

Listening Skills on the Phone

As parents, you have been listening to your student for almost 20 years. Although you likely know your student better than anyone else, many changes will take place during the college years. Not seeing your student on a daily basis will impact how she talks to you—and how you need to listen. Since you'll do most of your communicating via phone, here are some tips on listening from afar:

Be encouraging.

- Try to convey interest, no matter how simplistic or mundane the topic is. If your student called home, she wants to connect with you.
- Try not to agree or disagree with the student.
- Be patient and try not to interrupt.
- Ask open-ended questions such as, "Can you tell me more...?"

Ask clarifying questions.

- Ask questions to gather more information and better understand your student's point of view.
- Ask open-ended questions such as, "When did this happen?"

Restate what you hear.

- Restate basic ideas and facts to show you are listening and understanding what is being said.
- Concentrate on "hidden" emotional meanings.
- Ask questions such as, "So you would like your roommate to stop eating your snacks?"

Reflect on what was shared.

- Reflect on your student's basic feelings to show that you understand what she's telling you.
- Don't assume to understand.
- Think about what is *not* said.
- Help your student evaluate her own feelings by reflecting on what she shared.
- Make statements such as, "You seem very upset." This will reassure your student that you understand and support her.

Summarize the important pieces.

- Restate the major ideas expressed, including feelings, to help your student establish an action plan.

- Help your student sort out the important aspects of the conversation, without diminishing her feelings.
- Make statements such as, "These seem to be the key things you expressed..."

Validate thoughts and feelings.

- Acknowledge the value of your student's feelings.
- Try to keep your own emotions from interfering with your ability to listen openly. You don't have to agree in order to be a good listener.
- Express appreciation for your student's efforts and actions, even if they seem minimal. This will remind your student that she has a cheering section—even if it is far away!
- Make statements such as, "I am happy you called home to talk this through with me..." Chances are, she'll do it again next time there's something on her mind!

5 Tips for Parents

Here are suggestions for parents from students themselves:

1. Focus 100% attention on the phone call. If you can't at the time of the call, tell us so we can call back.
2. Ask questions that express genuine interest, even if you don't always understand what we are talking about.
3. Don't pressure us about grades and schoolwork, and instead ask us about what we are learning and enjoying about our classes. Then, we can engage on an intellectual level without worrying that all you care about is our GPA.
4. Ask us about our relationships with friends, faculty, and administrators—but without prying. Talk with us about our social life, but don't let on that you are worried about our behaviors. Instead, use these conversations to gauge how we are doing emotionally. Our ability to maintain and nurture quality relationships on campus directly relates to our comfort level and happiness.
5. Keep in mind that even though we are growing more independent of you, it's interdependence we ultimately seek. The college years are the time when we can begin having more mature conversations with you. Keep an open mind and remember that we make our own decisions on a daily basis. However, we still call home for guidance, reassurance, and support.