



I Choose to Listen

Being Present When You Don't Have the Answers



FOR EVERYDAY LEADERS

Supervisors, coworkers, parents, partners, and friends



DURATION

15-20 minutes with discussion



CAMPAIGN

I Choose to Listen

A FOUNDER'S REFLECTION

Sometimes I don't want to listen. Sometimes I don't want to hear what someone has to say.

As a leader, a father, and a husband, I've had conversations that were uncomfortable. And honestly... I didn't always have the answers.

Looking back, I began to see a change in my leadership when I changed what I did when someone came to talk. I put down the phone. I stopped answering emails. I turned toward them and listened.

It sounds simple. It wasn't. I had to force myself to be present. The conversations were tough at first. With practice, it got easier.

Adapted from the reflections of Charlie Parker, Founder of Eden317.

“

*I didn't have the answers.
I didn't need them.
I just needed to be present.*

Notice the habit. Practice presence. Make room for the person.

Toolbox 001 started the conversation. Toolbox 002 asks what we do when someone begins to talk.





1. Start with an honest question

OPENING DISCUSSION | 3 MINUTES

Have you ever tried talking to someone who kept looking at their phone?



How did that feel? Now think about a time you were the one holding the phone.

Facilitator: Invite a few responses. No names or personal disclosures. The goal is recognition, not embarrassment.

2. The first person to coach is yourself

Choosing to listen doesn't mean you always feel like it. It means noticing the pull to keep typing, interrupt, defend yourself, or rush toward an answer... and choosing what you do next.

You are not trying to control the other person. You are practicing how you show up for the conversation.

3. Make the choice visible



Pause the distraction. Put down the phone and stop typing when it is safe to pause what you are doing.



Turn toward the conversation. Give the person your attention. Find a quieter place or a different way to communicate when needed.



Let them finish. Resist preparing your reply while they are still speaking. Let a pause be a pause.



Check what you understood. Try: "Let me make sure I've understood..." Leave room for them to correct you.

When you catch yourself drifting: reset without making a speech. "Sorry, I got distracted. I want to hear this." Then return your attention to the person.





4. You don't need the perfect answer

Someone may need room to explain what they are experiencing, not an immediate solution. Before offering advice, ask what would help.

WORDS YOU CAN USE

To make room: "Tell me more about what that has been like for you."

To understand the need: "Would it help to talk it through, or would you like some ideas?"

When you don't know: "I don't have an answer right now, but I'm here."

Listening is not agreeing with everything, excusing harmful behavior, or taking responsibility for solving every problem in someone else's life. You can care, listen, and still maintain boundaries.

5. The lesson follows you home

AT WORK Stop typing when a coworker begins explaining a concern.

AT HOME Set the phone aside when your partner or child wants to talk.

WHEN IT IS HARD When the message is uncomfortable, listen before preparing your defense.

6. Be present, not always available

You don't have to abandon a safety-critical task or be available every minute. For a non-urgent conversation, be honest and set a time you can keep:

"I want to hear this. Can we sit down in ten minutes so I can give you my full attention?"

Then follow through. Respect boundaries. Listening is an invitation, not a demand for personal details.





7. The five-day listening challenge

For the next five days, choose one conversation each day at work or at home to practice giving your attention. Pause the competing task. Let the person finish. Ask what support would help.

Afterward, reflect privately: What pulled my attention away? What helped me return? No scorecards and no recording anyone's personal story. Practice your behavior, not their willingness to open up.

8. Practice it. Then talk about it.



PARTNER PRACTICE | 2 MINUTES

Choose an ordinary topic: a meal, a hobby, or your weekend. One person talks for 45 seconds while the other listens without advice. The listener uses 15 seconds to reflect back what they heard. Switch roles.

Discuss: What was harder: staying present or resisting the urge to answer? Where will you practice first: work, home, or with a friend?

Facilitator: Keep practice low-stakes. Participation is voluntary; no one needs to disclose a personal struggle.

The choice is presence, not perfection.

You will not always feel like listening. You will not always know what to say. You can still practice being present as a leader, a parent, a partner, or a friend.

***You don't have to know what to say
to choose to listen.***

WHEN LISTENING NEEDS TO BECOME ACTION

Concerned about suicide? Ask directly: "Are you thinking about suicide?" Listen without judgment and help connect the person with support. Do not promise secrecy about plans for self-harm.^{1,2}

U.S. support: Call or text 988 for yourself or someone else.

Immediate danger or medical emergency: Call 911.²

Support references: 1. NIMH, 5 Action Steps; 2. 988 Lifeline, Help Someone Else / Contact Us. Reviewed Oct. 14, 2026.

