

ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES

Tips for Successful Interviews

Active listening involves paying attention to not only *what* the person with COVID-19 or contact says, but also *how* it is said so that you can adjust the conversation to gather more information when necessary. Being an active listener means being fully engaged in what the other person is saying, not interrupting, and trying to see things from their point of view. Active listening techniques are summarized below.



- Pay attention:** Focus your attention on the respondent to show them that you value and respect their time. Try to reduce any background noise or other distractions.
- Show care and respect:** Demonstrate a caring and respectful attitude to help the respondent feel comfortable answering questions. A caring attitude is expressed through actions, words, body language, tone of voice, and eye contact. Keep an open mind and avoid judging the respondent.
- Paraphrase and summarize:** Restate what the person has said using different words (paraphrase) or repeat key themes (summarize) to check your understanding and show engagement. An easy way to begin paraphrasing is by saying, “Let me see whether I heard you correctly...”
- Reflect feelings:** Reflecting involves putting words to a respondent’s *emotional* reactions. This is similar to paraphrasing, but adds emotion and helps demonstrate empathy. Understanding a respondent’s emotional experiences can also help you identify the services or resources that might be helpful to the respondent.

- ❑ **Use nonverbal communication:** Nonverbal communication happens through gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Pay close attention to nonverbal communication—both the respondent’s and your own—during interviews. Here are some tips for Case Investigators and Contact Tracers about nonverbal communication:
 - *Try to smile:* Even over the phone, a smile can transmit through your voice and tone.
 - *Pay attention to your body language:* Make eye contact, nod, and lean in to show you are listening and engaged.
 - *Watch for facial expressions, eye contact, appearance, and posture:* These cues can provide information that supports what you are hearing or might signal an opportunity to dig deeper if the body language does not match the words.
 - *Notice pauses, sighs, or changes in the respondent’s voice:* This might help you understand when to ask probing questions or find a better time to talk if the respondent can’t speak freely at that time.
 - *Use silence:* It is not necessary to fill every moment of silence during an interview. Nonverbal cues can help you determine if the respondent is silent because they are thinking about their answer or do not understand the question.

- ❑ **Ask strategic questions:** Asking open-ended questions can encourage respondents to provide more in-depth and insightful responses. Open-ended questions have the following characteristics:
 - They ask the respondent to think and reflect.
 - They give the respondent the opportunity to share opinions and feelings.
 - They give the respondent more control over the conversation.

- ❑ **Give affirmations:** Affirmations are short phrases that show that you are listening and encourage the respondent to keep talking, like, “I see,” “Okay,” and “Go on.”

