

ACTIVE LISTENING

When listening to your partner, it is not enough to just not talk and nod your head. Your brain must be actively engaged. If you do not “actively listen” you really are not communicating in any beneficial way. Communication is two way, even if one person is doing most of the talking. Active listening involves paraphrasing, clarifying, and giving feedback.

Paraphrasing

When your partner says something to you that is important, you should state in your own words what you think they are saying. This is the most important part of listening. To lead-in to your paraphrasing you can say something like: 1)“What I hear you saying is that ...2) In other words...3) Let me get this straight...4) So you feel5) If I understand you correctly....6) Do you mean ...7) Would you say that ...”

Some of the benefits of paraphrasing are:

Preventing most listening blocks.

Correcting false assumptions and misinterpretations on the spot.

Giving your partner the priceless gift of being **heard** and acknowledged.

Angry feelings are kept from escalating.

You will remember better what was said.

Clarifying

Paraphrasing leads to clarifying. When clarifying you tell your partner what you thought he/she said, find out your were wrong, and start asking question to clarify. When you phrase your questions it is very important to remember that the **intention** is to learn, understand, enjoy and help. The intention is not to interrogate, pressure him/her to seeing

your point of view, to blame or belittle, or manipulate in any way. Asking questions will help you understand the shades of meaning, depth of feeling and get a broader idea of what your partner is trying to convey. Ask the facts: who, what, where, why and how. Also, ask: “How do you feel about that?” or “What were you thinking then?”

Feedback

After you have listened, paraphrased, and clarified with appropriate questions, you have the chance to give “feedback” to your partner. Feedback is your own reactions to what you understand and heard. To give feedback, you calmly relate, without judgment, your own thoughts, feelings, opinions, desires and so on. You share your inner thoughts and feelings *about what your partner conveyed* to you without falling into “communication roadblocks” (giving advice, arguing).

Feedback accomplishes three things. 1) it is another chance to check out your perceptions with your partner, so that he/she can correct any misconceptions. 2) Your feedback gives your partner information about the accuracy and effects of his or her communication. 3) Your partner gets the benefit of your fresh point of view.

Good feedback is immediate, honest and supportive

- *Immediate* means you give feedback right away, not waiting for an hour or a day to find a better time etc.
- *Honest* means you give your real reaction without fear of offending, or need to manipulate or holding back your own feelings.
- *Supportive* means your honesty does not become brutal. You soften negative opinions without destroying the person. For instance: Say “I think you may have made a mistake” instead of, “You really blew it didn’t you?” Or, you might say, “I’m feeling insecure about your leaving” instead of, “I’ll die if you leave me.”

Matthew McKay, Patrick Fanning, & Kim Paleg, *Couple Skills*