



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

GOOD LISTENING: A PATH TOWARDS GREATER HUMILITY

"Think lightly of yourself and deeply of the world."

—Miyamoto Musashi

OVERVIEW

Students practice good listening in their conversations and reflecting on what was said to cultivate greater humility.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To encourage the building of new friendships
- To cultivate humility in students
- To encourage a safe space for sharing thoughts and feelings

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pencil/pen

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice good listening skills
- Reflect on what they have learned from their partner
- Practice sharing their own thoughts, feelings, and/or life stories

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Humility
- Reflection
- Curiosity

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused Attention
- Non-Judgment
- Open Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Find a person in your life whom you can invite to have a conversation with you for a few minutes.
- Take the time to really ask them questions and listen to what they are saying. Make sure you have rid yourself of all distractions (e.g., placed your phone out of sight, turned off the TV, etc.). Behave as if they were telling you the most interesting thing you have ever heard. Ask questions when appropriate to learn more or get clarification. Focus on really trying to understand them without placing judgments.
- After the conversation, identify three things you learned about them from your conversation.
- Notice how you feel. Did you learn something about the other person or about yourself?

INSTRUCTIONS

BACKGROUND

According to [research](#), a humble person focuses on the needs and well-being of other people, appreciating both their strengths and the gifts they have to offer the world. Humility also helps us to see and accept our own strengths and limitations without [defensiveness or judgment](#). This kind of self-acceptance emerges from grounding one's worth in our intrinsic value as human beings rather than external factors such as economic or educational status or appearance. Some scientists also believe that humility provides a reality check: that we are just one small person within a vast universe.

Researchers have found that listening to another person [increases humility](#) in the listener and slightly in the person being listened to, mainly because listening creates a feeling of psychological safety—that we are safe to speak our truth, ask questions, and be ourselves. This sense of inner safety makes it more likely that the person speaking will be more open, which, in turn, makes the listener more focused on the one speaking. In addition, hearing another person's story expands our world—we realize that the world is more than just our own story.

To help students become a little less self-focused and a little more humble, try this practice as part of a class lecture or as a classroom community building activity.

HOW TO DO IT

- Start by talking to students about the importance of listening.
 - Ask them what it feels like when someone listens to them and when someone doesn't listen to them.
 - Next, ask them how they know when someone is listening to them. What body language do they show? (e.g., they make eye contact, they face their body towards the person. NOTE: Students may offer responses that don't match your own experience of listening, as body language often varies by culture. For example, some cultures believe that eye contact with an elder is a sign of disrespect.)
 - Explain that good listening creates a safe environment in which individuals feel as though they can share more about themselves without feeling defensive. This helps build [trust](#) and a greater willingness to continue [engaging](#) with the other person.
- Next, let students know that they will get an opportunity to practice good listening with one another. Explain to students that they should listen with curiosity as if the speaker was telling them the most interesting things they have ever heard. You may also encourage them to practice some of the following techniques as they listen:
 - Ask questions when appropriate to have the speaker clarify points made or to learn more about what they are saying.
 - Avoid judgments, the goal should be to understand the speaker's perspective.
 - Keep all distractions away (e.g., turn off phones, place laptops away, clear your mind so you are ready to enter into someone else's world)
- Next, give students a prompt to discuss in pairs. Each pair will take turns answering and listening.
 - The prompt may be related to a course topic. For example, views on immigration laws, a take away from a book chapter that was assigned, or views on STEM cell research.

- The prompt could also be a community building prompt aimed at getting students to know each other better. For instance, what is something you are grateful for? What is one challenge you have faced and how did you navigate through it? Who is someone you admire and why?.
- After each student in each pair has talked, have students write down three things they learned from their partner.

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how it felt to be on both sides of the listening exercise.
- Did anything surprise them? What did they find challenging?
- Did they learn something new about the other person or themselves from this exercise?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What are some other ways in which you can encourage good listening among students?
- Have you noticed a difference in student's behavior?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [series of studies](#), students spoke with either a partner who practiced either good listening or poor listening skills. Students rated their partner as showing greater humility when their partner practiced good listening skills. Partners—those doing the listening—also reported greater humility when practicing good listening skills. These studies also found some support for an increase in humility from the speaker when they engaged in a conversation with a partner who practiced good listening.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

In light of the current social context, in which political divides continue to grow and hinder collaboration among individuals, the cultivation of humility seems to be a necessity. Humility in the classroom is particularly important as it can help create a [safe environment](#) in which students can better engage with ideas and differing opinions. Furthermore, humility is also related to greater [generosity](#), [helpfulness](#), and [gratitude](#), which can help students develop strong and supportive relationships with each other.

Overall, individuals who are more humble also report higher levels of [physical](#) and [mental well-being](#). Thus, cultivating humility in students can help set them up for healthier and happier lives.

SOURCE

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