

**ACTIVITY**

**35**  
MINUTES

**ACTIVE LISTENING**

Participants pair off again for a listening exercise in which a "speaker" discusses a problem with a "listener" who has been secretly instructed to listen poorly. Group members then assess aspects of "poor" and "good" listening, and practice using effective listening skills in a role-play

**MATERIALS**

- ✓ Handout, "Good Listening Skills Checklist
- ✓ An index card for each pair of participants

**PLANNING NOTE**

Prepare the instruction cards for this activity by writing the following instructions on the front of index cards and marking them as "1," "2" or "3" on the back:

1. *Listen attentively to your partner for about a minute. Then begin to get distracted. Look at your watch or the clock, glance around, drop your pen—but don't be obvious.*
2. *Pay attention to your partner, but disagree with everything that he says. Interrupt while he is talking and tell him what you think he should do, whether or not he asks for your advice. Point your finger and try to be aggressive.*
3. *Listen to your partner carefully. Try to show that you understand without talking. Look the person in the eye and pay careful attention. Do not speak.*

**PROCEDURE**

1. Tell participants that in this activity, they will learn about listening skills. Give the following directions:
  - ✧ *Pair off. One person in the pair will be the speaker; the other will be the listener.*
  - ✧ *The speaker will talk about a problem that he has had recently (for example, some conflict with a parent or a friend).*
  - ✧ *The listener will be given an index card with special instructions to follow*

**Session VI:**  
**Communication**  
**ACTIVE LISTENING**

2. Divide participants into pairs and have them choose (or you assign) roles. Tell the speakers to think of a recent problem that they feel comfortable discussing (nothing too personal or intimate).
3. Distribute the instruction cards you have prepared to the listeners, asking them not to show them to the speakers until you say so. Ask the pairs to begin, explaining that you will stop them after three minutes.
4. After three minutes, bring the group together and ask the following questions:
  - ✧ *Speakers, how well did your partner listen? Did you feel you were being understood? Why or why not?*
  - ✧ *Listeners, what was it like for you in your role?*
5. Now ask some of the listeners to read the instructions they were given. Assure the speakers that the listeners' behavior was influenced by the instructions, not by what they heard from the speakers.
6. Ask the group to suggest ways in which a listener can hurt the communication process. Write the headings "hurts" and "helps" on newsprint and record responses to the first question under the heading "hurts." After the first list is complete, brainstorm listening behaviors that can help communication. For example:

HURTS	HELPS
Looking away	Making eye contact
Interrupting	Acting concerned
Saying something that doesn't relate to the speaker's point	Asking clarifying questions
Acting distracted	Providing feedback

7. Once the brainstorming is complete, be sure that the "helps" list includes nonverbal skills, such as body language (e.g., making eye contact, leaning forward toward the speaker), and paying attention to the speaker's body language (e.g., facial expression, tone of voice). Explain that this list describes "active listening," which is doing more than just hearing what someone is saying; it's trying to understand the feelings underneath what someone says and showing the speaker that you are interested. Write the title "Active Listening Skills" on the top of the newsprint.
8. Give the following instructions for active listening:
  - ✧ *Concentrate on what the other person is saying.*
  - ✧ *Focus on the nonverbal cues and feelings that underlie the speaker's words.*
  - ✧ *As a check to see whether you listened well, ask for feedback (as discussed in the previous two activities). Repeat the speaker's comments in his or her own words without adding any of your own opinions*

For example, suppose a young father, Tyrone, talking about the maternal grandmother of his child, said, "Lamika's mother is such a b\_\_\_\_. She gets on my back as soon as I walk in the door." A listener, Ike, might respond by saying, "Give Mrs. Johnson a break, man. She does so much for your son. You couldn't make it without her." If you were Tyrone, what would you think of that response? Was Ike using active listening? How do you think Tyrone is feeling? How well did Ike tune into Tyrone's feelings?

The responses should indicate that Ike was way off base as a listener. Tyrone is going to be even more frustrated after talking to Ike. Even if Ike has a point, Tyrone is not going to be able to hear it Ask, "What could Ike have said to Tyrone to show that he was really trying to understand Tyrone's feelings?" New responses for Ike might include, "So you feel Mrs. Johnson harasses you?"

9. Point out that paraphrasing (i.e., restating what someone says in slightly different words) provides a way to test your understanding of what was said. If you misunderstood, the other person can correct you and explain things more clearly. If you understood, the person knows that you are really paying attention.
10. Distribute the Handout "Good Listening Skills Checklist." Tell the men that if any points on the newsprint are not covered on the checklist, they should add them.
11. Ask for two volunteers to role-play another conversation for the whole group. This time, one person will be the speaker, and the other will be a good listener. Explain that the listener should try to use the techniques that have been identified in this activity.
12. When the role-play is finished, ask the following:
  - ✧ *Actors, what was the experience like for you?*
  - ✧ *Audience, what did you think of the listener's skills?*
  - ✧ *What skills did he use?*
  - ✧ *What could the listener have done to be even more effective?*
13. If the listener gets a lot of constructive feedback, have him try again. Ask the group to respond to the second role-play.
14. End with the discussion questions.

**Session VI:**  
**Communication**  
**ACTIVE LISTENING**

**VARIATION**

Instead of having one pair role-play at the end of the activity, ask all the pairs to role-play again -- this time, using effective listening skills. If you want to make it more challenging, you could give the senders an instruction card, asking them to role-play their baby's grandfather, who is criticizing the listener for not bringing the baby home on time. Of course, the goal for listeners is to be able to really listen and understand the speaker's point of view.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Can you remember experiences you have had with bad listeners in your life outside this program?
2. After this exercise, how would you evaluate your own listening skills with friends, family or coworkers?
3. What do you really think about active listening? Do you plan to ever use it? How will you use it in real life?
4. How could active listening be useful with your children? *(It's a great skill to use when children feel upset or have a problem to solve.)*

## HANDOUT

# GOOD LISTENING SKILLS CHECKLIST

- ✧ Act concerned with what the speaker has to say.
- ✧ Give the speaker your full attention.
- ✧ Make direct eye contact (In some cultures this is considered disrespectful, but it can be very useful in certain situations—e.g., a job interview.)
- ✧ Lean forward toward the speaker.
- ✧ Don't interrupt, judge or criticize the speaker.
- ✧ Use nonverbal skills: Nod or shake your head; change your facial expression as appropriate (e.g., showing concern, excitement).
- ✧ Use brief verbal responses that indicate you are listening, such as "yes," "I see," "go on," etc.
- ✧ Ask questions to clarify what the person is saying and to encourage the person to say more. For example, "So, what happened that got you so upset?" or "What did you think about that?"
- ✧ Try to figure out the feelings reflected by the speaker's words. Ask a question to determine whether you are correct about how the speaker is feeling.
- ✧ For example, "Are you nervous about going to court?" "Are you pissed off, man?"
- ✧ Get feedback. Test how well you understand the speaker by telling him what you think he's saying.