A heart with a ear drawn on it

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**Guidelines for Listening**

*The Heart of Listening is partly born after working for many years with a model called ‘The Listening Partnership’. A tool developed by Patty Wipfler, founder of not-for-profit organisation Hand in Hand Parenting.*

*This therapeutic tool has helped and continues to help many thousands of parents to give and receive the kind of non-judgmental support essential for the tough, emotional work of parenting.*

Now the time has come to share this fabulous tool with a wider community so we can all benefit from the support it brings. We can experience a closer connection with each other and rediscover how much more we have in common than that which divides us.

Deep Listening is different to normal conversations were we usually listen casually, jumping in to offer our comments whenever we think of something to say, bouncing from person to person. Offering our own interpretations and judgements.

The idea here is to listen in turn, with the aim of being of assistance to the person talking. Giving a person precious time to think and develop trust in their own intelligence and capacity to come to their own conclusions and solutions to the challenges they face.

When we listen to another person while protecting them from interruption, interpretation and judgement it can enable them to think more clearly. As the listener, try to learn who she/he is and what they think and feel, putting aside what you are curious about or how your experience compares to theirs.

It is not a place to try to win support for your point of view or where you try to convince others that you have the best analysis of current events around you. Talk about what is important to you but make sure it is all about you and not the other person.

Also, and this is very important - please refrain from naming other members of the Community. We can offload upsets without referring to any one person. The Heart of Listening is about creating more connection not more division.

It will be a place where we can help one another safely offload any feelings of isolation, helplessness or anything else that is alive in us. We will listen to one another with respect.

We all want a world in which we, our families and neighbours are safe and cared for. We all do agree on that. Listening to each other helps us to find our own best thinking for how to move forward with that. You will have an opportunity to be listened to in the same way during your turn.

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**Listening Guidelines**

Here are some short guidelines to get you started which will keep the listening exchange safe and valuable for both parties.

* Adopt an attitude of full respect for yourself and every member of the group
* Assume that the listening you do will make a significant difference to the other members of the group.
* Give your full attention to the person who is speaking, do not interrupt.
* Don’t offer advice. Instead, offer an attitude of trust in each person’s ability to think, experiment and solve problems.
* Openly praise the good you see in yourself and in others.
* Keep the situations and feelings discussed in the group strictly confidential. Don’t refer to what someone has said in the group when it’s your turn to talk, at the close of the group or if you meet outside of the group or in conversations with others.
* This is not a place to try to win others over to your ideas or opinions.

**Outline**

1. Each person shares one thing that is going well, a bright spot that reminds us of the goodness of life.
2. Decide who will talk first and who will listen.
3. Use a timer to share out the time equally. Divide the time equally between all participants.
4. At the end of each person’s turn talking, the listener thanks the talker for their contribution and then asks a simple grounding question such as ‘tell me three countries beginning with the letter…’. This will bring the talkers attention back to the here and now ready to listen to the next person.
5. Swap over and repeat the listening process with the next person.
6. Finish with an appreciation of each other, or yourself or the process.

**A final note**

If you find yourself in a listening exchange where you feel that the above guidelines are not being adhered to or you are no longer able to offer your good, warm attention to the person/people in the group then calmly and politely let the person know that you need to end the exchange. Please don’t enter into a dialogue about this, just leave the call and let the moderator, call leader know what has happened. Thank you.

Thank you and much love

Sarah