



TOOL 3.9: The 12 Steps to Becoming a Better Listener

This tool is made for you to use continuously over time to remind you of things you should be doing to listen *well*. It is an active tool, meaning you should *read* and then *do*. Read through the steps once. Then try them out in practice when you talk to patients, or anyone! You can always improve your listening skills. Use this tool to figure out where to start.



- 1) Stop talking



- 2) Put yourself in the patient's shoes so you get a deeper understanding of where they are coming from. Try to understand what is driving them to say what they are saying.



- 3) Focus on using inviting body language if you're having a face to face conversation with a patient. Inviting body language includes making eye contact, uncrossing your arms, and turning your shoulders so you're facing the patient when they talk.



- 4) Avoid thinking about what you're going to say next. This will only distract you from what the patient is saying.



- 5) Be open-minded and try not to pass judgment on the patient.



- 6) Stop doing other things — all other things — while someone is speaking to you. Don't do other things even if you're talking over the phone and they can't see you. Doing other things will distract you and cause you not to listen.



- 7) Similarly, reschedule the conversation (if possible) if you can't stop what you were doing. The conversation will be a waste if you are trying to do more than listen at that moment.



- 8) Whether you are talking to a patient in person or on the phone, try 'active listening' techniques to let them know you are listening. When you nod and verbally agree as appropriate, the patient will feel encouraged.



- 9) Take what is being said at face value and don't try and find a "hidden" meaning in what the patient says.



- 10) Don't interrupt.



- 11) Summarize and repeat what you heard when it's your turn to talk.



- 12) Summarize what you think they told you. Ask for clarification to get a better understanding of what was said.