



# How to Be an Active Listener

You know the phrase, “In one ear and out the other”? All too often, this approach qualifies as “listening.” But you need to be more intentional as a facilitator, actively hearing, processing, and responding to what your Connect Group members say. Not only will doing so allow you to ask engaging follow-up questions and keep the conversation alive, but it will help you get to know your members better. Here are some tips to become a strong active listener:

1. **Make eye contact.** Don't let yourself get distracted by other things. Show the speaker they have your full attention and that you care about what they're saying by facing them and maintaining consistent eye contact.
2. **Give nonverbal affirmation.** When the speaker says something you agree with, give them positive affirmation through a nod or smile. This will give them confidence and create a more positive group atmosphere.
3. **Shut down your internal dialogue.** Don't daydream or think about what you're having for lunch tomorrow. Give the speaker your undivided attention so you can process what they're trying to say. Try to put yourself in their shoes and understand where they're coming from.
4. **Don't interrupt unless completely necessary.** You may want to make a follow-up point or include a personal story that affirms what the speaker is saying, but interrupting could hurt the speaker and discourage future sharing. Try to remember your point until they're done talking, or just keep it to yourself for another time. The exception might be if someone is saying something offensive or Biblically inaccurate, at which time you can gently and kindly provide correction.
5. **Ask follow-up questions.** Follow-up questions not only keep the conversation going, but they prove you're listening to your members and value their answers. As a group member speaks, intentionally focus on what they're articulating and try to formulate questions that will get them to share more. “Can you tell me more about that?” or “That's interesting. What makes you say that?” are examples of ways to get the speaker to expound.
6. **Say thank you.** Don't do this every time someone speaks, but express your appreciation several times throughout the meeting, particularly when someone shares something personal. Thank them for their openness and insight.
7. **Paraphrase answers.** Ensure you understand the speaker's point by saying, “In other words, what you're saying is...” or “I think you're saying \_\_\_\_\_. Is that correct?”
8. **Validate feelings.** Use positive phrases to encourage the speaker. Consider phrases like:

- “I can see why you feel that way.”
- “That’s a great point.”
- “That’s really tough.”

Even simple expressions like “hmmm” or “uh huh” can validate what someone is saying and encourage them to continue.