Listening so people feel heard

How to listen so the other person knows they have been understood.

Feeling heard is one of the things people want most from those close to them. Good listening is a skill. It depends more on paying attention than on saying the right thing.

The basics

1. **Stop what you are doing.** Phone down, screen off, turn towards them.
2. **Let them finish.** Hold back your own story, your advice and your defence.
3. **Show you are with them.** Nod, "mm", "go on".
4. **Reflect back what you heard.** "So what you are saying is..." "It sounds as if..."
5. **Check the feeling.** "That must have been frustrating."
6. **Ask open questions.** "What was that like?" "What happened then?"
7. **Ask what they need.** "Do you want ideas, or do you want me to just listen?"

Blocks to listening

- Interrupting
- Jumping in with advice
- "That is nothing, wait till you hear what happened to me"
- Defending yourself before they finish
- Planning your reply
- Checking your phone

What helps

- Staying quiet a bit longer
- Summarising in your own words
- Naming the feeling
- "Tell me more"
- Tolerating silence
- Asking before advising

When it is about you

Listening is hardest when you are the one being complained about. Try to hear the whole thing first. "Let me check I have got this right..." You can give your side afterwards. Understanding is not the same as agreeing.

Try this

Once this week, in a conversation with someone close, do nothing but listen and reflect back for five minutes. No advice, no stories of your own.

What I noticed

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