

## How to Listen Collaboratively

The foundational skill necessary for successfully moving from a martial relationship to an effective co-parenting partner that support the needs and interests of all members of the family is the ability to listen fully and completely. The focus of full listening is not only to understand the content of what is being said but the context in which it is being said. The goal is to fully understand what the speaker is saying even if you don't agree. Full listening is approached with curiosity and a real interest in understanding where the speaker is coming from and what they are trying to say. The skills listed below support full listening:

1. **Face the speaker and keep eye contact.** Your steady attending to what the speaker is saying shows that what the speaker is saying is important.
2. **Be attentive:** To attend to another person means that you be present, give and pay attention, and not be distracted by your own thoughts, feelings, or biases.
3. **Keep an open mind.** Listen without judging, blaming, or mentally criticizing the speaker. Listen without jumping to conclusions. Don't complete the speaker's sentences. If you must speak, summarize what you have heard.
4. **Listen to the words and try to picture what the speaker is saying.** Allow your mind to create a mental model of the information being presented. When listening for long stretches, concentrate on and remember key word and phrases. Don't spend time planning what to say next. You can't rehearse and listen at the same time. Concentrate on what is being said. If your thoughts wander, refocus.
5. **Don't interrupt and don't impose your solutions.** Interrupting sends a variety of messages such as: "I'm more important than you"; "I don't really care what you think"; and "What I have to say is more interesting, accurate, or relevant." Refrain from giving solutions. If the person wants your suggested solutions they will ask you.
6. **Wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions.** If you don't understand something, wait for a pause to ask a clarifying question.
7. **Ask questions only to ensure understanding.** Fully understanding what the speaker is saying is the goal of full listening.
8. **Try to feel what the speaker is feeling.** If you can convey back to the speaker that you are feeling their feeling through facial expressions, body posture, tone of voice, and words your effectiveness as a listener is assured. You will have demonstrated empathy which is the heart and soul of good listening.
9. **Pay attention to what isn't said-to nonverbal cues.** Much of what is communicated is done without words. Pay attention to facial expressions, body posture, and tone of voice. Words only convey a fraction of the message.

**The goal of full listening is to understand rather than be understood**