

OVERVIEW

Developing, practising and exploring active listening skills is important because it enables us to better recognise and pay attention to the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of others. It is crucial for cultivating productive relationships, establishing meaningful connections and developing safe spaces where people feel able to take part in community life. It also helps us with understanding and showing respect for others' perspectives and build inclusive spaces where everybody feels welcome. When people feel they are listened to, they feel better valued as a member of the community and become more open to participating and contributing regardless of whether they are staff, volunteers or participants.



AIM

1. Support volunteers to build their skills in listening to - and really hearing - other people's thoughts and views.
2. Practice communicating what you have heard. This can be challenging; it shows how much attention you have paid.
3. Reflect topic of choice from feedback given. This can provide new and interesting ideas.

INSTRUCTIONS

This activity can be used during any meeting. It doesn't require preparation or materials, but you may want to take notes if it helps the group reflect on outcomes. It is dynamic, interactive and flexible, and can be done outdoors.

Step 1:

Decide on a question and if appropriate write it up for all to see.

For a new group, you might want to start with a simple question to warm up.

For example, What is your favourite food? or Why do you enjoy coming to this project?

Step 2:

Split participants into pairs and explain how the process will work.

One person will start off as a 'Listener', and the other person as a 'Speaker'. The Speaker will have exactly 2 minutes to respond to the question, and they can use that time however they like (e.g. speaking, taking a break to think, etc). The Listener will listen carefully, without interrupting the Speaker – they will have their own turn to speak next, so their role is to listen.

After 2 minutes exactly, the roles will switch. The Listener now becomes the Speaker, and they will have 2 minutes to share their thoughts about the question.

Explain that you will keep time carefully to allow each person the same amount of time to respond. After both people have had a turn, each group member will be asked to share what they have heard while they were being the Listener.

Step 3:

Select the question, make sure everyone understands the task and begin the exercise. Remember to keep time carefully so that everyone feels they have had time to contribute.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Step 4:

Bring the group back together and invite each person to share the main point that they have heard in their 'Listening' role. The facilitator may wish to record the group's responses on flip chart.

The focus here should be on what the Listener took away from listening to the Speaker, not on trying to capture every detail. The Speaker in each pair should listen to this without correcting, discussing or adding more information now.

Step 5:

Ask the group to discuss any surprises about how what they said was reported back by the Listener.

Step 5a (optional):

Repeat the exercise with another question if there is time and your group are ready for some deeper thinking about Dignity in Practice. We have provided some example questions for this below. It is helpful to make sure everyone can see the list of Dignity Principles in Practice for this exercise.

Step 6:

Ask the group to reflect on how they felt during this exercise, in their role as Speaker and Listener. Have a brief discussion about how this exercise helps volunteers support people in the community with dignity.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

The questions below encourage staff and volunteers to reflect on the design and delivery of their project – they can be used in the Active Listening exercise to help volunteers think about how the Dignity Principles in Practice relate to their work.

- a. **What are we doing well in terms of working towards the Dignity Principles in Practice?**
(Optional: choose one principle to discuss at a time)
- b. **What challenges do we currently have in working towards the Dignity Principles in Practice?**
(Optional: choose one principle to discuss at a time)
- c. **What practical changes could we put in place to help us work better towards implementing the Dignity Principles in Practice?**
- d. **How will we know when we are making progress on the Dignity Principles in Practice?**
- e. **What else might help improve the services we provide?**

The Dignity Principles in Practice ask staff, volunteers and those taking part in community food initiatives to consider how the project supports people to feel:

- **A sense of control.**
- **Able to take part in community.**
- **Nourished and supported.**
- **Involved in decision-making.**
- **Valued and able to contribute.**