

## **ACTIVE LISTENING**

from Trauma Healing and Transformation, Chapter 6, pp. 240-241

One of the most important skills for both leaders and participants is listening. Listening is the basis of true communication—listening to oneself to hear the truth of one’s heart, and listening to the other, to hear clearly what they are saying. Listening is a skill that we are never finished learning. It is one of the basic skills of body-mind-spirit workshops, where part of the process involves listening to the wisdom of the body. This section concerns one kind of listening that involves an active attentive presence to oneself and to the other person. The purpose of active listening is to provide a safe and caring space for a person to speak and share whatever is going on within them, knowing that they are accepted and understood by the listener. When a person is listened to, they are often empowered to free themselves of feelings, memories, emotions, thoughts, concerns, problems, and wounds of the past. For person suffering traumatic stress, listening brings much comfort and provides the atmosphere for healing. When a person is listened to with care and respect, they are able to discharge many memories and wounds of the past that are affecting their lives in the present. And from the security and wisdom of the present moment, they can let go of the wounds of the past.

Active listening involves one person who takes the role of the speaker, and the other person who is the listener. While the speaker shares, the listener gives their total attention, and from time to time asks a question or mirrors back what the speaker has shared. After one person has shared for a while and feels finished, the two exchange roles and the listener becomes the speaker. This kind of listening is very useful in many situations and is excellent at times of conflict. Many times problems can’t be easily resolved. Putting aside your feelings and opinions to truly listen to the other person, can help you to deeply understand the other and their point of view. Listening presence is a variation in which two people take turns at sharing and listening. Here the listener only listens to the speaker with respect, without comments or questions. The listener simply accompanies the speaker with their attention. It is important that both persons take equal turns at speaking and sharing.

## **Guidelines for Listening**

Listening skills should be reviewed by both leaders and participants of workshops to improve communication. The following are guidelines for active listening:

- Listen with interest and attention. Active listening will encourage the person to speak and to share their feelings, emotions, joys, preoccupations, concerns, difficulties, and problem areas. Sharing deeply in this way permits the person to discharge and release many feelings that have been held within, and helps them to see more clearly and wisely in the moment what is going on within themselves.

- Permit the person to discharge any feelings or emotions they have at the moment.

The listener's role is to listen and provide a safe space, not to give answers.

- Don't let the problems of the person sharing disturb you as the listener. If you find that you easily absorb problems of others, imagine light or a wall protecting you, giving you clear boundaries. Try to be completely present to the person. Your role is listening to them, not solving their problems.

- Don't interfere or interrupt the person with your comments or suggestions for solving their problems. Don't intervene by sharing similar problems or concerns. This is the person's time to be listened to. You will have your turn, too.

- Don't interpret for the person or give your good advice or solutions. The person has within themselves their own wisdom to work out their own solutions to their problems. Your active listening helps them to clarify their thoughts and feelings in order to arrive at their own wise solutions.

- Don't react emotionally to the person. Your right attitude is one of attention and peaceful, caring interest. Indifference, hostility, or sympathy disturb the process of letting go and discharging whatever is held by the person.

- Don't interrupt or try to accelerate the process of the person. Often the listener feels the impulse to control the process, to help the discharge, to move along the process. The person will have their own natural rhythm of moving through the process.

- The person should decide on the issues that they want to work with during the session. Don't impose your own agenda on the person. This is also not a time for socializing. Each person should have equal time to listen and to be listened to during the process.

## **Guiding the Listening Process**

- Asking Questions:

The purpose of these questions is to help the person to clarify their own thinking and feelings, to guide the focus of the discharge or sharing, to show the sincere interest of the listener. The questions are not for the listener to add to their information about the person.

- Confidentiality:

Confidentiality is most important during and after the listening process. The person sharing should have complete confidence that the listener or the group will never speak outside of the session about what has been shared, unless given permission by the person. In cultures and communities where gossip and talking about everyone's business is the tradition, leaders should speak strongly and clearly about the value of confidentiality at the beginning of the workshop.