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# Effective Listening Practice



See relationships thrive as you begin to listen

# Effective Listening Practice

*Introduction to Active  
Reflective Listening Skills*

## The Listening Pathway: Module 1 of 3

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*Registered Charity Number: 1080011 (England and Wales)  
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*Email: [info@acornchristian.org](mailto:info@acornchristian.org)*

*Website: [www.acornchristian.org](http://www.acornchristian.org)*

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# Introduction to Listening

## Good Listening is Hospitality

*"Listening is the highest form of hospitality ...  
Hospitality is not to change people but to offer them space  
where change can take place."*

**Henri Nouwen**

## Good Listening is Healing

*"The gift of being a good listener, a gift which requires  
constant practice, is perhaps the most healing gift anyone can  
possess. It allows the other to be, enfolds them in a safe place,  
does not judge or advise them, accepts them as they are  
without desiring to change them, and communicates support  
at a level deeper than words."*

**Gerard Hughes**

## Good Listening is Hard!

*"Listening looks easy, but it's not simple. Every head is a world."*

**Cuban Proverb**



# How do I Listen?

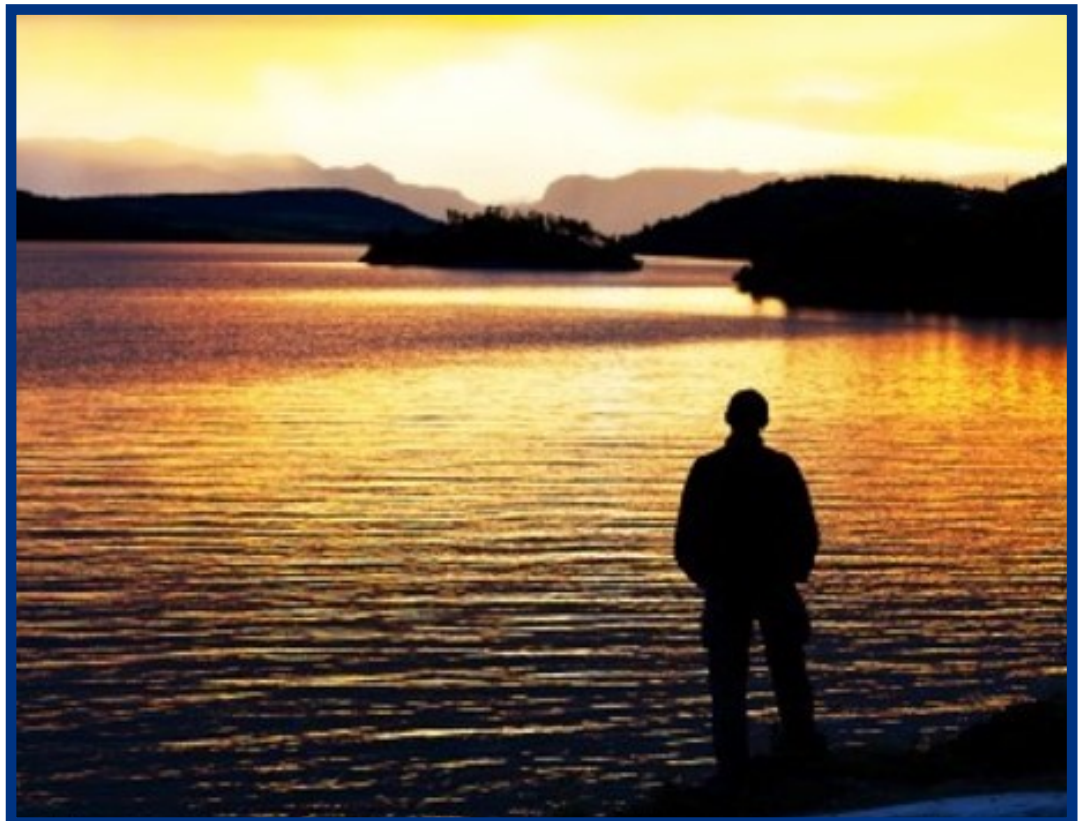
*Think about your own listening patterns.*

*'When I ask you to listen and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked. When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.*

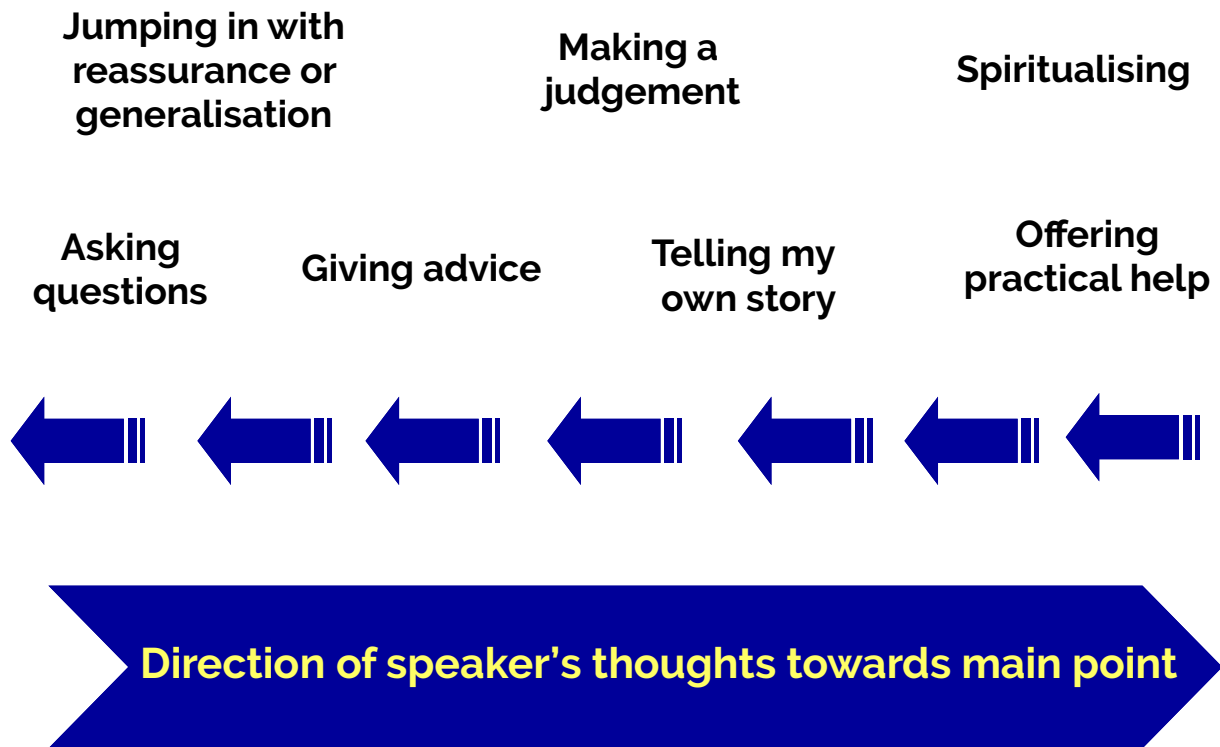
*When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problems, you have failed me – strange as that may seem. Listen! All I ask of you is that you listen, not talk or do, just hear me.*

*Advice is cheap. When you do something for me that I can, and need to, do for myself, you contribute to my fear and inadequacy; but when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel no matter how irrational, then I can stop trying to convince you and get down to the business of understanding what's behind my feelings. And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.*

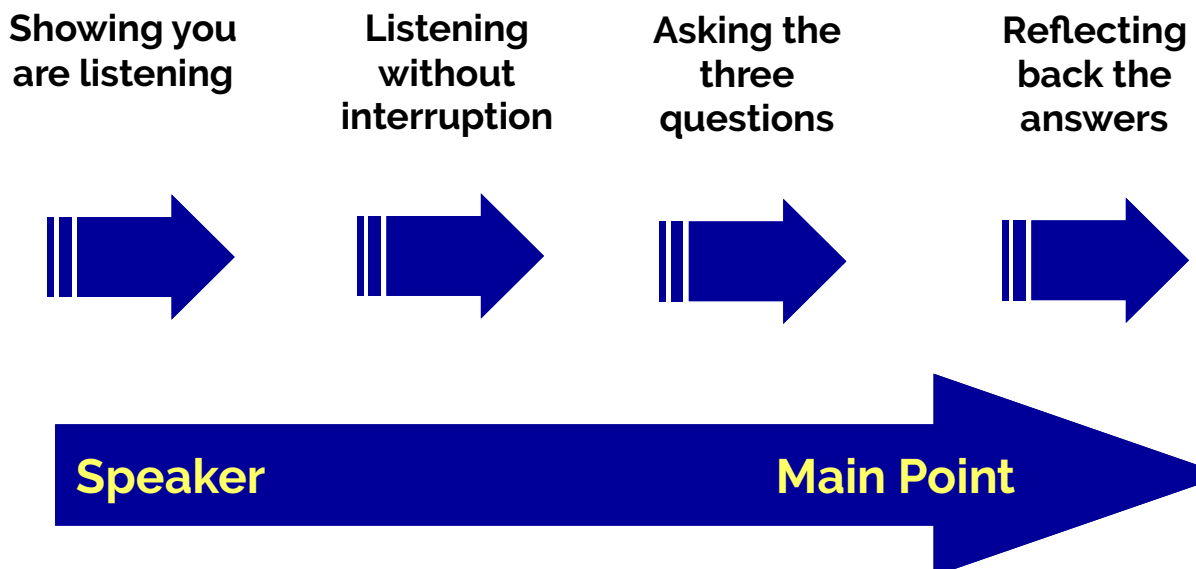
*Perhaps that's why prayer is so important for some people – God listens and stays with us but doesn't give advice all the time or try to fix things. God listens and gives us the power to work things through for ourselves, but I need you to be with me too. So please, just listen. If you want to talk, wait a few minutes for your turn and I'll listen to you.'*



# Deflective Listening



# Reflective Listening



# What is active reflective listening?

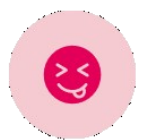
*Active Listening provides a reflective framework for listening to another person "where a comfortable, non-judgmental environment is created based on empathy, and a non-directive approach.*

*This approach helps individuals in finding their own solutions to their problems through self awareness and self empowerment."*

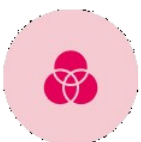
*The report went on to identify certain core elements of the listening, based on Acorn's values, four of which were:*



A **relationship** built on trust of confidentiality, care, valuing and respecting the person.



A **listening** structure that encourages expression of feelings, prioritisation and goal setting.



Appropriate **signposting** to other organisations who may better provide information or support.



A **safe space** for the speaker to tell their story, to be heard; where affirmation is achieved through the reflective process as the speaker hears their own words.

# Listening practice in pairs

Look for opportunities to practise your listening with someone else who has been on the course. Remember that this is a listening activity, not a conversation – try to stick to the method.

## Listening to Each Other

### Speaker

#### **Topic to explore:**

Set a time limit and explore a topic of your choice.

As **speaker** you are free to say much or as little as you choose.

## Listening to Each Other

### Listener

As a **listener**, focus as fully as possible on the speaker. If your mind strays, try taking a deep breath and relax.

When the speaker has finished, the **listener** asks the three questions below in turn. After each reply, reflect back what the speaker has said.

### **Out of all you have been saying, what is most important?**

*(Listener repeats/reflects back speaker's reply)*

### **Is there anything you would like to do about it?**

*(Listener repeats/reflects back speaker's reply)*

### **Now we are finishing, can you say how you are feeling?**

*(Listener repeats/reflects back speaker's reply)*

### **Points to note:**

*The listener is the timekeeper.*

*Remember the listener does not speak, interrupt, question or comment.*

*Simply listen.*

*You can encourage your speaker with "mm"s, nods, etc...*

*What is shared is confidential.*

### **Change over so that the listener becomes the speaker.**

*Take a moment in silence and ask yourself how you felt as speaker/listener.*



# Expressing feelings

## Sympathy and Empathy

*A person expresses sympathy, but shares empathy.*

*In sympathy the focus can be on my own feelings.*

*Empathy is 'feeling with' the person, I use my imagination as if I'm entering your world. It is YOU-focused.*

## Showing empathy when we listen

- *Be genuinely interested.*
- *Offer 'inner hospitality'.*
- *Reflect back the person's feeling words and phrases.*
- *Use your imagination: what might it feel like to be this person?*



# Listening to myself

## Questions to ask

*As you listen to people, become aware of what is happening in yourself.*

- *Do I want to **interrupt**?*
- *Is it **easy to listen** to some parts, **hard to listen** to others?*
- *Do I find my **thoughts wandering** at any point?*
- *Do I want to ask **questions**?*
- *Are there times when I would like to **tell my own story**?*
- *Do I find I want to give **any advice** to the speaker?*

## Other Observations?

- *Do I notice any 'feeling' words?*
- *Do I see any non-verbal body language?*

# Listening Skills - handy ways to get going

*You might like to use these or similar questions to relax the speaker and invite them to start.*

- *'Where would you like to start?'*
- *'Can you tell me what brought you here today?'*
- *'Do start when you're ready [or comfortable].'*
- *'How are you?' or 'How are you feeling?'*

## What next?

**Applied Listening Practice (Module 2)** *is about how to apply our listening skills in our lives.*

- *If you are interested in preparation for the next module think about where, and how, you expect to use your listening skills.*
- *Practise using active reflective listening appropriately (i.e. not in general conversation).*



# Top Tips for Good Listening Practice

Now you have completed the *Effective Listening Practice* training, you may be keen to go out and practise listening with the new skills you have learnt. To help you on your way, here are some top tips for listening well, safely and effectively.

## When we listen it is good practice to:

- *Keep confidentiality following your organisation's safeguarding policy. There are some situations where confidentiality cannot be maintained.*
- *Treat the person being listened to with respect and dignity, helping them to relax and feel valued.*
- *Be accountable to someone and consider how you can be supervised.*
- *Be clear that we are offering listening and not counselling.*
- *Be clear about the method of listening being used.*
- *Recognise when this listening is not appropriate and further professional help or other services are required. This is not saying that the listening does not work but recognising its limitations.*
- *Recognise your own limitations, including time.*

## Some principles of good active listening:

- *Set aside your own preoccupations before you start listening.*
- *Listen to the whole person, not just the words: tone, pitch, speed, silences, feelings.*
- *Do not offer advice. Enable the speaker to make their own decisions.*
- *Note the feeling words used. It may help to reflect some of these back so that the speaker can hear their own words.*

# When we listen it is important to:

- *Consider the time and place that you will listen.  
Are you safe? Is it a public place? Are there other people around?  
Do not meet in a place where no one else is present.*
- *Do not give out personal details or phone numbers to people you do not know.*
- *Do not travel with someone you do not know.*
- *Do not stay with a person who makes you feel uncomfortable, or is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.*
- *A listener does not have to stay listening to someone who is offensive or inappropriate, or causing unwanted distress to the listener.*
- *A listener does not feel they have to listen to everyone who asks.*
- *When listening to someone under the age of 16 years the listener must follow your organisation's safeguarding rules and must be aware of the legal situation surrounding this listening.*

*Often our opportunities to listen will be unexpected rather than planned.*

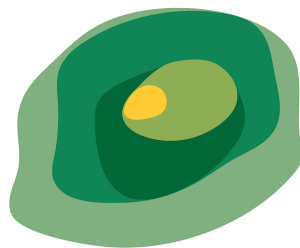
- *These may be when walking in the neighbourhood, or over the phone.*
- *Remember that good listening is about quality rather than quantity.*

*Sometimes it will be appropriate to signpost the speaker to other organisations, You may find it helpful to make a list of local and national organisations.*

# Further Training

**Module 2: Applied Listening Practice** – *this enables you to build on module 1 through applying your new-found skills. On this day together we will begin to learn the full Acorn listening model.*

**Module 3: Professional Volunteer Listening Skills** – *this continues to develop listening practice to an advanced level. We will consider how and when to signpost to other support and we will practise the full Acorn listening model.*



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