



Engaged Listening Practice

Engaged Listening uses 3 strategies:

- Connecting Comments
- Curiosity
- Deepening Questions

Get together with a friend who would like to practice engaged listening with you.

With one of you being the “skill-builder” and the other the “talker” spend 5 minutes with the skill-builder simply making connecting comments. Then switch roles for another 5 minutes. Reflect on how this felt to both. (*Note the examples given below*)

Next do another round where the “skill-builder” asks both connecting comments and curiosity-based questions for 5 minutes. Then switch roles for 5 minutes. Reflect on how this felt to both.

Now do a third round where the “skill-builder” uses connecting comments, curiosity, and deepening questions. This is likely to feel like a real and engaging conversation with the talker even starting to use the skills in an easy and natural way. Switch roles and then reflect on your experience of engaged conversation.

Keep practicing. I think you’ll find engaged conversations to be both enjoyable and interesting.

Connecting Comments

A connecting comment begins with making a link between what the other person is saying and your own experience. “My version of what you are saying is _____,” or “You are speaking of _____. That makes me think of _____. ” Making a connecting comment does double duty. It demonstrates that you understand AND it offers you a way to include yourself and focus on something that is also of interest to you.

Curiosity

In making a connecting comment, you want to be guided by something about what the person is saying or how you are experiencing them that interests you or that you are curious about. Here’s where you can guide the conversation in a desired direction. “I’m really curious about what got you interested in _____. Could you tell me more?” “I recently had a similar experience and it made me curious about _____. ”

Deepening Questions

These are questions that take the conversation deeper, and could also be called open-ended questions. Keep in mind that questions that can be answered simply by yes or no, or even a few words, generally don’t take you deeper or to a new place. Questions that ask a person to expand on

their experience by not leading to a choice (yes or no) will do wonders to keep a conversation from dead-ending. An easy way to try this would be to use questions that start with “how” or “why”

You can sense that engaged listening is happening when people are able to demonstrate listening to each other through *connecting their experience*, bringing themselves into the talk with *curiosity*, and exploring new ideas through *deepening questions*.

Here are a few examples:

Examples At Work

Is your project done yet? “No.”

Impact: dead-end question and person may feel criticized.

Instead: *How is your project going?* “It’s going pretty well.”

Impact: open-ended question and invitation to go deeper

Are there any obstacles? “No.”

Impact: dead-end and person may feel criticized.

Instead: *I’m curious about what obstacles you are encountering.*

Impact: open and person may feel seen, cared for, invited

Examples At a Party

Who do you know here? “Nancy and Jim.”

Impact: new question needed immediately

Instead: *How do you know people here?*

Impact: You have opened an opportunity to tell about how you know people here. *I don’t know them through the singing group, I know them through the swim club.*

Where did you grow up? “Minnesota.” (no pause) *I saw a good movie this week.*

Impact: The person doesn’t feel heard. There is no connecting comment that includes them in how the movie you say is related to where they grew up. You’ll keep talking but they won’t likely keep listening.

Instead: *Where did you grow up?* “Minnesota.” *Minnesota, eh. You know that makes me think of a good movie I saw where one of the scenes was in Minnesota. What’s the best movie you’ve seen recently. I really like movies.*

Impact: You might not have anything to talk about regarding Minnesota, so you can draw the conversation to something that could interest both of you.

Do you do any kind of exercise? “Yes.”

Impact: dead-end through a yes or no question.

Instead: *What kind of exercise is most satisfying to you?* “Swimming.” (Now, following an interest of yours:) *I’ve really been searching for the right kind of exercise for me. What led you to swimming?*

The keys for engaged listening, as a right use of your power and influence, are to demonstrate you understand, guide the conversation toward a topic that is interesting to you both, make connecting comments that create links between you, and ask how or why questions to open up new territory. This in turn leads to healthier and more connected relationships. In addition, you may feel more interested in others and more confidence in your ability to use your power toward increased well-being.