**ACTIVE LISTENING**

Active listening is a communication skill in which the “mediator” hears and feeds back the emotional content of the disputant’s message. Active listening also…

- Builds trust between mediator and speaker
- Demonstrates understanding and acceptance.
- Encourages discussion of important issues

**Recommendations in listening to others:**

1. STOP TALKING
2. ASK QUESTIONS WHEN YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND
3. FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON THE SPEAKER’S WORDS, IDEAS, AND FEELINGS
4. LOOK AT THE PERSON
5. CHECK YOUR EMOTIONS
6. GET RID OF DISTRACTIONS
7. SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNICATION
8. REACT TO THE IDEAS, NOT THE PERSON
9. DON’T ARGUE MENTALLY
10. LISTEN FOR WHAT IS NOT SAID
11. LISTEN TO HOW SOMETHING IS SAID
12. AVOID JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS
13. AVOID CLASSIFYING THE SPEAKER
14. RECOGNIZE YOUR OWN PREJUDICE
15. TAKE AN ATTENTIVE BODY POSTURE
16. MAKE APPROPRIATE HEAD NODS AND OTHER MOVEMENTS
I Message Formula – Worksheet

Step One

I feel…
(Talk about your feelings)

Step Two

When …
(State the specific behavior)

Step Three

Because…
(State what happens to you)

Step Four

And what I NEED is …
(Say what you need to make the situation better)
Difficult Conversation Checklist

Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, authors of Difficult Conversations, offer these guidelines for preparing for a challenging conversation. Are you prepared to have your difficult conversation?

**Step 1: Prepare by Walking Through the Conversation**

**Sort Out What Happened**

- Where does your story come from (information, past experiences, rules)? Theirs?
- What impact has this situation had on you? What might their intentions have been?
- What have you each contributed to the problem?

**Understand Emotions**

- Explore your emotional footprint and the bundle of your emotions you experience

**Ground Your Identity**

- What’s at stake for you about you? What do you need to accept to be better grounded?

**Step 2: Check Your Purpose and Decide Whether to Raise the Issue**

- Purposes: What do you hope to accomplish by having the conversation? Shift your stance to support learning, sharing, problem-solving.
- Deciding: Is this the best way to address the issue and achieve your purposes? Is the issue really embedded in your Identity Conversation? Can you affect the problem by changing your contributions? If you don’t raise it, what can you do to help yourself let go?

**Step 3: Start from the Third Story**

- Describe the problem as the difference between your stories. Include both viewpoints as a legitimate part of the discussion.
- Share your purposes.
- Invite them to join you as a partner in sorting out the situation together.
Step 4: Explore Their Story and Yours

- Listen to understand their perspective on what happened. Ask questions. Acknowledge the feelings behind the arguments and accusations. Paraphrase to see if you have got it. Try to unravel how the two of got to this place.

- Share your own viewpoint, your past experiences, intentions and feelings.

- Reframe, reframe, and reframe to keep on track. From truth to perceptions, blame to contribution, accusations to feelings, and so on.

Step 5: Problem-Solving

- Invent options that meet each side’s most important concerns and interests.

- Look to standards for what should happen. Keep in mind the standard of mutual caretaking; relationships that always go one way rarely last.

- Talk about how to keep communication open as you go forward.
THE ART OF THE QUESTION

Ask questions that encourage communication:

• Tell me more about …
• I am not sure I understand the part about…
• Let me make sure I understood correctly…
• Can you help me understand?
• What would you like to see happen today?
• Let me summarize what you just said…
• I want to review your statements and note that this seems to have been very frustrating for you…
• I gather you have been very discouraged about this…
• It would help me if I understood better how you came to decide on
  the specifics of your request.
• Can you help me get a better idea of the reason for your request?
• Help me understand your view/perception of the issues
• What would it look like to you if this were resolved/not resolved?
• What would it look like if it was….    
• Tell me more about how you feel about this…
• What will happen if this is not worked out today?
• What will the program look like without this part?
• What will life look like if this is not resolved? If it is resolved?
• I want to thank you for discussing such a hard issue with us and
  hope you can tell us more about…
• I am not sure I got this part of your overview correct. I understand
  that when you asked for…

Ask questions that encourage a discussion of beliefs/values:

• What truths can you find in what this other person is saying?
• Does understanding this better help you understand their perspective more?
  And if so, how?
• What is interesting to you about their view?
• How can what you are hearing today open new possibilities for a resolution?
• What exactly did you hear them say?
• What about their values and beliefs do you share and how might that impact what we are doing today?
• What is interesting or helpful to you about what you now know?
• Tell me more about your views of the world (in a specific area) and how that informs your view of this situation?
• How do you think your perspective and their perspective might impact working toward that resolution?
• You have very strong beliefs about this and your beliefs seem very important to you. I would really like to know more about how this developed in your life and how it impacts your decisions now?
• Now that you understand their views better, can you tell me what about their beliefs and values do you share?
• How did you come to this idea/belief/value of a resolution?

Other Questions

• What would it look like for you if this matter was resolved? How would you feel?
• Paint a picture for me of the future if this is settled/not settled?
• What wild ideas do you have that might help solve the problem?

What to Avoid?

• Avoid a question that can only be answered yes or no.
• Avoid a question that begins with why.
• Avoid asking anyone to talk about their “side”.

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**Sample Questions**

What Might be beneficial about your/this situation not changing?

If you weren’t trying so hard to change her/his ideas, what would you be doing?

What would be the worst consequence if I/you don’t do anything?

What will you notice when he/she is truly interested in Resolving this situation?

How will you know when the fight is over?

If this weren’t about me/you—what would you/I be noticing?

What wild ideas have you had about what could be done to solve this problem?

What do you need to experience & for how long in order for you to be convinced these changes will last?

What is your intent?

How will you know his/her intentions are sincere?

What needs to change in order for things to be different?

What have you been doing differently (recently) that has led to these results?

What’s different about you (or….?) Now that….?

How could this be handled so that the outcome will be positive?

What would be the first sign that things are really starting to slip?

Who would be the first to notice?

How will you know when you’re ready for a change?

What’s happening in your life that you enjoy or appreciate?

How have changes in one area affected the rest of your/my life?

What is the longest period I can remember during which things were going well?
TECHNIQUES FOR PROMOTING SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS

1. Separate the people from the problem.
2. Separate content issues from process issues.
3. Focus on interests, not goals; not positions.
4. Focus on the interdependence of the parties.
5. Invent options for mutual gain; expand the pie.
6. Use objective criteria to evaluate the options.
7. Take time for the dance. (as time goes on the offer differential gets smaller and the time between offers gets longer).
8. Find the common ground.
9. Explore the BATNA (Best Alternative To A Negotiated Agreement)
10. Explore the WATNA (Worst Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement)

Example...let's say you are going to an IEP for your child and you want more speech for your child -- before going into the meeting you should come in prepared with all of the options on how to achieve what you want. But if you are not able to collaborate or compromise with the District you need to know your BATNA beforehand. This is different for everyone. one parent may have already decided that if there is no negotiated agreement then she will just pay for the additional speech, another parent may decide to keep a good relationship with the IEP team but file for due process on the issue with speech, an example of WATNA may be not agreeing, going to due process and have an adversarial relationship with the IEP team...again all of this is different for each individual (family)

11. Frame and reframe and do it again.
12. Go to the balcony or take a break.
13. Look for smaller agreements/interim agreements that may provide a feeling of success.
14. Bottom line discussions are not usually very helpful.
15. Do not give up.
FORMULA FOR SOLVING A CONFLICT

1. COMMIT TO WORK IT OUT
   • Find a good time and place to talk
   • Agree to try to solve the problem
   • Establish Ground Rules

2. DEFINE THE PROBLEM
   • Each person says what happened and how he/she feels
   • Use Active Listening and I-Messages
   • Focus on Needs

3. BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS
   • Suggest many ways to address the issue
   • Do not judge the suggestions

4. CHOOSE A SOLUTION AND MAKE AN ACTION PLAN
   • Consider all options; look at possible outcomes
   • Select a solution that everyone agrees to
   • Decide the specifics (i.e. Who? What? Where? When? How?)