

The Speaker-Listener Technique

“...Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry...” James 1:19

Rules for Both of You

1. **The speaker has the floor.** Use a real object to designate the floor. You can use anything, the TV remote, a piece of paper, a paperback book, anything at all. If you do not have the floor, you are the Listener. Note that the Speaker keeps the floor while the Listener paraphrases, keeping it clear who is in which role all the time.
2. **Share the floor.** You share the floor over the course of a conversation. One has it to start and may say several things. At some point, you switch roles and continue back and forth as the floor changes hands.
3. **No problem solving.** When using this technique, you are going to focus on having good discussions. You must consciously avoid coming to solutions prematurely.

Rules for the Speaker

1. **Speak for yourself.** Don't mind read. Talk about your thoughts, feelings and concerns, not your perceptions or interpretations of the Listener's point of view or motives. Try to use "I" statements and talk about your own point of view.
2. **Talk in small chunks.** You will have plenty of opportunity to say all you need to say, so you don't have to say it all at once. It is very important to keep what you say in manageable pieces to help the Listener actively listen. A good rule of thumb is to keep your statements to just a sentence or two, especially when first learning the technique.
3. **Stop and let the Listener paraphrase.** After saying a bit, perhaps a sentence or two, stop and allow the Listener to paraphrase what you just said. If the paraphrase was not quite accurate, you should politely restate what was not heard in the way it was intended to be heard. Your goal is to help the Listener hear and understand your point of view.

Rules for the Listener

1. **Paraphrase what you hear.** To paraphrase the Speaker, briefly repeat back what you heard the Speaker say, using your own words if you like, to make sure you understand what was said. The key is that you show your partner that you are listening as you restate what you heard, without any interpretations. If the paraphrase is not quite right (which happens often), the Speaker should gently clarify the point being made. If you truly don't understand some phrase or example, you may ask the Speaker to clarify or repeat, but you may not ask questions on any other aspect of the issue unless you have the floor.
2. **Don't rebut. Focus on the Speaker's message.** While in the Listener role, you may not offer your opinions or thoughts. This is the hardest part of being a good Listener. If you are upset by what your partners says, you need to edit out any response you may want to make, so you can continue to pay attention to what your partner is saying. Wait until you get the floor to state your response. As Listener, your job is to speak only in the service of understanding your partner. Any words or gestures to show your own opinions are not allowed, including making faces. Your task is to understand. Good listening does not equal agreement. You can express any disagreement when you have the floor.

The speaker may use the below prompts

- *Event or behavior* - “When _____ happens...
- *Thoughts* - “...I think _____ [listener reflects]
- *Feelings* - “...I feel _____ [listener reflects]

Each Turn:

Speaker Shares – When _____ happens, I feel/think _____,

Listener Reflects – What I heard you say is...

Speaker Confirms – Yes...OR...no, I said...

Switch – Exchange object, switch roles