

# Understanding **CONFLICT**

# Listening skills and conflict

## Objective

- Understand and be able to identify positive listening skills.

## Audience

High school and above

## Time

50 minutes

## Supplies needed

- Flip chart paper
- Markers
- Support materials

## Do ahead

Prepare flip charts with questions.

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## Background

“Did you hear what I said?” and “Are you listening to me?” are two phrases that are commonly used interchangeably. However, there is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is a physiological process that our body innately does unless an individual has an auditory medical condition. Listening on the other hand is an active process that we have to try to accomplish. We may hear that the person is saying something, but are we really listening to their message?

When a conflict occurs, it is easy to forget to use good listening skills. Often, people are concentrating on ways to respond to the conflict and not what the other person is saying. Additionally, each person responds to conflict differently. Therefore, listening may become difficult because the individual's primary concern may not be concentrating on what the other person is trying to say.

## What to do

### Activity 1: Great listeners (20 minutes)

**Ask the group:** Think about the person in your life that you consider the best listener. This is the “go-to” person that you talk to when something is important. Some individuals have many people that they feel are good listeners and others may struggle to think of even one person.

## Support material— Your best listener

Give each person about five minutes to answer and think about the questions.

**Break into groups:** Have the participants break up into groups of three to four people and talk about their answers to the questions. Have each group select someone to be the recorder (record what the group is saying) and another person who will be the reporter (report to the whole group at the end). Give them about five minutes to discuss their answers as a group.

### Post the following questions on flip chart paper with room for answers under each question:

- Why do you go to this person first when you want someone who is really going to listen to you?
- What types of things do they do that others do not?
- Why do you find it easier to talk with them?
- Is there someone in your life that is not a good listener? What does he/she do that leads you to believe that he/she is not really listening to you?

**Group report:** Have the groups report their answers to the questions in a round robin fashion.

# Understanding CONFLICT

## Processing

Discuss the following questions as a large group:

1. What similarities did you find between your group's answers and other group's? Any differences?
2. If you were in a conflict with the person who is your best listener, would he/she use the same listening skills that you identified? Why or why not?
3. What are some things that would keep that person from using his/her good listening skills?

### **Support material—How to improve your listening skills**

## Activity 2: Conflict and active listening scenario (30 minutes)

### Scenario 1

#### **Support material—Listening scenario 1**

Now that all the groups have identified good listening skills and things that distract them from listening, let's look at some scenarios where we can apply this information.

1. Ask for three volunteers. (It is always a good idea to tell participants that they will be part of a role-playing scenario.)
2. Give the "characters" a few minutes to look over the script.
3. Ask the rest of the group to keep track of some of the barriers to good listening and where good listening practices are not being used.

4. After the scenario has been performed, ask the group to identify some of the barriers to good listening and where good listening practices are not being used.
5. Record the group's answers on a sheet of flip chart paper.

### Scenario 2

#### **Support material—Listening scenario 2**

1. Have the larger group break up into groups of three.
2. Pass out scenario two and instruct them to fill in the rest of the scenario using good listening skills.
3. As a group, discuss what you think would be the best way for both Bailey and his/her parents to use their skills in this situation. Tell them that the first phrase is given to you as a starting point and to add action directions as needed. Give them about 10 minutes to complete this task.
4. After the groups have finished their "good" scenarios, ask if anyone would be willing to give their role-play.

## Processing

Discuss the following questions as a large group:

1. Was it easy to pick out the bad listening skills and listening barriers? Why or why not?
2. Was it difficult to think of a good listening scenario? Why or why not?
3. How could good listening skills help you when you are involved in a conflict?
4. If you do not use good listening skills in a conflict, what could happen?

## Summary

**I**t is important to note that using good listening skills is one of the most effective tools to employ when dealing with a conflict. For many people, listening is not an easy process. This may be especially true in a conflict situation. Individuals need to make an active effort to use their listening skills, and it may take a great deal of practice to truly listen to what someone is saying.

When individuals listen to each other, even conflict can be a constructive experience. When you listen to a person, you give him/her time to voice his/her opinions and perceptions. Also, this will give you the opportunity to ask for more information. Consequently, by remaining calm and truly listening to the other person, you will have the opportunity to process the information he/she is telling you and work through the situation in the best way possible.



# Skills to help you become a better listener

## Activity 1: Your personal best listener

Think about the person in your life that you consider the best listener. This is the “go-to” person that you talk to when something is important.

- 1. Why do you go to this person first when you want someone who is really going to listen to you?**
- 2. What types of things does he/she do that others do not?**
- 3. Why do you find it easier to talk with him/her?**
- 4. Is there someone in your life that is not a good listener? What does he/she do that leads you to believe that he/she is not really listening to you?**



# Skills to help you become a better listener

## Recognize the difference between hearing and listening

**Hearing:** Hearing is a physiological process that our body innately does unless an individual has an auditory medical condition.

**Listening:** An active process that we have to try to accomplish. Many people have grown up listening, know how to listen, or at least know how to pretend that they are listening.

## Strategies to become a better listener

1. Remove as many distractions as possible.
2. Concentrate on what the other person is saying.
3. Make eye contact.
4. Wait until the person is done speaking to respond.
5. Do not interrupt the speaker.
6. Clarify information that you do not understand.
7. Use encouraging nonverbal cues (e.g. nodding, leaning forward, smiling).
8. Use verbal utterances (such as yes, umm-hmm, okay) to encourage the speaker to continue.
9. Be genuinely interested.
10. Have an open mind about what the speaker is discussing.

## Strategies to help you listen better in a conflict situation

1. Know yourself, how you react, and how you listen with conflict situations.
2. This is not a time to think of retaliations; you should be concentrating on listening to the other person.
3. If you are formulating or giving your opinion, you are not listening anymore.
4. Decide if you can listen at that moment or if you are too preoccupied with other emotions or thoughts.
5. Tell the other person directly if you need a minute to compose yourself.
6. If you need more than a couple minutes, assure the other person that you really want to listen to what he/she is saying and you can't concentrate on the situation at the moment. Then schedule a future time to discuss the situation.





## Listening scenarios 1 and 2

### Listening scenario 1— Not good listening skills

**Bailey:** Hey mom, hey dad, I have something important to tell you. You know how I was really worried about taking that test because my grade in English isn't so great and I was worried about failing and getting suspended from the basketball team and I thought for sure that I was going to...

**Dad:** (Interrupts and looks past Bailey.) Hey Bailey, you know that you make a better door than a window, the game is tied at 60-63 and there are only 10 seconds left. Can you move for a minute?

**Bailey:** (Looks annoyed.) Okay. I'll move, but are you listening to me? Mom, are you listening to me?

**Mom:** (Looks surprised to see Bailey standing there.) Oh hey, Bailey, when did you get home?

**Bailey:** Just a few minutes ago. Don't you remember me coming into the room and saying, 'Hey mom, hey dad, I have something important to tell you'?

**Mom:** I was so into the book I was reading that I hadn't noticed; now what were you saying?

**Bailey:** (Getting irritated.) What I said is that I had something important to tell you about my English grade. I thought that I was going to fail that test last week, that my grade was going to drop, and that I was going to be suspended from the basketball team but...

**Dad:** (Yells out.) They won! I can't believe it. What a game.

**Dad:** (Interrupts again.) Wait. What? You were kicked off of the basketball team? How did you let that happen?

**Mom:** (Puts hands on head and frowns.) Bailey, how did you let this happen?

**Bailey:** (Speaks angrily.) If you would listen to what I am saying...no I didn't get kicked off the team or fail. As a matter of fact, if you had listened to what I was saying and let me finish you would know that I studied hard and it paid off because I got a B.

**Dad:** Then why were you saying you got kicked off of the team?

**Bailey:** (Rolls eyes and walks away.) Never mind.

### Listening scenario 2— Good listening skills

**N**ow, it is your turn to come up with ways that this conversation could have gone differently. How could Bailey have made sure that his parents understood what he was saying? And how could have Bailey's parents used good listening skills?

**Directions:** Break up into groups of three and fill in the rest of the scenario below using good listening skills. Discuss what you think would be the best way for both Bailey and the parents to use their skills in this situation. The first section is given to you as a starting point. Add action directions as needed.

**Bailey:** Hey mom, hey dad, I have something important to tell you. You know how I was really worried about taking that test because my grade in English isn't so great and I was worried about failing and getting suspended from the basketball team and I thought for sure that I was going to...



## Listening scenario 3

### Example of a good communication scenario

**Bailey:** Hey mom, hey dad, I have something important to tell you. You know how I was really worried about taking that test because of my grade in English isn't so great and I was worried about failing and getting suspended from the basketball team and I thought for sure that I was going to fail?

**Dad:** (looks up at Bailey) Hi Bailey, I'm sorry I didn't hear you. Can you give me 10 seconds until the game is over and then I will turn off the TV. I don't want to miss the rest of the game.

**Bailey:** Yah, that's fine. I'll just go and sit next to mom until it's over. It looks like it is in the final seconds of the game anyway.

**Mom:** (looks up at Bailey and closes book) Hi Bailey, I was reading my book and I don't think I heard all of what you said earlier. Can you repeat what you were saying?

**Bailey:** How about we wait until the game is off and then I can tell you both?

**Mom:** Sounds good.

**Dad:** That was a great game; let me turn off the TV so that you can tell us what is going on. You sounded serious when you came in. Actually, let's go and sit at the kitchen table, I don't want to be tempted to turn on the game highlights, and I know I will if I am sitting here.

**Mom:** So, Bailey, what's going on?

**Bailey:** Do you remember how I was really worried about taking that test because my grade in English isn't so great and I was worried about failing and getting suspended from the basketball team and I thought for sure that I was going to fail?

**Mom:** (nods head) I remember you were really worried and had studied every night for two weeks. How did it go?

**Dad:** I was wondering how it went. I know how important being on the basketball team is to you. But you know our deal: If you get bad grades, you can't play basketball.

**Bailey:** (looks at both parents and smiles) Well, I guess all that studying paid off because I got a B+.

**Dad:** Good job, Bailey. I knew if you studied that you would do well.

**Mom:** Bailey, I'm really proud of you.