering reassurance**

5. Respond with Respect and Boundaries

Acknowledge the effort it takes to speak up.

- Be clear about what you can and cannot help with
- Offer support, not pressure
- ***"I'm really glad you told me."***
- ***"We can figure out next steps out together."***

"I didn't need advice. I just needed to know I wasn't being judged for how I was feeling."
— PSP peer voice

What Active Listening Sounds Like

Try These Responses	Avoid These Responses
"I'm glad you shared that."	"At least it wasn't worse."
"That sounds heavy."	"You'll be fine."
"Do you want advice, or would it help if I listened?"	"Here's what you should do."

When Listening Needs to Shift to Support

Listening alone is not enough if someone shares:

- Feeling hopeless or trapped
- Thoughts about self-harm
- Difficulty coping safely

In these situations, it's best to . . .

- Pause problem-solving
- Focus on safety and connection
- Reach out for additional support

Key Reminder

Listening is a skill - not a fix.
You don't need the right words or full understanding of public safety work to listen well. Being present, respectful, and non-judgmental can make a meaningful difference.



References

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