

Listening Skills

1. Make good eye contact with the person or persons speaking. This shows you are interested in what is being said. (If you are speaking to someone with a hearing loss, get his or her attention before you start speaking).
2. Look interested. Try not to let your mind wander or think about how you will respond. (When your mind wanders, so do your eyes and we know you have lost your attention).
3. Don't interrupt. Try to let the other person finish speaking before you speak. (You may be surprised to learn that what you were sure he or she was going to say is something entirely different).
4. Provide feedback. This can be verbal or just a nod or smile.
5. Don't monopolize the conversation. Allow the other person to speak. (For a person with hearing loss, monopolizing the conversation is compensating for the hearing loss and they don't have to strain to hear as long as they are talking. People who do this might need a hearing test).
6. Focus on what the person is saying. What is the main idea? What are the specific details? (If I know the subject, it helps to be able to read your face much like reading the title of a book. If the title gives me a clue to what's inside I can better understand what you are going to say).
7. Ask insightful questions. Ask the speaker to clarify a conflicting idea or expand on a point. Ask for examples. This shows you are listening and you may actually learn something. ("Huh" is not an insightful question).
8. Listen for meaning behind the words. The speaker may be expressing joy, sorrow, fear, anger or love. Facial expressions and body language are clues. For instance if a person says 'my mother died today' you would expect a sorrowful expression and perhaps drooping shoulders and tear stains. It is not a good idea in that case to answer "how nice!"
9. Watch your body language. You may be telling me more than you know.

Barry lives in Banning California, and is the Vice President and founder of Hearing Loss Association of Beaumont, California.