

Deep Listening

Learn to communicate about and reflect on the opinion, feelings and vision of others

RELATING | Empathy and Compassion

→ What you will need:

- 5-50
- Group workshop
- 5 mins preparation
- 30 mins execution
- Chairs

→ Related Tools:



[Inviting Non-Human Stakeholders](#)

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“I firmly believe that learning to really listen to each other is not only crucial for personal growth, but also plays a vital role in creating a more compassionate and empathetic society.

—Ilja Boor





I. Overview

The practice of deep listening encourages students to engage in attentive and empathetic listening, fostering curiosity and compassion in their responses. Drawing upon insights from psychotherapy, neuroscience, and Buddhism (Oliver, 2003), deep listening serves as a method that enables group members to identify and transform unproductive patterns into more constructive interactions. Particularly in situations lacking immediate answers or clear solutions, the skills of deep listening become indispensable.

This tool aids in learning students to recognising such circumstances, building trust by valuing and taking others' words seriously, clarifying the underlying issues and uncovering new possibilities.

Deep listening embodies a learning-oriented process, wherein the listener refrains from judgment and remains receptive to information, allowing the speaker ample space to articulate their thoughts and emotions. This creates a secure environment for free expression, fostering a profound connection between speakers and listeners.

Learning outcome

- ✓ The student is able to relate to others and oneself with kindness, empathy and compassion and address related suffering





II. Learning Activity

Using the deep listening technique, students learn to really listen and respond with compassion. This creates a safe space to speak freely and results into more productive interactions and a deeper connection between speaker(s) and listener(s).



1. Embrace an Open Attitude 3 mins

Create a safe and inclusive learning environment where attentive understanding thrives. Explain to students that deep listening involves active listening without the need to fix or judge. Emphasise the primary focus on understanding rather than immediate solutions or evaluations. Encourage an open mindset that fosters genuine connection.

Urge speakers to express themselves freely, without the expectation of immediate resolution, and encourage listeners to accept their words. Highlight the goal of genuine understanding and empathy, nurturing deeper connections and trust between speakers and listeners.



2. Share Personal Stories 7 mins

Form pairs among the students. Each student takes turns sharing a personal story with their peer about experiences where they felt unheard, unseen, or disrespected.

Encourage students to decide if they are comfortable sharing their experiences with peers. During the sharing process, the listener refrains from interrupting and instead focuses on asking open-ended questions such as “what else?” or “what happened next?”

This approach allows the speaker to delve deeper into their narrative, promoting a sense of validation and understanding. By actively listening without interruption, the listener creates a space that encourages the speaker to fully express their thoughts and emotions.





3. Share Experiences 5 mins

Encourage students to share their experiences as both the speaker and the listener openly. Each student reflects on how it felt to share their personal story, as well as how it felt to listen to their peer.

Encourage students to explore their emotions, thoughts, and reactions during the process. Prompt them to explore questions such as “How did it feel to share my story?” and “What was it like to listen to your peer’s story?”.

This sharing of experiences fosters empathy and enhances the students’ comprehension of the profound impact that effective listening and meaningful storytelling can have in building connections.



4. Switch Roles 7 mins + 5 mins

Ask students to switch roles. The student who was previously the listener now becomes the speaker, sharing their own story about experiences where they felt unheard, unseen or disrespected. Encourage the listener to provide the same level of support, refraining from interruptions and using open-ended questions to encourage further exploration.



5. Share Insights 5 mins

Facilitate a group reflection and ensure a safe and inclusive collaborative atmosphere that encourages and values participation from all students. Invite students to share their thoughts and insights in a respectful and constructive discussion. Encourage students to exchange their viewpoints, ideas and interpretations freely.

Emphasise the significance of this group reflection as an opportunity for collective discussion and analysis of the gained insights to broaden their understanding and learn from one another.



Tip: guide the discussion by encouraging students to build upon and expand upon each other's insights. Pose thought-provoking questions, such as "How can the principles of deep listening be applied to everyday communication?" or "What are some practical ways we can incorporate deep listening in our relationships?"

Guide the collective analysis by inviting students to identify common themes or patterns by exploring questions like "What recurring challenges or barriers to effective listening have we identified?" or "What strategies can we develop to address these challenges?"





III. Assessment

To effectively monitor and evaluate students' deep listening skills, students answer self-reflective questions. It can be utilised for both one-time self-assessments and as a feedback cycle to enhance and refine their listening abilities through practice. To further promote deeper learning, it is recommended to ask the speaker to answer these questions about their experience of the listener as well.



Purpose

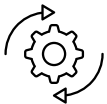
Assessment *for* learning (formative assessment) aims to gather evidence and provide feedback on students' learning during the learning process

Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.



Roles

Self-assessment and teacher-led assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning



Materials

Reflective questions



Assessment

Self-assessment Based on Robert Gass & Judith Ansara (2015)

Select what best describes your honest evaluation of your behaviour

1. I really stay focused on what the other is saying (vs. my mind is wandering, being distracted or thinking about what I'll say next)

rarely most of the time

2. I suspend judgment while I am listening (vs. immediately evaluating what is being said)

rarely most of the time

3. I listen with curiosity. What might be new? What might I learn? (vs. assuming I know what they think and feel)

rarely most of the time

4. I attend well to the other non-verbally in ways that actively encourage their sharing – being present, appropriate eye contact, open body posture, smiles, head-nodding and encouraging words or noises like “un-huh” that show I’m interested (vs. appearing distracted, arms folded, or fail to offer the non-verbal encouragers that show I’m interested)

rarely most of the time

5. I can sustain my ability to listen attentively for long, deep conversations (vs. after a while, I notice I have difficulty sustaining attention)

rarely most of the time

6. I don't interrupt. I do allow space before responding, helping others to feel relaxed and comfortable in communicating with me. (vs. I tend to jump in quickly with my responses, sometimes before people are completely finished)

rarely most of the time





7. I try to communicate my understanding of what the other has said before stating my point of view (vs. failing to acknowledge what the other has said and simply stating my own point of view)

rarely most of the time

8. Even when I disagree, I try to reflect back my understanding of their position. (vs. failing to acknowledge any validity in the other's point of view)

rarely most of the time

9. People tend to come to me with their feelings and concerns because I listen well

rarely most of the time

Reflective questions

1. What are your strengths as a listener?

2. In what areas could you use improvement?

3. What benefits do you see in improving your listening skills?

4. What listening skills, if any, are you committed to practising and improving?





IV. References

Gass, R. & Judith Ansara, J. (2015) Tools for transformation. Deep Listening survey.
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Lipmanowicz, H., & McCandless, K. (2014). The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures: Simple Rules to Unleash A Culture of Innovation.
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