

BE A GOOD LISTENER

Here are some tips to be a good listener to yourself so you can be a good listener for others.

1. **Check inside:** "How am I feeling just now? Is there anything getting in the way of being present for the other person?" If something is in the way, decide if it needs to be addressed first or can wait till later.
2. **Feeling your own sense of presence:** extend it to the other person with the intention to listen fully and openly, with interest, empathy, and mindfulness.
3. **Show you care:** focus on the other person, shut out any distractions, make eye contact, put away your phone.
4. Silently note your own reactions as they arise - thoughts, feelings, judgments, memories. Then return your full attention to the speaker.
5. **Say it back:** reflect back what you are hearing, using the speaker's own words when possible, paraphrasing or summarising the main point. Help the other person feel heard.
6. **Use friendly, open-ended questions:** that need more than a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer, to clarify your understanding and gently probe for more. Use follow up questions like 'Tell me more'.
7. **Affirm before you differ:** Acknowledge the other person's point of view – acknowledging is not agreeing! - before introducing your own ideas, feelings, or requests.
8. **Don't interrupt :** or offer a solution unless invited
9. **Give them space:** don't feel you have to fill the silence - it gives time for thought and contemplation.
10. **Be patient:** it may take time and several attempts before the person is ready to open up - if that's what they want to do.

HOW TO MEDITATE

This meditation focuses on the breath, not because there is anything special about it, but because the physical sensation of breathing is always there and you can use it as an anchor to the present moment. Throughout the practice you may find yourself caught up in thoughts, emotions, sounds - wherever your mind goes, simply come back again to the next breath. Even if you only come back once, that's okay.

1. **Sit comfortably.** Find a spot that gives you a stable, solid, comfortable seat.
2. **Notice what your legs are doing.** If sitting on a cushion, cross your legs comfortably in front of you. If on a chair, rest the bottoms of your feet on the floor.
3. **Straighten your upper body** - but don't stiffen. Your spine has natural curvature. Let it be there.
4. **Notice what your arms are doing.** Situate your upper arms parallel to your upper body. Rest the palms of your hands on your legs wherever it feels most natural.
5. **Soften your gaze.** Drop your chin a little and let your gaze fall gently downward. It's not necessary to close your eyes. You can simply let what appears before your eyes be there without focusing on it.
6. **Feel your breath.** Bring your attention to the physical sensation of breathing: the air moving through your nose or mouth, the rising and falling of your belly, or your chest.
7. **Notice when your mind wanders from your breath.** Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places. Don't worry. There's no need to block or eliminate thinking. When you notice your mind wandering gently return your attention to the breath.
8. **Be kind about your wandering mind.** You may find your mind wandering constantly—that's normal, too. Instead of wrestling with your thoughts, practice observing them without reacting. Just sit and pay attention. As hard as it is to maintain, that's all there is. Come back to your breath over and over again, without judgment or expectation.
9. When you're ready, gently lift your gaze (if your eyes are closed, open them). Take a moment and notice any sounds in the environment. Notice how your body feels right now. Notice your thoughts and emotions.

MINDFUL LISTENING



How often do you feel really listened to?

How often do you really listen to others?
(Be honest.)

All too often we are distracted from the moment and don't listen to others as we should. People feel cared for when they feel someone is really listening to them.

We know we're in the presence of a good listener when we get that sweet, affirming feeling of really being heard. But sadly it occurs all too rarely. We can't force others to listen, but we can improve our own listening, and perhaps inspire others by doing so.

Good listening means mindful listening. Like mindfulness itself, listening takes a combination of intention and attention. The intention part is having a genuine interest in the other person – their experiences, views, feelings, and needs. The attention part is being able to stay present, open, and unbiased as we receive the other's words – even when they don't line up with our own ideas or desires.

Paradoxically, being good at listening to others requires the ability to listen to yourself. If you can't recognise your own beliefs and opinions, needs and fears, you won't have enough inner space to really hear anyone else. So the foundation for mindful listening is self-awareness.

Mindfulness is living in the present moment and putting space between ourselves and our reactions, breaking down our conditioned responses. When we lose awareness of the present moment, our minds get stuck in maladaptive ways of thinking which hinders our ability to adjust adequately or appropriately to the environment or situation.

Here's how to tune into mindfulness throughout the day:

Set aside time - it doesn't have to be long.

Observe the present moment as it is.

The aim of mindfulness is not quieting the mind, or attempting to achieve a state of eternal calm. The goal is simple: to pay attention to the present moment, without judgment. Easier said than done, we know.

Let your judgments roll by.

When we notice judgments arise during our practice, we can make a mental note of them, and let them pass.

Return to observing the present moment as it is.

Our minds often get carried away in thought. That's why mindfulness is the practice of returning, again and again, to the present moment.

Be kind to your wandering mind.

Don't judge yourself for whatever thoughts crop up, just practice recognising when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.

It's often been said that this is a very simple practice, but it's not necessarily easy. The work is to just keep doing it. Results will accrue.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a technique aimed at focusing the mind to achieve a relaxed, non-judgmental awareness of your thoughts, feelings and sensations in the present moment.



Whenever you bring awareness to what you're directly experiencing via your senses, or to your state of mind via your thoughts and emotions, you're being mindful.

THE BENEFICE OF STOURDENE

*Ettington, Alderminster, Halford,
Pillerton Hersey with Pillerton Priors,
Newbold on Stour with Armscote,
Butlers Marston,*