

# 6

## Improving My Listening

### Description

This lively activity involves people in a range of different listening situations. Some strong feelings are likely to be evoked among participants. The activity is powerful and most participants will learn or have reinforced key listening skills.

### Situations

This activity is suitable for many situations—standing on its own as a separate activity or introduced in response to recognized obstacles caused by poor listening among members of a group.

Ideally, participants should have some time within the session to put new behaviors into practice.

### Objectives

- To experience and observe a variety of listening situations.
- To connect with the range of feelings associated with being heard in different ways.
- To form conclusions about behaviors that enhance listening.
- To identify three listening behaviors to practice for the short term.
- To receive feedback about performance within these behaviors, together with areas for further improvement.

### Trainer guidance

Your role is mainly facilitative, building trust among participants and supporting them through the different listening cycles. As participants take on the role of speaker encourage them to talk about something that they are interested in; for example, a sport, a hobby, a favorite pastime, a vacation, etc. Some strong feelings may emerge and the benefits of the activity will be increased if participants are encouraged to reflect on these and share them with other participants.

## **Method**

1. Introduce the activity as follows. The exercises within this session are designed to provide some powerful examples of listening. Different listening behaviors will be introduced with participants being given plenty of time to practice and observe listening and to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of their own listening skills.

The work will be carried out in small groups of three (or four if numbers do not allow threes) and each member will have an opportunity to (a) listen, (b) be listened to, and (c) observe. A predetermined number of cycles will be completed by each group; details will be given at the start of each cycle. All small groups meet at the end to share learning.

Some suggestions for the listening cycles:

- a. The listener remains passive throughout; no feedback or non-verbal clues to show interest or that the information has been received or understood.
- b. The listener shows interest and attentiveness; good concentration on the speaker with supportive non-verbal behaviors. Listener refrains from speaking (that is, no verbal feedback or questions).
- c. The listener constantly interrupts the speaker; is distracted by other events in the room.
- d. The listener concentrates totally on hearing, receiving and understanding the speaker's words. Questions are asked, feedback given.
- e. No visual contact *but* every effort is made to hear and understand (as in telephoning). This can be achieved by sitting back-to-back.

You may wish to design others to suit particular needs or difficulties.

The observers' role is to ensure that the listener keeps to the given parameters and notes any significant factors.

Make sure that all participants understand the three roles and the process that they are about to take part in. Encourage questions.

2. Divide participants into groups of three (or four if necessary, when two observers for each cycle should be used); allocate time and space to each group and commence the first listening cycle. Limit your own involvement to giving clear instructions, time management, organizing the activity and encouraging the groups to record points at each stage.

At the end of each cycle encourage group members to discuss, offer feedback to each other and to record anything that they consider to be relevant to effective listening: in particular try getting them to tune in to the feelings they experienced when faced by the different types of listener.

Continue until the predetermined number of cycles has been completed, making sure that participants experience each role at least once. Then allow a short ten-minute break before moving on to step 3.

3. Allow time for each small group to:
  - a. Discuss and agree to a "listening model," i.e. those factors that the cycles have alerted them to as being important, for sharing in the main group; and
  - b. help each participant to identify three listening behaviors that they are committed to trying, beginning immediately, for at least the next two days.
4. Back in the main group encourage participants to share the "listening models" and the types of behaviors that they wish to apply in the short term.

If this activity was used as part of an ongoing program then participants can be encouraged to help each other in subsequent stages by observing and offering feedback on each other's listening behaviors.

### **Time**

1. Briefing the participants takes 10-15 minutes.
2. Each listening cycle (minimum of 3 cycles) takes 20 minutes (2-3 minutes playing the role and the rest for discussion).
3. Producing the model of listening and agreeing to each person's new behaviors takes 30-40 minutes.
4. Sharing in main group takes 20 minutes.

Average total time: 2 hours and 30 minutes, which includes a break. (If more than three cycles are completed the time will be extended.)

### **Materials required**

1. Sufficient space for small groups to work in (can be achieved in one large room).
2. Pens and flipcharts for producing listening models.
3. Video camera and playback facilities (optional).

