

## **The Listening Gift**

In this exercise, you will take turns sharing with and listening to a partner. When people feel truly listened to, they often describe it in a similar way as receiving a gift from a person who cares about them. Listening shows your appreciation and positive regard for your listening partner, even if you do not agree with one another. Listening requires careful attention to your listening partner, to their verbal and nonverbal communication. It entails behaviors such as repeating or paraphrasing to show understanding; offering nonverbal cues to show you're listening, such as nodding or leaning in; focusing only on your listening partner by minimizing distractions; and asking questions to show the other person that you care and would like to know more. This activity has multiple steps.

### **Step 1:**

Describe a time when you felt really listened to. What was the situation that you shared with your listening partner? Who was the person who listened to you? What specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors demonstrated that they were listening. Pay close attention to the behaviors and try to be as specific as possible. How did you feel as a result of feeling listened to?

### **Step 2:**

Choose one of the following and write down some of the details:

- A recent personal or professional accomplishment or recognition, and why you are proud of it;
- A recent or current hardship/difficulty or challenge and why (that you're comfortable sharing);
- A time when you personally felt at your best.
- A person that you care about who is making a difference in your life and why.

### **Step 3:**

You and your partner will each take turns sharing and listening in this activity. Remove everything from your desk (except this handout) and face your partner. As listener, your goal is to communicate, verbally and nonverbally, caring and respect for your partner. You should try to model the behaviors from step 1 where you felt like you were really listened to, and to try to create a similar feeling for your partner as you felt.

### **Step 4:**

Now that you each have taken turns sharing and listening, write down the following:

1. Verbal and nonverbal behaviors that you did to demonstrate listening when your partner shared. Try to be as specific as possible. Write down how you felt as the listener.

2. Verbal and nonverbal behaviors that your partner did while you were sharing that demonstrated listening. Try to be as specific as possible. Write down how you felt as a result of the interaction.

#### **Step 5:**

Now you will share with your partner. This is another opportunity to listen. You will give feedback about their listening and share how you felt in the role of listener. To be useful and actionable, your feedback should be specific.

#### **Step 6:**

Write down two things that you will really strive to work on when you next have the opportunity to give the gift of listening.

#### **Step 7:**

Think about a friend, family member, or work colleague who may not feel seen, heard, or respected. Write a brief explanation about how listening to them may make them feel seen, heard, or respected. Develop a plan that includes how you will offer to listen and when. Discuss the verbal and non-verbal behaviors you will do to show that you are listening.

#### **Questions/Debriefing**

- Are listening and hearing the same? How are they related? How are they different?
  - **Hearing is a physiological process; you can hear sound without listening; Listening is a much more involved process that can range from passive to active listening. Such a definition would exclude individuals who are hearing impaired.**
- From your experiences, what are some of the verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors that demonstrate listening?
  - **Verbal: to paraphrase or repeat back; to ask follow-up questions to gather more information or show that you're listening; supportive verbal behaviors rather than those that make the conversation about you. Nonverbal: eye contact; body position; not engaging in other tasks or activities.**
- How was it in the different roles of sharing and listening?
  - **Students will share a variety of experiences as sharers and listeners.**
- How did it feel to be listened to?
  - **Students will share a number of different experiences as sharers. They may express different positive emotions that arose from recognition, affirmation, or positive regard.**
- How did it feel to listen to your partner? What did you do to show that you were listening to your partner?

- **Students may focus both on the positive and negative aspects of listening. They will like that their sharers felt positive about the experience, and they may comment on the challenge of listening – that it takes a lot of work to do it well.**
- **Who will you pass on the gift of listening to next?**
  - **Students will offer a variety of people who they will listen to make them feel seen, heard, and respected.**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe a time when you really felt listened to. What was the situation? Who was the person who listened to you? What did they say or do to make you feel listened to? How did you feel as a result of feeling listened to?

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2. Describe one of the following in detail: 1) a recent personal or professional accomplishment or recognition; 2) a recent or current hardship/difficulty or challenge and why; 3) a time when you personally felt at your best; 4) a person whom you care about who is making a difference in your life and why.

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3. Write down the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that you did when listening to your partner. Be as specific as possible. Write down how you felt afterward.

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4. Write down the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that your partner did. Be as specific as possible. Write down how you felt afterward.

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