

## Student Assistance and Outreach ❖ Resources

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### Listening Skills: A Guide for Faculty and Staff

Listening skills are essential in any interpersonal relationship and in all interpersonal communication. Good communicators know the importance of listening and they know listening is more important than speaking.

As you work with students, be aware that ordinary conversations can emerge on a deeper level because listening helps students feel worthy, appreciated and respected. Listening skills fuel our social, emotional and professional success. Here are some tips on how to be a better listener:

1. Pay Attention: Give the student your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.
  - Look at the student directly.
  - Put aside distracting thoughts. **Be aware of distractions such as your phone or computer.**
  - "Listen" to the student's body language.
2. Show That You're Listening: Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.
  - Nod occasionally.
  - Smile and use other facial expressions.
  - Make sure your posture is open and inviting.
  - Encourage the student to continue with small verbal comments like 'yes', and 'uh huh.'
3. Provide Feedback: Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.
  - Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "Sounds like you are saying," are great ways to reflect back.
  - Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say..." "Is this what you mean?"
  - Summarize the student's comments periodically.
4. Defer Judgment: Do not interrupt. It frustrates the student and limits full understanding of the message.
  - Allow the student to finish each point before asking questions.
  - Don't interrupt with counter arguments.
5. Respond Appropriately: Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
  - Assert your opinions respectfully.
  - Treat the student in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated.

It takes concentration and determination to be an active listener. Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself frequently that your goal is to truly hear what the student is saying. Set aside all other thoughts and behaviors and concentrate on the message. Ask questions, reflect, and paraphrase to ensure you understand the message.