



Student Handout

## NCFE Counselling Courses

<https://learn.lifecharity.org.uk>

### Active listening

Active listening means using a set of skills that encourage the person you are listening to to talk, to help them feel heard and understood. It is called “active” because you intentionally do things to help them feel able to talk, and because you engage with all your attention on what the speaker is saying, how they are acting, and how they are feeling.

#### Some active listening skills are:

**Using minimal encouragers** – small signals or words that let the speaker know you are listening and understanding – words like “uh-huh”, “yes”, “no”, “mmm”, and little actions like nodding that show you are engaged in listening.

**Using open body language** – helping make the speaker feel comfortable and safe with you.

Repeating back some of the speaker’s words, or a phrase, to help prompt them to say more.

**Paraphrasing** – putting what the speaker says into your own words.

**Summarising** – putting in a nutshell, in a sentence or two, what the speaker has been talking about over an extended period.

**Mirroring the speaker** – adopting aspects of their body language, voice tone and language to develop rapport and help them feel more at ease.

**Reflecting** – picking up on the speaker’s feeling or mood and feeding your perceptions back to them.

**Using silence** – so that the speaker has a respectful space to stay with their feelings and to work up to what they want to say.



# life

**Questioning skills** – when and how to use questions to help the speaker to open up and tell you more.

In the context of interpersonal and counselling skills, active listening involves a focus on feelings – helping the speaker get in touch with their own feelings, and being aware of what feelings are around for you in the process. This can help the focus move from the surface issue, to underlying issues.

In listening actively, you are not trying to solve the speaker’s problems, nor to have “words of wisdom” to give them. Rather you are helping them get in touch with, and work through, the feelings that are at the root of what is going on for them, and in doing so enable them to work out for themselves what they may want to do about it. Only the speaker can really be sure what’s best for them.