

# Practitioner and Parent Practice

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**Active Listening:** Connect with a partner through empathy and understanding.

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**Time Required:** 10 minutes

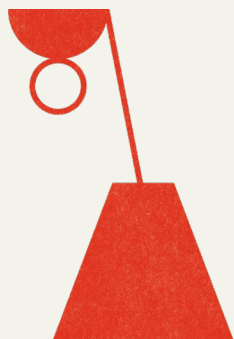
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First, try this step-by-step activity for yourself and then guide the parents you support through the practice. During and after the activity, take a moment to pause and notice your thoughts, sensations, and feelings. Guide the parents you work with in doing the same.

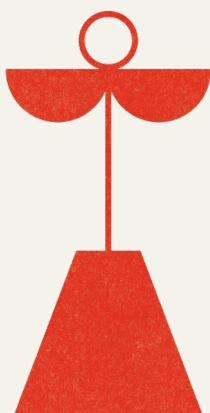
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## Why you should try it



This exercise helps you express active interest in what the other person has to say and make them feel heard—a way to foster empathy and connection. This technique is especially well-suited for facilitating constructive conversations across political, cultural, or other differences. When there’s a power imbalance between people of different groups, it’s more important for the person with less social power to give their perspective while the person with more social power listens and tries to take their perspective.



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## Why it works

Active listening helps listeners better understand others’ perspectives and helps speakers feel more understood and less threatened.<sup>46</sup> This technique can prevent miscommunication and spare hurt feelings on both sides. Active listening can make relationships more enduring and satisfying by improving communication and preventing arguments from escalating.

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## How to do it<sup>47</sup>

Find a quiet place to talk with a conversation partner without interruption or distraction. Invite this person to share what's on their mind. As they do so, try to follow many of the steps below.

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- 1 Paraphrase.** Helpful ways to restate include “What I hear you saying is...,” “It sounds like...,” and “If I understand you right...”
- 2 Ask questions.** Try to avoid jumping to conclusions about what the other person means. Instead, ask questions to clarify their meaning.
- 3 Express empathy.** For example, if the speaker expresses frustration, try to consider why they might feel that way. Respond with support and understanding, regardless of whether you think that feeling is justified or whether you would feel that way if you were in their position.
- 4 Use engaged body language.** You can show that you are engaged by making eye contact, nodding, facing the other person, and maintaining a relaxed body posture.
- 5 Avoid judgment.** Your goal is to understand the other person's perspective and accept it for what it is, even if you disagree with it.
- 6 Avoid giving advice.** Problem-solving is likely more effective after both partners understand each other's perspective and feel heard.
- 7 Take turns.** After the other person has had a chance to speak and you have engaged in the active listening steps above, ask if it's OK for you to share your thoughts and feelings. When sharing your perspective, express yourself as clearly as possible using “I” statements (e.g., “I feel overwhelmed when you don't help out around the house.”).