

MODULE 2: COMMUNICATION

SESSION 3: LISTENING TO OTHERS

Key Ideas for This Session:

- The key to good relationships is good communication.
- Good communication begins with good listening.
- Good listening is more than just hearing with ears.
- Key verse: Proverbs 18:2:
Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.

Some people think that communication is only about being able to get their point across—to make another person understand what they are saying. However, good communication begins with good listening. The ability to hear and understand what another person is saying will help support and strengthen good relationships with family members, friends, employers, parole/probation officers, and others in the community. When you are not listening or listening poorly, you will not successfully connect with others.

The Telephone Game:

The game of “Telephone” demonstrates the importance of listening carefully. In a circle of people, have one person quietly speak the following paragraph to the first person in the circle (others in the circle should not be looking at the paragraph and should try not to hear the first person). The listener then quietly recounts what he/she heard to the next person in the circle—and then that person recounts to the next, and so on. At the end of the game, once the last listener has recounted what he/she heard, the first person can re-read the paragraph to the group.

“A red car was turning left at an intersection when suddenly there was a crash with a big gravel truck coming from the other direction. It looked like the truck driver was just shaken up, but the driver of the car was hurt and was taken to hospital by the ambulance.”

What happened to the original message when it got to the last person in the group?

How would you explain the reason for the message changing, or not changing?

What are some barriers to good listening?

The Communication Cycle:

Communication involves several elements (shown in the chart below). At every stage of the communication cycle, things can happen to distort the intended meaning of a message.

Sender	The person who expresses a message that has a specific purpose or intention.
Medium	The means by which the message is communicated. For example, it can be spoken, written, visual, or acted.
Recipient	The person who receives and interprets the message. The recipient may consider many things about the sender including body language and past interactions.
Feedback	The recipient lets the sender know that the message was received.
Stage Prop	An object or place that communicates something about the sender or adds “context” E.g., a gun, badge, pulpit, cane, backpack.
Status Symbol	A special, unique or expensive object that signifies social status of the sender.
Background Noise	External circumstances and context at the time of the communication. Can include racial or cultural prejudice, preconceived ideas, and/or emotions.

Good listening involves hearing and understanding what is said as well as what is not said and what is communicated visually or non-verbally. It includes noticing the tone of a person’s voice, body language, the status symbols that are visible, and the “stage props” that they may be using.

Give some examples of what a person might communicate through:

The tone of their voice:

Their body language:

Stage props:

What messages might the following status symbols communicate?

Status Symbol	Possible Message
An expensive sports car	
Wearing a large amount of gold jewelry and chains	
A baseball cap with NY on it	
A shirt with a cross symbol	

Although the items above communicate something to us, we may or may not be correct in our interpretation of the intention. For instance, maybe the person driving the expensive sports car is working for a wealthy individual who has paid them to take their car and get it cleaned.

Before jumping to conclusions about the message a person (with a status symbol) is trying to communicate, what else would you want to know about the person?

How have you used status symbols in the past to send a message or communicate something to others about who you are or what you believe?

Active Listening

Active listening describes a person who is engaged and intent on truly hearing another person. An active listener draws another out through open-ended questions. Open-ended questions prompt the other person to dig deeper and to share more completely. An active listener seeks to hear the complete message that a person is communicating.

Change the following closed questions into open ones. Write your answers in the right column below:

Closed question:	Open question:
Did you have fun at hockey practice?	
Are you feeling well?	
Is your brother starting his own business?	
Do you have a large family?	

Listening Non-Judgmentally

Non-judgmental listening is an aspect of active listening. The listener is open-minded and free from judgmental approaches such as prejudice, stereotyping, forming opinions, jumping to conclusions and evaluating. Rather, the listener waits to hear what the person is saying, in order to respond.

In **Column A** below, there is a list of non-judgmental listening skills. In **Column B**, there is a list of examples and explanations that match to **Column A**. Using a pencil, draw a line connecting each item from **Column A** with its matching example/explanation in **Column B**.

Column A “Non-Judgmental Listening”	Column B “Examples & Explanations”
1. Don’t interrupt	1. Eliminate distractions. Stay focused in the present.
2. Keep an open mind	2. Use attending prompts like “mmm,” “uh-huh,” or “I see.”
3. Make listening a priority	3. Open body posture, eye contact
4. Show respect for the person	4. Clarifying, paraphrasing, summarizing
5. Offer suggestions vs advice	5. You can’t listen and talk at the same time.
6. Listen with empathy	6. E.g., “I don’t agree, but I do see your point.”
7. Let the person know you are listening	7. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes
8. Ask good questions	8. E.g., “What has worked for you before?”
9. Watch non-verbal behaviour	9. E.g., “Switching courses or taking it again next year might be an option?”
10. Check understanding	10. Listen, don’t judge right or wrong or jump to conclusions

Proverbs 20:5
The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.

How might you state this verse in your own words?

Listening With More Than Your Ears:

For any effective communication cycle, both the sender and the recipient need to listen well. Listening is more than hearing. Listening well is an attitude and behaviour that leads to complete understanding.

The Gospels tell of a time when Jesus was at the temple in Jerusalem and was teaching the people through stories called parables. The leading priests and Pharisees were among those in the group and were hostile to Jesus, seeking to trap Him. Through parables, Jesus got His message across, loud and clear:

Read Matthew 21:23-27; 33-45

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while He was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him. "By what authority are You doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave You this authority?" ²⁴ Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?"

They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ²⁶ But if we say, 'Of human origin'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then He said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

³³ "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵ "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸ "But when the tenants saw the son,

they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" ⁴³ "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed." ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew He was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest Him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that He was a prophet.

Who does the father in the story represent?

Who does the son represent?

Who does the tenant represent?

In Matthew 21:45 it says, "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew He was talking about them." Why did they think that?

What were some of the "stage props" in the parable that may explain how the message was interpreted by those in attendance?

Break into small groups and discuss the following if there is time, or think about these topics this week:

- *In Matthew 13:16, Jesus says, “But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.” What do you think He means?*
- *Why is it important to take the time to understand another person’s point of view?*
- *The list below illustrates some differences between a poor listener and a good listener. Check off the things that you need to do to improve your listening skills:*

You are not listening to me when...⁴

- You do not or cannot care about me, until you know something about me.*
- You say you understand before you know me well enough.*
- You have an answer for my problem before I have finished telling you what my problem is.*
- You cut me off before I have finished speaking.*
- You feel critical of my grammar, accent, culture, or way of doing and saying things.*
- You are communicating to someone else in the room.*
- You are dying to tell me something or want to correct me.*
- You are trying to sort out the details and are not aware of the feelings behind the words.*
- You sense my problem is embarrassing and you are avoiding it.*
- You get excited by what I am saying and want to jump right in before I invite your response.*
- You need to feel successful.*
- You tell me about your experience which makes mine seem unimportant.*
- You refuse my thanks by saying you haven’t done anything.*

You are listening to me when...⁵

- When you come quietly into my private world and let me be.*
- You really try to understand me when I do not make sense.*

⁴ Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2020

⁵ Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2020

- *You grasp my point of view when it goes against your sincere conviction.*
- *You realize the hour I took from you has left you feeling a bit tired and drained.*
- *You didn't tell me the funny story you were just bursting to tell me.*
- *You allowed me the dignity of making my own decisions even though you felt I was wrong.*
- *You didn't take my problem from me but trusted me to deal with it in my own way.*
- *You gave me enough room to discover for myself why I felt upset and enough time to think for myself what was best.*
- *You held back the desire to give me good advice.*
- *You accepted my gift of gratitude by telling me it was good to know I had been helped.*