

Active listening exercise

The 'talker' has to describe something, whether it is something that happened at work, their commute, an activity they enjoyed, a holiday they want to go on, their favourite movie, etc. the topic is up to the talker but it should not be such a big, important topic that it cannot be discussed in three minutes.

The 'listener' has to practise active listening skills – listening attentively to what is being said and what is not quite being said, and demonstrating their listening to the talker by their behaviour, e.g. nods, smiles, mhms. After three minutes the listener has to summarise the key things described by the talker including facts about what was described as well as emotions that were described.

The talker can then feedback to the listener if they think they picked up on everything important or if they missed anything out. The talker will then give the listener another chance to summarise with all the important information, then they will swap roles.

At the end of the exercise it is useful to review what went well and what could be improved. Bear in mind that the goal is not to remember every detail but to listen, understand and reflect back to the talker your understanding.

Uninterrupted listening

Another simple but powerful exercise is called 'uninterrupted listening', and it's exactly what it sounds like. We all need to feel heard, understood, and cared for, and this exercise can help both you and your partner feel this way.

Set a timer for this exercise (three to five minutes will usually do the trick) and let your partner talk. They can talk about whatever is on their mind – work, school, you, the kids, friends or family, stress – it's all fair game.

While they are speaking, your job is to do one thing and one thing only: to listen. Do not speak at all until the timer goes off. Simply listen to your partner and soak it all in. However, while you may not speak during this time, you are free to give your partner non-verbal encouragement or empathy through body language, facial expressions, or meaningful looks.

When the timer goes off, switch roles and try the exercise again. You may find that one partner is much chattier than the other, but don't worry – this is totally normal.

The weekly CEO meeting

If you and your partner are leading lives jam-packed with activities, events, and obligations, this exercise will be a great way to connect.

This exercise provides you and your partner with an opportunity to interact as adults (no kids allowed) and without distractions (no phones, tablets, or laptops allowed).

Schedule a non-negotiable chunk of time (30 minutes is a good default) once a week for you and your partner to talk about how you are both doing, your relationship as a couple, any unfinished arguments or grievances, or any needs that are not being met.

You can start the exercise with questions like:

- How do you feel about us today?
- Is there anything you feel incomplete about from this past week that you would like to talk about?
- How can I make you feel more loved in the coming days?

The answers to these questions should lead you and your partner in a healthy and productive discussion about yourselves and your relationship. Make sure to do this regularly to keep on top of any issues and ensure that things don't get swept under the carpet or put on the back burner for too long.