

Compassionate Listening Practice:

*** If at any time, in any role, you feel overwhelmed, raise your hand and one of the meeting coordinators will come to assist. ***

Three Roles:

Sharer: Choose an issue to focus on. You might choose a “handle” – a word or phrase. Choose something you feel safe (and maybe a bit uncomfortable) sharing. Sharing your feelings relative to the issue will give you the most “bang for your buck”; sharing thoughts, a little less. Share in “ear-sized” chunks: small enough that your Reflector doesn’t have to struggle to reflect your words back to you.

Also make it easier for your Reflector by getting to the “bottom-line” or “laser focus” of your story: this means giving only as much detail as is important to support the thoughts and feelings you are sharing. You’ll probably discover that the details are not as important as the thoughts and feelings.

Reflector: Listen and reflect what the Sharer is saying, using the words s/he chose. In the first phase, understanding is not the goal; be the audio “chalkboard” on which the Sharer can hear and amend their own words until they match his/her experience. Your challenge is to be a clear Reflector, accepting the other’s experience, outside of your own agenda. To keep yourself out of the Sharer’s story, reflect by repeating almost exactly, substituting “you” and “your” for “I”, “me”, and “mine”.

If you find your memory getting over-filled, respectfully pause the sharer to reflect back what you have before they continue. (A sign we have found effective is putting hands in a “T” - the sign for “time-out”) Also notice any feelings you have; do not act unless requested.

In the second phase, Summarizing, take a moment – you might close your eyes – to reflect on everything you’ve heard (yes, it’s all in there!). Pick the main points and summarize what you’ve heard. (restating all the details is not very helpful.)

In the third phase, validating, be sincere and stay focused on the Sharer’s experience: your personal stories should only inform your own understanding, and should not be expressed (to do so would take focus away from Sharer). This is the piece I call “Welcome back to the human race”; the goal is to find a way for their thoughts or feelings to make sense in the realm of human experience, as something a number of people might do. We wish to convey “you are not alone.” And more that: “you are not an anomaly.” By refraining from offering connection with our personal self, we offer them the chance to reconnect with themselves. For instance: rather than saying “I had a similar thing happen to me and I had similar feelings.” you might say “It makes sense to me that if a person <encountered these conditions>, they might feel <similarly>.”

Observer: “Hold the space” for the Listening Practice, staying emotionally present and attentive with the other two as witness for them as they go through the process. If your own feelings or reactions rise up, this is your chance to practice witnessing your own feelings - just notice, and then return to attentive-ness; don’t act unless requested.

Preparation:

Create the “container”. Agree on which conditions all current participants need and want to feel emotionally safe. I’ll list some I think are important, but do make sure everyone has what they need, or has the chance to opt out.

- acceptance
- “need-to-know” confidentiality (no identifying details);
- don’t bring up topics after the evening has ended (unless you get permission);
- no suggestions, advice without permission.

You might want to take a few moments to pay attention to and accept how your body feels right now, before you start. Clear your minds of agendas and expectations as much as possible. Choose to believe in others’ wholeness and resourcefulness and capability – you are not here to fix or advise each other. (If you wish to offer suggestions, please only do so AFTER the process, and be sure to ask for and receive permission before doing so.)

Form triads. Break into groups of three. Choose roles. After each round rotate roles until each person has had a turn in each. (If necessary, you can expand the number of observers. A dyad can be created with those who are familiar with the practice.)

Phase 1: The issue

Sharer	Reflector	Observer
Choose an issue to explore. (think about “laser focus” / “bottom-line”)		
Share personal thoughts and feelings in “ear-sized chunks” that make it easy for Listener to reflect.		Stay attentive and present to the other two, and to your own feelings. Notice, but do not act!
	Listen, then reflect back to the Sharer what you have heard IN THEIR WORDS. Check in with the Sharer: “did I get it?”	
Amend the reflections until you feel it captures your experience.		
	Listen to amendments and restate. (you may prompt with “is there more about this?”)	
“Rinse and repeat” until this issue is played out... or until notified of time limit. :- (Seldom longer than 10 min)		

Phase 2: Summary

Sharer	Reflector	Observer
	Take a few moments to gather all you’ve heard, then give an overview of what you heard. (especially thoughts and feelings)	Continue staying attentive and present...
Amend the summary until you feel it captures your experience.		
	Listen to amendments and restate.	

Phase 3: Validation

Sharer	Reflector	Observer
	Validate feelings: “It makes sense to me that you might think or feel that because...” or “you are not alone...”	Continue staying attentive and present...
Listen and receive the validation		

Closing:

Take a moment to check in with how you feel.

Express honest and specific thanks to your triad-mates.

You may share experiences with each other.

If you would like feedback, this would be a good time to request it. If you have feedback, this would be a good time to offer it (do not give without permission).

Once you leave the group, do not bring up what you’ve heard... unless you get permission to do so.

Cycle Roles - We will do this 3 times, cycling roles to give each person a chance to experience each role.

Reconvene in larger group – share insights or experiences you feel may have value to others.