

Process Guide | Active listening

Objective

To practice active listening and assertive communication.

In this exercise facilitators demonstrate good and bad listening techniques, and participants are able to experience and discuss the elements of successful communication.

Time needed

60-90 minutes

Resources needed

- Whiteboard, blackboard or butchers paper
- Marker pens

How it's done

Introduce the exercise by telling participants that communication is vital to effective nonviolent activism in general. Ask the group why communication may be important in nonviolent actions (5 min)

Bad listening roleplay

Facilitators roleplay listening blocks and poor listening. This can be a fun roleplay to really “ham it up” (make it exaggerated and humorous).

The group then lists the “listening stoppers” they noticed.

Discuss other blocks to listening.

Facilitator asks group what they could have done to listen well. Write up suggestions on white board as ‘active listening skills’. Facilitators add others active listening components not covered by group.

Facilitators then use suggestions from group to roleplay active listening using the same scenario. This creates the learning tool of the group providing ‘advice’ to the facilitator.

Brief discussion on what was different and the aims of active listening. (20-30 min)

Introduce concentric circle exercise.

Topics to speak on could include:

- “The way I feel about the terrorist attacks on September 11”.
- “A time when I dealt with a difficult conflict well”.

Give each person at least 4 minutes to speak and to listen. Encourage people to reflect back what they are hearing and to focus on listening skills. Facilitators move around and observe participants’ skills.

Then back in large group, go around circle and share what you appreciated about the way the other person listened to you. Name things that you noticed they did well. (20-30min)

Source

Pt'Chang Trainers' Manual

https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/waca/pages/1191/attachments/original/1515989314/pk1_trainers_manual.pdf?1515989314 p.18

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SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ACTION

Handout | Active listening

Active listening is a critical component of communications inside and outside facilitated spaces.

The Change Agency team use active listening in a number of ways. One of our favourite processes is to break people into pairs and give them one or two really great questions about a topic related to a session we are facilitating (see strategic questioning notes on our website).

Tell people this is an exercise in active listening and that they will both have an opportunity to listen and be heard. Ask people to decide who will go first, let them know how many minutes they have, say five each, tell them you will keep time, and remind them that active listening might not involve speaking if you are listening, or asking questions.

We like to encourage people to be silent as they listen and focus completely on the person they are hearing. When you bring people back to the bigger group, debrief the process a little before heading into discussion about what people heard or said. “How was that?” “How was it being listened to?” “How was listening?”

10 Tips to Effective and Active Listening Skills

Active listening is about *really hearing* people. Listening makes people feel worthy, appreciated, interesting, and respected. Ordinary conversations emerge on a deeper level, as do our relationships. When we listen, we foster the skill in others by acting as a model for positive and effective communication. In relationships, greater communication brings greater intimacy. Listening helps us learn more about others and helps to prevent misunderstandings.

1. Face the speaker. Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show your attentiveness through other body language.
2. Maintain eye contact, to the degree that you all remain comfortable.
3. Minimise external distractions. Turn off the TV. Put down your book or magazine, and ask the speaker and other listeners to do the same.
4. Respond appropriately to show that you understand. Murmur (“uh-huh” and “um-hmm”) and nod. Raise your eyebrows. Say words such as “Really”, “Interesting”, as well as more direct prompts: “What did you do then?” and “What did she say?”
5. Focus solely on what the speaker is saying. Try not to think about what you are going to say next. The conversation will follow a logical flow after the speaker makes her point.
6. Minimise internal distractions. If your own thoughts keep horning in, simply let them go and continuously re-focus your attention on the speaker, much as you would during meditation.
7. Keep an open mind. Wait until the speaker is finished before deciding that you disagree. Try not to make assumptions about what the speaker is thinking. Ask more questions to understand more deeply.
8. Avoid letting the speaker know how you handled a similar situation. Unless they specifically ask for advice, assume they just need to talk it out.

9. Even if the speaker is launching a complaint against you, wait until they finish to defend yourself. The speaker will feel as though their point had been made. They won't feel the need to repeat it, and you'll know the whole argument before you respond. Research shows that, on average, we can hear four times faster than we can talk, so we have the ability to sort ideas as they come in...and be ready for more.
10. Engage yourself. Ask questions for clarification, but, once again, wait until the speaker has finished. That way, you won't interrupt their train of thought. After you ask questions, paraphrase their point to make sure you didn't misunderstand. Start with: "So you're saying..."

As you work on developing your listening skills, you may feel a bit panicky when there is a natural pause in the conversation. What should you say next? Learn to settle into the silence and use it to better understand all points of view.

Source

Adapted from an article by Susie Michelle Cortright <http://www.iamnext.com/people/listen.html>