



BioGraffs is a visual storytelling method that naturally encourages active listening skills. But you don't need a BioGraffs Kit to practice this powerful technique of good communication!

Active listening is a powerful skill that is more than simply hearing the words that another person speaks. It's deceptively simple. It may feel awkward and false at first, but it can have profound effects on a conversation. It requires being a mindful and focused participant in the communication process.

Active listening techniques include:

- Being fully present in the conversation
- Noticing (and using) non-verbal cues like eye-contact
- Asking open-ended questions to encourage the other person to expound (tell me more!)
- Paraphrasing and reflecting back what has been said
- Listening to understand rather than to respond
- Withholding judgment and advice

Typically in a conversation, especially more difficult ones, each person is, to varying degrees, not really listening. They may be composing a response in their mind, resisting what they are hearing, or just waiting for the other person to pause so they can say what they think, or correct what they got "wrong," or add their own knowledge or experience.

The result is that each person may come away feeling like they were not really heard.

You can change that! Active Listening changes the structure of the conversation and creates a different outcome -- each person feels more seen, more fully heard, more respected. When the listener "reflects" what the storyteller says, it gives the storyteller encouragement to go deeper into their own understanding of their lived experience.

This is a turn-taking activity.

HOW TO USE THIS DOWNLOAD

- If you can, print out the following page. Cut the paper down the middle.
- Pick a time to devote to this activity when both of you are relaxed and interested.
- Have a timer (like on your phone).
- Read through your roles first so they are familiar.
- After the first round, read through the roles again and think about how well you listened actively.
- The role of the listener will get easier and feel more natural over time.
- Make a date to practice regularly.



Listener

Cathy Aerts



Storyteller

While your partner is telling their story, your role is to actively listen

Pick one of the prompts below, or anything else you want to talk about



Set a time for 5 minutes

Encourage

Use body language to show you are interested. Don't argue, give advice, or correct details.

Reflect

When they pause, simply restate what you just heard, for example:

- You're saying you like it when I....?
- I'm hearing that you want to get up and do things in the morning.
- So you want to do x, y, and z next year?

Clarify

When they seem done, ask follow-up questions, for example:

- Is there more you want to say?
- Tell me more about x and y?
- How often does this happen?

Be curious!!

Appreciate

Acknowledge the value of what they shared and appreciate their efforts to tell you. For example:

- I'm glad you told me this.
- This is good for me to know about you.

Try Not to

- Tell your perspective.
- Contradict.
- Interrupt.

Remember that listening doesn't necessarily mean agreeing. Just hear.



- **What is conflict like in this relationship?**
- **What's a perfect day of being together and what's good about it?**
- **What is something you are excited about?**

Be a Storyteller

- Think of what the title of your story would be and start with that.
- Keep to the one story you started.
- Does your story have a moral or a conclusion?

I Statements

- This story is about you. Talk about your feelings, your perspective, your experience.
- Avoid phrasing things in ways that could put your listener on the defensive, especially phrases like "you always" or "you never."

Ask for Impact

- After 5 minutes, ask the listener how they felt about the story you told.

Switch

- Switch roles. The listener becomes the storyteller.
- They can choose the same prompt, or a different one.
- Reflect together on how well you each listened actively.
- Do another round and see if you each can improve as an active listener.