

Positive Listening Skills that Erase Negative Habits

1. When communicating with my partner, I will be aware of when my partner is upset.
 - **DISCUSSION HINT:** Underlying emotions are predominantly conveyed through nonverbal cues (i.e. facial expression, tone of voice, posture). Look and listen. Only after you truly see and validate someone's feelings can you thoughtfully consider the real meaning behind their words.
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "We want people to feel with us more than to act for us" (George Elliot).
2. Even when I am excited or upset, I will focus on my partner and listen.
 - **DISCUSSION HINT:** When you feel strong emotions rising, take an internal pause for emotional regulation (i.e. deep breaths with slow exhales, mental counting). Make eye contact and focus on the words your partner is saying, not the emotions you are feeling. Self-control is key to collaborative solutions and shared hope.
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "Better to be patient than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city" (Proverbs 16:32 NLT). "I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them" (Oscar Wilde).
3. When my partner speaks, I will give my partner my undivided attention.
 - **DISCUSSION HINT:** Giving the gift of your undivided attention is the quickest and most powerful way to let your partner know you care. Focused attention avoids all kinds of misunderstandings. So, look at your partner, not your phone, not the T.V., and certainly not the time!
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say" (Bryant H. McGill). "You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time" (M. Scott Peck).

4. I will pay more attention to what my partner means than to how the message is conveyed.
 - **DISCUSSION HINT:** Evaluate the heart of your partner's message, not their public speaking skills. Understanding the "what" is more important than the "how".
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "The most basic of all human needs is to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them" (Ralph Nichols).
5. I will ask questions to clarify what I don't understand.
 - **DISCUSSION HINT:** Asking clarifying questions demonstrates genuine interest, helps you better understand your partner's perspective, and creates a safe space for open, honest communication without judgment.
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge" (Thomas Berger).
6. I will listen for my partner's main ideas and not get lost in the details.
 - **DISCUSSION HINT:** Details? They're the rabbit trails that lead you astray. Especially when time is ticking or decisions are urgent, ditch the distractions. Focus on the main event – your partner's core message, even if it's lurking beneath the surface. Practice summarizing key points to ensure understanding.
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out" (Proverbs 18:15 NIV).
7. I will listen for something of value in what my partner says even if I don't agree with everything my partner says.
 - **DISCUSSION HINT:** Do not let disagreements become walls; build bridges instead. Within every differing perspective lies a nugget of value. Seek it out, appreciate it, and watch your potential battleground transform into a shared space. Facilitate the conversation further by finding common ground.
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking" (George S. Patton).

8. I will wait without interrupting until my partner is through, then I will pause, think and respond.
- **DISCUSSION HINT:** Interrupting is disrupting and corrupting. Waiting shows respect, avoids misunderstandings, and captures the full message. Give your partner space to finish and yourself time to reflect. Try passing an object or setting a timer (e.g. 2-5 minutes) to signal who listens; no interruptions allowed.
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "The biggest communication problem is we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply" (Stephen R. Covey). "The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause" (Mark Twain).
9. I will communicate an understanding of my partner's thoughts and feelings before stating a contrary opinion.
- **DISCUSSION HINT:** Reflect back what you heard, using phrases like: "It sounds like you're feeling...", "What I'm hearing is..." Validate your partner's feelings first. By showing that you understand, you are showing respect, building trust, and making your partner more at ease and receptive to differing opinions.
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "When you listen generously to people, they can hear the truth inside themselves, often for the first time" (Rachel Naomi Remen).
10. I will not change the subject until either my partner is finished, or we agree to change the subject.
- **DISCUSSION HINT:** Imagine sharing your innermost feelings, only to have the channel changed abruptly. That is the sting of a premature topic shift. It cuts off the voice and silences the soul. However, lingering in your partner's emotional space shows genuine interest; you hear their heart and build a bridge of connection.
 - **MOTIVATION TIP:** "The most precious gift we can offer anyone is our attention. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers" (Thich Nhat Hanh).
11. When my partner criticizes me, I will recognize and admit to anything that is true.
- **DISCUSSION HINT:** When stones of criticism are thrown, what if you catch the single diamond of truth? What if you face the perceived attack, not with a shield, but with strategic openness? You're not conceding defeat; you're claiming the power to transform, demonstrating self-awareness and a willingness to grow.

- **MOTIVATION TIP:** “Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise” (Proverbs 19:20 NCV). “We all need people who will give us feedback. That’s how we improve” (Bill Gates). “A gentle answer turns away wrath. But a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1 NASB).

12. In conversation with my partner, I will listen more than I speak.

- **DISCUSSION HINT:** Want to know the most potent love potion? Active listening. It's a sincere demonstration of love, a magnetic force that pulls you closer, a promise whispered without words.
- **MOTIVATION TIP:** “Love without demonstration is on life support” (Arthur K. Robertson). “Fools do not want to understand anything. They only want to tell others what they think” (Proverb 18:2 NCV).

13. I will observe my partner’s facial expressions (without staring) while my partner speaks.

- **DISCUSSION HINT:** Six basic facial expressions (anger, happiness, fear, surprise, disgust and sadness) are readily recognized across very different cultures. Learning to read the transparent language of the face is easy and can dramatically improve your ability to connect with others.
- **MOTIVATION TIP:** “The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said” (Peter F. Drucker). “To understand another person, you must first be willing to listen with your eyes” (Unknown).

14. I will notice the nonverbal messages given by my partner's eye movements and body language.

- **DISCUSSION HINT:** Eyes have been called the “windows of the soul” because they reveal the heart. Eye movements and body posture provide insights into the emotional undercurrents of a conversation. Observe these nonverbal cues with a curious, non-judgmental approach and a desire to understand.
- **MOTIVATION TIP:** “The eye is the lamp of the body” (Jesus in Matthew 6:22 ESV). “The body projects the thoughts of the mind and cannot be hidden” (Sigmond Freud).