

Constructive Dialogue – Active Listening Exercise

Objective: Help people gain an appreciation for the skill of active listening.

Instructions:

1. Invite someone to partner in a conversation with you. Find a comfortable spot where you can sit facing each other and hear the conversation. Review the steps below and use them as a guide to your conversation and to strengthen your listening skills.
2. Agree together to the following conversation guides or ground rules:
 - Listen with curiosity for understanding
 - Speak from your own authentic experience with humility
 - Connect with respect
 - Note any common ground
3. Start by getting to know each other a bit – spend 2 minutes each on these questions:
 - Describe the community that you grew up in or a community that is meaningful to you. Briefly paint the picture for your conversation partners.
 - What sense of purpose/duty/mission guides your life?
4. Active Listening Exercise - Decide who will go first as the speaker and the listener.
 - **(2 Minutes) *The speaker*** will answer: Q: How has polarization impacted your life or ability to deliver on your mission? You have 2 minutes to share. The listener should listen silently without interrupting or taking notes. Try to sit so that your body language invites openness and shows that you are listening.
 - **(1 Minute) *The listener*** will then attempt to paraphrase what was said, felt, or meant to the speaker. The listener will start with the phrase, “So what I hear you saying is…” The goal for the listener is to have the speaker feel like they are portraying their words and intentions as accurately as possible.
 - **(2 minutes) Now, *the speaker*** will discuss with the listener how accurate the listener was in understanding what the speaker said and intended. The listener can then ask follow-up questions.
 - Switch roles and begin again.

Some reflection questions:

- How did you feel as the speaker when sharing your examples? What made you feel that way?
- How did you feel when hearing your story repeated back to you?
- How did it feel as the listener to sit silently without interrupting or asking questions?
- What do you want to apply for yourself in the future?



Practicing Constructive Dialogue

Engaging in meaningful, respectful conversation—even on difficult topics—starts with intentional habits. Here’s a guide to help you foster understanding and connection in every dialogue.



Listen with Curiosity

Approach every conversation with genuine interest in the other person’s perspective. Be open to learning something new.



Create a Safe Environment

Make it clear that all thoughts and feelings can be shared without judgment or fear of criticism.



Ask Constructive Questions

Acknowledge the other person’s perspective.

“Can you tell me more about what led you to that view?”



Wait for the Right Moment to Respond

Pause before jumping in. Let the other person fully finish so they feel heard and respected.

How to Respond Thoughtfully



Use “I” Statements

Focus on your own perspective

“I feel...” instead *“You always...”*



Draw on Your Own Experience

Share personal stories than making general claims.

“In my experience...”



Remember: Curiosity over judgment.

Connection over winning.

Dialogue over debate.