SOLER Model Practice

Good listening is not only about hearing words; it is also about what our body says. The psychologist Gerard Egan created the SOLER model to help counsellors show that they are fully present. Today, managers, coaches, nurses and customer service teams use it in everyday conversations. SOLER is a simple checklist of five body-language skills. Each letter stands for one behaviour that tells the other person: I am really listening.

1. S: Sit Squarely

S stands for facing the other person squarely. When our body turns toward someone, it says that they have our full attention. Turning away, or facing a screen, sends the opposite message. If sitting directly opposite feels too intense, a slight angle also works. What matters is that the person feels that we are with them.

Example: a friend who puts the phone down and turns to face you makes you feel important.

At work: Khalid, a team leader, used to answer his team while typing emails. Now he turns his chair away from the screen and faces the employee who is speaking.

2. O: Open Posture

O stands for an open posture. Crossed arms or crossed legs can look defensive, even when we do not mean it. Relaxed arms and visible hands show that we are open to what the other person says. An open posture also helps us feel more open inside. It invites the speaker to share more.

Example: a shop assistant with crossed arms looks less welcoming than a colleague with open hands.

At work: in a difficult meeting, Khalid notices that his arms are crossed. He opens them and rests his hands on the table, and the discussion becomes calmer.

3. L: Lean Toward the Speaker

L stands for leaning slightly toward the other person. A small lean forward shows interest and involvement. Leaning back too far can look bored, while coming too close can feel uncomfortable. The key is balance, and natural movement during the conversation. Our body can follow the rhythm of the talk, leaning in at important moments.

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Example: when a child tells an exciting story, the parents naturally lean toward the child.

At work: when an employee explains a problem with a client, Khalid leans in slightly. The employee sees that the problem is taken seriously.

4. E: Eye Contact

E stands for good eye contact. Looking at the speaker shows attention and respect. Good eye contact is steady but not a stare; it is natural to look away from time to time. Culture matters here, because the comfortable amount of eye contact differs between people and places. The aim is to be present, not to make the other person uneasy.

Example: a teacher who looks at the students while answering their questions keeps them engaged.

At work: during a video call, Khalid looks at the camera when he speaks and at the speaker when he listens. His team feels that he is really with them.

5. R: Relaxed

R stands for being relaxed. A calm body tells the other person that we are comfortable and have time for them. Fidgeting, checking the clock or tapping a pen sends signs of stress or impatience. Being relaxed does not mean being careless; it means being calm and focused. When we are relaxed, the other person relaxes too.

Example: a doctor who sits calmly and speaks slowly helps a worried patient feel safe.

At work: before a performance review, Khalid takes a deep breath and puts his phone away. The employee speaks openly, because the meeting feels calm.

Conclusion

In summary, the SOLER model turns listening into something the other person can see. Sit squarely, keep an open posture, lean in, keep good eye contact and stay relaxed. These are not strict rules but reminders, and they should feel natural, not mechanical. Practise one letter each week, and ask others how you come across. People open up to those who truly show that they are listening.

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