



# #WeAreListening

## Here's how you become a good listener

A CORRESPONDENT

Is there anything more irritating than an inattentive listener? Imagine telling a story, but the only reaction you are met with is your audience staring at their phones.

That scenario isn't new to any of us. Doesn't it feel like everyone, including ourselves, is too preoccupied with something else, almost all the time?

The culprit in these situations is almost always the little touch-sensitive friend in our hands. Yes, the devices which have been created so smart, so ingenious, they're almost to the point of diabolical, and stealing away every bit of attention we have only for itself.

But it's also our classes and dissertations, the mental space occupied by it, spending hours staring mindlessly at the abyss that is the traffic to reach our destinations – all of which pushes being there for our friends to the backseat. When so much of every day spreads us all too thin, how can we prioritise those in our lives who genuinely need our attention?

All too often, we are victims of poor listening practices. But no more. With these handy tips, we too can become master listeners. Here are some dos and don'ts:

### FIND POCKETS OF TIME TO CHECK UP ON FRIENDS

If we have someone in our lives we know might be going through something, to be there for them is a choice we have to make. But what happens when our schedule is packed to the brim?

Utilise time spent in traffic, or weekends when we're not doing anything, to give them a call or ask them to hang out. Keep in mind: it's important to not probe the person. More often than not, if they are willing to open up about their problems, they will do so on their own accord. Sometimes, just being with someone or engaging in activities together does the trick.

If someone does ask for our time and we are too busy at the moment, being gentle when saying a different time works better for you is always better than to leave a conversation with a refusal.

### BE OPEN TO CONVERSATIONS

When someone is trying to open up to us about something they may be experiencing, it's good to give them the space to express themselves. This doesn't mean that they should be the only one speaking – a conversation is a two-way street.

One thing to remember in any conversation is that it's an opportunity to learn

about something we didn't know before. As part of the conversation, it's also up to us to contribute and ask questions, and steer the conversation forward.

### FOCUS ON THE SPEAKER

By being present in the very moment, we can put our focus entirely on the speaker. Blocking out other engagements for that time can do wonders to be there for our friends when they need us.

The key is to understand what the speaker is feeling and allow them the space to unburden. Paying attention to their bearings, body language, tone, etc. can contribute to that understanding by a mile.

With some of the things we can do to be effective listeners out of the way, let's focus on the things we should avoid:

### DON'T HAVE EXPECTATIONS

Having expectations from a conversation means having some preconceived notions about the situation the person could be in. Even if we are very close to the individual, human emotions are complex, and may go on different tangents at different times. Rarely can we expect to know how someone may feel or react in a given situation.

It's very easy to become judgemental if we go into a conversation with expecta-

tions. That's the last thing a good listener needs to be – judgemental. Keeping an open mind and being the quiet help for the speaker entails having zero expectations on what the person is going through.

### DON'T THINK ABOUT WHAT TO SAY NEXT

This takes the focus away from the speaker and our roles as listeners become counter-productive. Not only does this hinder us from giving our full attention to the person who is speaking, by listening to only respond does little justice to someone who chose to reach out to us.

### DON'T LET THOUGHTS WANDER

Let's face it, we're all guilty of losing concentration on all fronts in our lives. Becoming absent-minded can make the person we're talking to feel irrelevant and small, and further add to their discontent. But refraining from getting distracted is not an easy task. So how do we stay in the moment?

We can start by acknowledging the power we have in helping someone with their emotions. We hold a tremendous ability to empower and embolden the person who wants to open up to us. This realisation can help us stay focused on the person in front of us, and listen with intent.