

our everyday life

How to Listen Without Judging

by Shelley Frost ; Updated March 15, 2018



Listening without judging requires an open mind.

Listening without judging isn't always easy. For most people, it takes lots of practice, but it's an important skill that can improve your communication. Withholding judgment while you listen to others means you can truly hear them with an open mind. Your friends and family feel better supported, and people around you are more likely to open up when they know you aren't judging as they talk.

Be Aware of Judgment

Most people don't set out to be intentionally judgmental, but it's a natural instinct to do so. You have your preconceived notions of how the world should work and what people should do. When you listen to someone talk, you automatically compare what comes out of the person's mouth with the ideas that are ingrained in your mind.

Being aware of the fact that your mind naturally makes judgments is the start of breaking the cycle. Set out to intentionally listen without making assumptions. If you notice yourself thinking the person is wrong or should do something differently, calm that inner voice and refocus on what the person is saying. This isn't easy and takes practice, so don't give up if you find it difficult.

Use Active Listening Skills

Very often, people only half listen to the person who is talking. Instead of fully engaging, you're already making judgments and thinking of how you're going to respond. You may miss out on important details or subtle hints that give more information about what the person is actually saying.

Improve your active listening skills, so you can focus completely on the message without jumping to conclusions while the other person talks. Hold eye contact with the person. Listen without interrupting or offering solutions. Try to imagine how the speaker feels, picking up on subtle hints and nonverbal cues to understand the emotions involved. If you're unclear on something, wait until the speaker pauses before asking clarifying questions.
Be Empathetic

When you hear someone talk, you typically analyze the words from your perspective. But it's important to remember we're all a little different. We don't all see things exactly the same way. Instead of listening from your own perspective, try putting yourself in the other person's shoes and listening from that point of view.

Say your friend is dealing with a spouse who treats her poorly, says mean things to her and generally hurts her self-esteem. From your perspective, his behavior is completely unacceptable, and she should leave him. But you're not taking into account her position. She loves this person very much. She may have lots of good times with him, too. She may be dealing with the fear of being alone. When you consider how she's feeling, you can start to understand why it's not so easy to just leave.

Being empathetic to the person's situation and point of view can help you open your mind while listening. Remember that everyone's experiences and journeys are different.

Consider Your Own Flaws

It's easy to judge other people when you think they're making the wrong choice. Everything seems black and white when you aren't personally and emotionally invested in the situation. Selling a house that you can't afford instead of falling behind on bills seems logical, but parting with a home that holds so many memories is difficult when you're the homeowner. Leaving an unhealthy relationship seems like the obvious decision, but it's more challenging when you also have lots of good memories and emotions tied to the other person.

No one makes right decisions all the time. Everyone has lapses in judgment or gets caught up in the emotion of situations. If you find yourself judging someone else who is talking about a problem, remind yourself that you've been in plenty of situations in which others could have judged you. Remembering that the person you're talking to is a human just like you can help you withhold judgment.