

Core Communication Skills

CORE COMMUNICATION SKILLS DEVELOPED IN THIS UNIT:

- **Active Listening:** Active listening is a cornerstone of communication. It is a skill that helps youth deepen understanding of the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of others. Active listening exercises provide youth with opportunities to feel heard and respected by peers and adults. Starting with Active Listening helps to set positive social norms and provides a forum for relationship building early in the program or project.
- **Speaking and Presenting:** Sharing information clearly, so the listener understands and can respond, is a critical communication skill. Speaking and presenting practice provides youth with opportunities to reflect on and improve body language, content development, and to develop different types of speaking and presentation tools.
- **Working as a Team:** Clear agreements, shared expectations and goals, and personal responsibility set the context for effective communication. Exercises expose youth to processes and structures that help people work well together, establish trust and safety, and create shared ownership of roles and expectations. Setting an agreement is also the foundation for any research or action project that youth may undertake.
- **Facilitation:** Facilitation is a skill that helps to ensure that everyone's voice is heard, upholds norms and agreements, and moves the group's agenda forward so that shared goals and objectives are met. Facilitation puts together listening, speaking, reflecting, and team process and decision making. For staff new to facilitation, use this section for training and skill development prior to the beginning of the program. Facilitation skills will also support youth in authentic youth-inclusive contexts, including youth-led focus groups, community forums, and group dialogues.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Session 1

60 minutes
OBJECTIVES:

Youth will understand what active listening is, why active listening is important, and the role of active listening in leadership.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Butcher paper, tape, and markers.
- Copy the *Active Listening Guidelines* (Master Copy 1.1a) before session: one copy for each participant or copy them as a poster.
- Copy *Confidentiality Guidelines* (Master Copy 1.1b) before the session: one copy for each participant.
- Paper or cloth bag. Make a "feeling bag": Cut out the feelings from the *Feeling Bag Activity* (Master Copy 1.1c), or create your own list of 20-25 words that denote feelings. Put all of the words into a paper or cloth bag.

I. OPENING: ATTENDANCE, SNACKS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AGENDA OVERVIEW (15 MINUTES)

Opening Circle Statement (Around the World): Think about a time you had something to say and no one would listen to you. How did you feel, or what did you do?

Introduction to Active Listening


II. WARM UP: LISTENING LINES (10 MINUTES)

Have each youth stand and face a partner. Explain that each partner will have one minute to share an experience they had of not being listened to. What was the situation? What was it like? How could you tell you were not being heard? While one partner is talking, the other partner listens silently (no talking, commenting, agreeing or disagreeing with the experience). Time the youth and tell them when to switch speaker and listener roles. When the activity is completed, ask the youth to name some of the experiences that came up.

Variation: When it is time to switch roles, ask the new listener to turn his or her back on the speaker as the speaker shares his or her experience. With this variation, ask (both listeners and talkers in turn) what it was like to be in that situation.


Facilitation Tip:

Set up seating in a circle and have adult staff or volunteers sit in the circle with the youth.

At the beginning of this session, establish some basic group norms or agreements. Ask participants "what do we all need to agree to do so that we all feel respected and willing to participate?" This list might include: One person talks at a time, no put-downs, stay open to different opinions. You will develop a more detailed set of agreements in Sessions 4 and 5.


Learning Strategy for a classroom setting:

Use the closing section of each agenda to prompt journaling assignments for students.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Session 1

60 minutes



III. DEFINING AND EXPLORING ACTIVE LISTENING (25 MINUTES)

Step 1: Brainstorm by asking for thoughts and ideas: What is active listening? How is active listening different from just listening? How do you know when someone is really listening to you? What do they do or say? List youth's answers where everyone can see them.

For example, active listening means listening for real understanding. When you listen actively, you focus on the other person and how they think and feel.

Step 2: Hand out and explain the *Active Listening Guidelines* (or refer to your prepared poster). As you go through the guidelines, refer to the ideas that youth came up with in the brainstorm. How do all the guidelines fit together? Are there any that we should add? What is the importance of each of the guidelines? For example, Empathy: Have youth think of a situation where empathy is not only important but vital to achieving a certain goal or outcome.

Facilitation Tip:

Walk around and watch the listening partners. See which guidelines are being ignored and which are naturally present – this will be very different for every individual.

Step 3: Hand out and review the *Confidentiality Guidelines*. What is the role of confidentiality in listening? What kinds of problems can lack of confidentiality create? Gossip is a great example.

IV. PRACTICING AND APPLYING ACTIVE LISTENING: FEELING BAG (20 MINUTES)

Pass around the *Feeling Bag* (see Materials and Preparation) and have each participant take two or three "feelings" out of the bag. Have each youth pick one of the feelings and think about a time they have experienced it. In pairs, have one person begin by explaining their experience, with the other person practicing active listening guidelines. Switch and repeat with the other partner.

V. DEBRIEF (10 MINUTES)

Sample questions for youth: Why are the components in the active listening guidelines important to leadership? What about friendship? Academic success? If you have time, write down what youth say under each of these categories, and look for patterns.

VI. CLOSING: (10 MINUTES)

Closing Circle Statement (Around the World): Think about a time you really felt heard and listened to. What did the person do or say that let you know that you were heard?

Learning Strategy:

Around the World:

Opening and Closing Circle Activity

This works well to set the tone at the start of a session or to connect participants to the lesson of the day through personal reflection. One at a time, each participant shares out one thought (or opinion or experience) on a given topic.

Note: Every session in this curriculum suggests an Opening Circle Statement, done as Around the World.

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Active Listening Guidelines

- **Empathize.** Put yourself in the other person's place to understand what that person is saying and how he or she feels.
- **Be attentive.** Make an effort to listen carefully. Don't daydream or talk when someone else is talking.
- **Show understanding and acceptance by nonverbal behaviors.**
 - Tone of voice
 - Facial expressions
 - Gestures
 - Eye contact
 - Posture
- **Reflect back** the person's most important thoughts and feelings. Try to do this in your own words. Paraphrase or restate while being careful to say only what you heard.
- **Do not interrupt, offer advice, or give suggestions.** Do not bring up similar feelings and problems from your own experience. Leave out your personal emotions, disagreements, opinions, and other feedback (unless you are asked for it).
- **Remain neutral.** Don't take sides.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Ask for clarification but be polite and respectful. For example, ask "Can you say more about that?" or "What did you mean when you said...?"

Confidentiality Guidelines

Adapted from a resource by Samira Soleimanpour, MPH - School-Based Health Center Student Research Project of the Institute for Health Policy Studies - University of California, San Francisco

"WHAT IS SAID HERE STAYS HERE."

Confidentiality means that anything you learn about another person must be kept private and not shared with others. If confidentiality is "broken" people can be hurt or embarrassed. You must not share an individual's thoughts, feelings, or experiences that they tell you or personal information you learn during your project.

WHAT INFORMATION MUST BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

1. Information that your team members share with you. You may share personal information with your fellow team members. You want your privacy to be respected and must respect the privacy of others as well.

- **For example:** You are doing an Active Listening exercise, and your partner shares that she has been receiving counseling services through the school health center. This is personal information that your partner felt comfortable sharing with you, but it should not be shared with others.

2. Information you gather through your research. You might be collecting surveys or conducting interviews or focus groups for your research topics. In these cases, rules of confidentiality also apply.

- **For example:** Sometimes in focus group discussions or interviews, people will share experiences they have had but do not want anyone to know that the information came from them. It is important to keep what is shared in these discussions confidential and never share the identity of the person who gave you this information. When reporting any results, you should always refer to general terms, such as, "One female respondent said..."

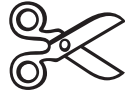
WHEN SHOULD YOU SHARE PRIVATE INFORMATION?

If someone is or tells you they are...

- Being hurt by someone else.
- Going to hurt someone else.
- Going to hurt himself or herself.

IF THIS HAPPENS, PLEASE TALK TO YOUR PROGRAM COORDINATOR OR TEACHER IMMEDIATELY.

Adults working in schools and youth-serving organizations are required by law to report if they heard about any of these three situations. They need to make sure the person is getting the help he or she needs to stay healthy and safe.



Feeling Bag

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| Happy | Powerful |
| Frustrated | Judgmental |
| Sorry | Inspired |
| Grumpy | Tired |
| Excited | Anxious |
| Energized | Embarrassed |
| Confident | Angry |
| Motivated | Calm |
| Bored | Pensive |
| Distracted | Jealous |
| Stressed | Spiteful |
| Sad | Empathetic |
| Overwhelmed | Satisfied |
| Surprised | Scared |
| Shy | Devastated |
| Powerless | |