



## ACTIVE LISTENING FOR SCHOOL STAFF

*"Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand."*

— Karl A. Menninger

### OVERVIEW

School staff members practice listening to each other with empathy and understanding.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- During staff meetings or trainings
- During one-on-one meetings between staff members
- When resolving a conflict between staff members

#### TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Adult

#### MATERIALS

- None

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

School staff will:

- Practice listening to each other without interrupting, judging, or giving advice

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Relationship Skills

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to think of a time when someone listened to you deeply, with no judgment or advice-giving. How did it make you feel?

### INSTRUCTIONS

#### SET-UP

- If doing this practice as part of a staff meeting or training, you might want to suggest a prompt related to your desired outcome. For example, if you want to help staff de-stress, then you might have them describe something fun or good that they experienced recently or what they are most grateful for.

#### THE PRACTICE

- Find a quiet place where you can talk with a conversation partner without interruption or distraction. Invite them to share what's on their mind. As they do so, try to follow the steps below. You don't need to cover every step, but the more you do cover, the more effective the practice is likely to be.
- Paraphrase. Once the other person has finished expressing a thought, paraphrase what they said to make sure you understand and to show that you are paying attention. Helpful ways to paraphrase include "What I hear you saying is..." "It sounds like..." and "If I understand you right..."
- Ask questions. When appropriate, ask questions to encourage the other person to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings. Avoid jumping to conclusions about what the other person means. Instead, ask questions to clarify their meaning, such as, "When you say\_\_\_\_, do you mean\_\_\_\_"?
- Express empathy. If the other person voices negative feelings, strive to validate these feelings rather than questioning or defending against them. For example, if the speaker expresses frustration, try to consider why they feel that way, regardless of whether you think that feeling is justified or whether you would feel that way yourself were you in their position. You might respond, "I can sense that you're feeling frustrated," and even "I can understand how that situation could cause frustration."
- Use engaged body language. Show that you are engaged and interested by making eye contact, nodding, facing the other person, and maintaining an open and relaxed body posture. Avoid attending to distractions in your environment or checking your phone. Be mindful of your facial expressions: Avoid expressions that might communicate disapproval or disgust.

- Avoid judgment. Your goal is to understand the other person's perspective and accept it for what it is, even if you disagree with it. Try not to interrupt with counter-arguments or mentally prepare a rebuttal while the other person is speaking.
- Avoid giving advice. Problem-solving is likely to be more effective after both conversation partners understand one another's perspective and feel heard. Moving too quickly into advice-giving can be counterproductive.

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice whether relationships between staff members have shifted after engaging in this practice? If so, how?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [study](#) of a representative sample, but mainly female, college students, participants had brief conversations (about their biggest disappointment with their university) with someone trained to engage in active listening, someone who gave them advice, or someone who gave simple acknowledgements of their point of view. Those who received active listening reported feeling more understood at the end of the conversation.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

One of the most effective ways to cultivate a positive school climate is to encourage positive relationships between staff members--and one of the quickest ways to do this is to help them to really see and hear one another.

Active listening helps listeners better understand others' perspectives and helps speakers feel more understood and less threatened. This technique can prevent miscommunication and spare hurt feelings on both sides. By improving communication and preventing arguments from escalating, active listening can make relationships between staff members more enduring and satisfying.