Mindful Listening

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“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

- **In a world where electronic communication is the norm and people are more disconnected from one another than ever, mindful listening is paramount.**

- **What is mindful listening?**
  - Listening with empathy and curiosity while being fully present without interruption or criticism.
  - Differs from active listening in that it engages the listener to monitor their own thoughts, reactions or feelings to improve focus and minimize distraction.

- **Key concepts of mindful listening:**
  - Empathy
  - Vulnerability
  - Connection
  - Presence
  - Patience
  - Impartiality
  - Noting verbal and non-verbal cues
  - Comfort with silence
  - Open-ended questions
  - Paraphrasing/reflection

- **Four attributes of empathy:**
  - See the world as others see it
  - Be nonjudgmental
  - Understand another’s feelings
  - Communicate the understanding

- **Empathy vs. sympathy:**
  - Empathy is “the ability to perceive a situation from the other person’s perspective. To see, hear and feel the unique world of the other.”
  - Sympathy is feeling sorrow or pity for someone’s misfortune.
  - “Empathy fuels connection. Sympathy drives disconnection.”

- **Five ways to listen better:**
  - Silence: sit quietly for 3 minutes per day
  - “The mixer”: consciously separate sounds in a loud environment
  - Savoring: note mundane sounds in everyday life (e.g., birds chirping)
  - Listening positions: apply filters to your listening (e.g., active or empathetic)
  - RASA
    - Receive: pay attention to the speaker
    - Appreciate: maintain eye contact, nod, smile etc.
    - Summarize: reflect back on what you heard
    - Ask: show curiosity

- **Things to avoid in mindful listening:**
  - Sympathy
  - Giving advice
  - Attempting to fix
  - Distraction

- **Barriers to mindful listening:**
  - Fear of and discomfort with vulnerability
  - Insertion of own agenda
  - Negative self-talk
  - Time constraints
  - Social restrictions
  - Prevalence of electronic communication
  - Distractions

- **Rewards of mindful listening:**
  - More meaningful relationships
  - Improved communication skills
  - Deeper understanding of others
  - Improved self-esteem
  - Reduced anxiety
  - Increased positive feeling.

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**References:**