

The Listener

“Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19-20)

The listener’s goal: to enter the perspective and mindset of the other person until you can see the situation through their eyes. Ask questions, probe for deeper understanding, and expand your knowledge of the other’s feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

Listen calmly:

- Don’t defend yourself, argue, explain, or problem solve. You don’t have to agree with what you are hearing in order to listen and explore.
- Focus on the speaker’s experience, not yours.

Control your reactivity:

- Remember: when defenses go up, listening goes down. Remind yourself, *“I can listen with an open mind even if I disagree. The speaker is a person with his or her own feelings, thoughts, personality, and family history.”*

Be aware of your non-verbal responses:

- Don’t roll eyes, sigh, groan, or give responses that stop communication.
- Maintain eye contact and encourage the speaker to continue.

Four steps of listening:

- Listen, then ask the speaker to stop and let you summarize if it gets too long.
- Repeat back in your own words what you heard and check for accuracy.
- Ask questions that will broaden your understanding.
- Respond with empathy... *“I see what you are saying”* or *“I can see how you might feel that way.”*

Good questions to ask:

- Tell me more; I want to understand.
- How does that make you feel?
- Are there other times you have felt this? Are there times you felt this as a child?
- Are you hurt? Afraid? Scared? Angry?
- What are your hopes? Expectations? Desires?
- Don’t ask why (it is often accusatory). Ask where, how, who, and what questions.
- If you are wrong, don’t apologize until you have fully listened.

Resolution: (Key guiding question: “*What do you need right now?*”)

- **Ownership:** “*I need you to admit and own the problem, infraction, or mistake.*”
- **Forgiveness:** “*I need a well thought through forgiveness statement and an apology.*”
- **Less or nothing:** “*You know, I don’t think I need anything right now, I just feel better having gotten that off of my chest.*”
- **Reassurance:** “*I need to hear from you that things will be OK, or that you will work on this or that you still really love me!*”
- **Agree to disagree:** “*While we still do not agree on this, I feel like we understand and accept one another.*”
- **Negotiation:** “*I need for us to find some middle ground or a compromise on this!*”
- **Analysis / problem solving:** “*Would you help me figure out how to solve or fix this reoccurring problem?*”
- **Comfort and nurture:** “*Would you please hold me and comfort me while I cry?*”