What does unheard feel like?

Listening, understanding and responding are not the same thing.

Feeling unheard can happen when you share something important but receive advice, defensiveness, silence or a response that misses the point. Neurodivergent processing, sensory load, emotional intensity and different communication preferences may widen this gap.

THE LISTENING GAP

WHAT I AM SHARING

A feeling, need or experience I want recognised.

WHAT IS RECEIVED

A problem to fix, criticism, or a request for an answer.

The gap does not prove either person lacks care.

Understanding begins by checking meaning instead of guessing intention.

REFLECTION

When did I last feel that my words were not understood?

What gets in the way?

Possible barriers are clues, not labels or diagnoses.

Processing time

I may need silence before I can respond.

Sensory overload

Noise, light or competing demands can affect attention.

Different listening signals

Eye contact, movement or looking away may mean different things.

Problem-solving too soon

Advice may arrive before feelings have been acknowledged.

Emotional threat

A comment can sound like blame even when that was not intended.

COMMUNICATION CAPACITY CHANGES WITH CONTEXT



Illustrative bars only; not measured data.

The unheard cycle

How both people can become increasingly disconnected.

1 A need or feeling is shared

v

2 The response misses the intended meaning

v

3 One person repeats or intensifies their point

v

4 The other defends, fixes, withdraws or shuts down

v

5 Both leave feeling misunderstood

A MOMENT TO INTERRUPT THE CYCLE

“I think we are missing each other. Can you tell me what you heard?”

Ways to feel heard together

Five small changes can make a difficult conversation safer.

01 Ask what is needed

“Would you like me to listen, ask questions or help solve it?”

02 Reflect before replying

“What I hear is that you felt left out. Is that right?”

03 Allow processing time

Make room for pauses, writing or a planned return.

04 Focus on one point

Separate facts, feelings and requests instead of piling them up.

05 Repair missed moments

Acknowledge impact without arguing about intention.

A USEFUL REPAIR SENTENCE

“I can see my response missed what you needed. Can we try again more slowly?”

My being-heard plan

A reflection worksheet for future conversations.

What do I most want my partner to understand?

What response helps me feel genuinely listened to?

What happens in my body when I feel dismissed?

How can I ask for a pause or a different communication method?

What could we both try in our next conversation?

Being heard does not mean agreeing on everything. Respect, boundaries and safety matter. If there is intimidation or coercion, seek support rather than relying on communication exercises alone.