

Listening to people

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To listen carefully to identify key information about a health concern
- To use active listening skills
- To ensure understanding by clarifying points
- To weigh up information from different sources and take action



RESOURCES

- Magazine pictures illustrating active listening
- Copies of Resources 1–3
- Word cards to be devised by teacher (Activity 1 ESOL)
- Speech-bubbles from Resource 3 on cards (Activity 4 Support)
- Audio equipment 🎧 54–56
- Copies of audio scripts (Activity 3 Support, optional)

RELATED TOPICS

Talking to your doctor/health professional (Theme 10, Topic 8)

Asking questions (Theme 11, Topic 2)

HEALTH SKILLS

Learners will listen to information about their health and medical concerns from both health professionals and peers. This topic helps learners to weigh up different sources of information.

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

When listening, learners need to be able to:

- judge the relevance of the information
- understand that key points are often repeated or emphasised
- use strategies to check understanding.

Functional Skills/Core Curriculum

Activities in this topic will contribute to learning in the following curriculum areas:

- listen for and identify relevant information and new information from discussions, explanations and presentations
English E3.1 (L)Slr/E3.3) English L1.1 (L)Slr/L1.1)
- use strategies to clarify and confirm understanding (e.g. gestures, body language, verbal prompts) **English E3.2 (L)Slr/E3.4) English L1.2 (L)Slr/L1.3).**

Engage

- Give learners a quick overview of the session (this will depend on which activities you decide to use, your learners' specific health interests, etc.).
- Stop suddenly and ask if anyone can tell you what you have just said.
- Discuss what sort of information learners picked up on and why, for example things that are important to them (such as coffee breaks) or words you repeated several times or emphasised, etc.
- Discuss what might have helped them to remember the information (e.g. being told what they are listening for, writing it down, asking for it to be repeated, etc.).
- Ask learners to share any 'bad listening experiences' they've had in a medical context. Ask what made it difficult to follow and remember the information (e.g. too much information, health professional using difficult vocabulary, background noise, too busy, personal distractions – worrying about something else). Ask what could help.

What can you do to help you remember things the doctor or nurse tells you?

Enable

ACTIVITY 1

Consider spoken sources of information

Use Resource 1 to stimulate discussion about who learners might listen to in order to find out about managing their condition/health concern. Ask learners if they have listened to any of the people shown. List answers on the board/flipchart and support learners as they add their own ideas to the list on Resource 1.

Who can you trust to give you reliable information?

Support

- Give learners the pictures one at a time. Discuss who the people are, asking questions that encourage learners to look for clues in the pictures (e.g. 'What is on the shelves?' 'What do you think these women have in common?').
- Make sure learners understand terms such as 'pharmacist' and recognise the word in the list.

ESOL

- Discuss each picture with learners, asking direct questions to establish the context (e.g. 'Where are they?' 'Who is the doctor?'). Display useful words as they come up.
- Provide cards showing the names of the health professionals and ask learners to match them to the pictures. Check learners are able to pronounce the names clearly.

ACTIVITY 2

Think about non-verbal messages given through body language

- Ask learners to sit back-to-back in pairs. One speaks while the other listens (without speaking or making any noise). You may want to give learners a topic for discussion (e.g. talk about your day, your health concerns, a visit to the hospital). Discuss how the speaker and listener felt.
- Ask learners how they can tell that someone is listening (e.g. eye contact, looking directly at the speaker, keeping still, concentrating, focusing completely on the speaker, etc.). Discuss the pictures on Resource 1 in this context.

How can you tell if someone is listening to you?

- Discuss facial expressions, gestures and postures that mean 'I don't understand'. Demonstrate learners' suggestions or ask learners to demonstrate these where possible, to provide learners with a visual reference. As an alternative, magazine pictures might be used.

How can you tell when someone doesn't understand you?

Support

Less confident learners might have difficulty making eye contact. Encourage them to try other ways of showing they are listening, such as smiling and nodding. Suggest looking at another point on someone's face from time to time.

ESOL

Body language, particularly eye contact and use of individual space, varies between cultures. Learners need to be aware of body language conventions in UK culture (mainly to avoid misunderstandings). Encourage learners to share cultural variations in body language, so that all learners are aware of this.

ACTIVITY 3 54-56

Listen for relevant details

- Give out Resource 2. Before playing each audio clip (doctor, pharmacist, nurse), read the instructions so that learners know what to listen for.
- For each picture, play the audio clip through once for gist, then again, allowing time for discussion, replays and answers to be given.
- Discuss phrases that could be used to check or clarify the information.

How can you check information you are given?

Support

Identify key words or phrases that learners can listen for, such as 'I think you ...' to introduce the doctor's diagnosis. Some learners may prefer to look at copies of the audio scripts.

ESOL

- When playing the audio clip for the first time, provide questions to help learners focus their listening (e.g. 'Does the patient have a cold, a throat infection, tonsillitis?').
- Check understanding of idioms and expressions such as 'running a temperature' and 'coming down with a cold'.

ACTIVITY 4

Practise strategies for checking and confirming

- Hand out Resource 3. Read the doctor's part of the dialogue aloud. Make sure learners understand the vocabulary. Talk about 'active listening'. If possible, with a colleague, use the conversation as a basis for a role-play situation, so that learners can see the importance of body language and gestures in active listening.
- Discuss the ways in which the patient (the listener) checks the information.
- Discuss and note down other methods that learners might use to make sure they understand and can remember the information (e.g. making written notes, clearing mind of all other thoughts, thinking things through in your own words). Suggest that learners have a notebook to write down information they need to remember.

Why is it important to check information about your medicine and dosage?

- In pairs, ask learners to think of more questions they might ask the doctor.
- Talk through the active listening strategies at the bottom of Resource 3 as a summary of active listening techniques.

Support

- Give learners the speech-bubbles separately and read through them one at a time, guiding learners to relate them to the information from the doctor by asking direct questions.
- Encourage learners to think of questions they would ask by asking leading questions to test their understanding.

ESOL

- Discuss the importance of using phrases and 'noises' that tell the other person you are listening (e.g. words like 'Right', 'OK', 'I see' and noises like 'uh-huh').
- Demonstrate 'active listening' (gestures and the short phrases and 'noises') by asking one of the learners to describe a communication problem they have had. Ask learners to practise a similar scenario in pairs, taking turns to be the listener.

TIPS

- Learners may prefer to have copies of the audio scripts for reference.
- Be overt when modelling so that learners can pick up the active listening strategies.

Action

- Invite an expert to talk to learners about a particular condition that affects them or may affect them in the future. Ask learners to list the actions they have been asked to take. At the end, encourage learners to ask and answer questions about the information.
- To encourage active listening, set up further role-play scenarios between health professional and patients in groups of three. Ask the third person in each group to act as an observer, using the active listening section on Resource 3 as a checklist to assess how many listening strategies are being used. In each scenario, ask learners to summarise what action the patient has been asked to take. Swap roles so that learners play each of the three roles.

To summarise, what can you do to improve your listening skills?

Listening to people

RESOURCE 1

To manage your condition, you need to listen carefully and understand the information you are given.

Tick the people who have talked to you about your health.



Doctor	
Friends	
Family	
Nurse	
Telephone helpline	

Pharmacist	
Support group members	

Which of these people can give you information about *your* health?
Add some more ideas.

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RESOURCE 2

1



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Listen to the doctor.
What is wrong with the patient?

2

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Listen to the pharmacist.
How many tablets must the patient take each day?



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Listen to the nurse.
What should the patient drink?
What should the patient *not* drink?

3



Listening to people

RESOURCE 3

Health professionals need to be sure that you know what to do and how to do it. You also need to be sure.

If the pain gets particularly bad after a lot of activity, take an over-the-counter anti-inflammatory drug such as ibuprofen. Make sure you take plenty of fluids, but avoid too much caffeine, as that won't help your sleeping problems.

Sorry, but what did you say? Anti-flames or something? What does that mean? I've never heard of those.

Could you just go over that bit again? Did you say I had to get extra sleep?

So, how many cups of coffee can I have?

Thank you, doctor. Can I just check what you said? I'm to drink plenty of liquids but not too much tea and coffee. And, if I get a lot of pain after doing a bit too much, I should take ibuprofen, which I can buy without a prescription.



Tick the active listening strategies that the patient is using.

Use the right body language

- Look at the speaker.
- Nod and smile if you understand.

Focus on what is being said

- Make mental notes in your head as you listen.
- Ask the speaker to repeat anything you didn't follow.

Clarify and check

- Ask about unfamiliar words or anything else you don't understand.
- Repeat the main points back to the speaker using your own words.
- Summarise the action points – what has the speaker asked the patient to do?

ACTIVITY 3 / Resource 2

- 1 The patient has a throat infection.
- 2 The patient has to take two tablets a day.
- 3 The patient can drink water but not coffee.

ACTIVITY 4 / Resource 3

The patient (the listener) is probably using all the active listening strategies. From looking at the photo and reading the speech-bubbles he certainly:

- has good eye contact with the doctor
- asks the doctor to repeat things he didn't follow
- asks about unfamiliar words or anything else he didn't understand
- repeats the main points back to the doctor in his own words
- summarises the action points – what the doctor has asked him to do.

ACTIVITY 3



Extract 1

Doctor: Well, Mr Kappel, there's nothing to worry about. Your tonsils look OK and there's no swelling. I think you just have a throat infection. It's probably viral, so there's no point in giving you antibiotics as they wouldn't have any effect. You need to keep your neck warm, drink plenty of fluids and try to rest. If it feels very sore, you can suck throat sweets as well. It should clear up in a couple of days.



Extract 2

Pharmacist: If you experience any irritation or dizziness while taking these, it's very important that you contact your doctor. There's 3 weeks' supply here – one packet for each week, 14 tablets in each pack. Take two tablets a day with a meal.



Extract 3

Nurse: Now, you should make an appointment with your doctor for 2 months' time. Don't forget in the meantime to drink plenty of water but no coffee. That way we'll be able to see whether the caffeine is affecting your sleep pattern.