

## Listening and Speaking about Hot Topic Issues

The **Listener Role** and the **Speaker Role** are two separate jobs. They have different steps and different goals and cannot be done at the same time. A common mistake is for the Listener to not actually be listening, but to be planning his or her response instead.

**Before beginning** a conversation about a difficult topic, make an agreement to speak. Simply asking, “Is now a good time to talk about X?” sets up an attitude of a shared willingness to explore the topic. If your partner says “yes”, go forward. If he or she says “no” there needs to be a bit of exploration. Is it a responsible “no” that comes with an explanation and a promise for a future time to talk? Or is it a provocative “no” with no real commitment to addressing the other’s concerns?

### **SPEAKER’S JOB:**

Don’t let an important message get lost in a poor delivery. Follow some simple rules:

- 1) Rehearse what you need to say before you start. You want to be specific about this situation or issue.
- 2) Speak about your needs and wants, not what your partner is doing wrong. Use “I” statements, but avoid turning them into statements about the other person like “I think you...”
- 3) Do not blame, judge or criticize. Don’t attack the other’s character or personality. Stay on your side of the line and talk about you and your experiences.
- 4) Be careful that you’re not doing a verbal dump. Keep your statements short and few. Make sure they are coming in digestible chunks.
- 5) Cover the important parts:
  - a. What I observed was... (keep this part objective – only include things that another person would see if they watched the event on a video camera. Remember, cameras don’t record what someone was thinking or feeling.)
  - b. The story I told myself about this was... (tell what the story that was going through your head was.)
  - c. How I felt about it was...(The primary emotions are joy, pain, anger, fear, lust, love, shame and guilt. These can help you get started sorting out your emotions).

**BREAK FOR LISTENER’S TURN**

  - d. What I would like is... (give you partner a chance to shine. Ask for something they can give you or do for you.

Take a break between steps ‘c’ and ‘d’ to allow for feedback from your partner. Ask them to summarize what they’ve heard. Tell your partner what you like about their summary and what you still need. Do not have ultra-high standards. Take in what they are saying even if it is only “good enough”. Take in the fact that they are making an effort to listen, offering empathy and support and be sure to appreciate and enjoy those parts before making any corrections.

## **LISTENER'S JOB:**

Your goal is to “get it”, not to make them “get you”. What is your partner telling you about themselves and their experience, not about you? Ask questions whenever you're not sure:

1. Tell me more about that? How do you feel? How do you view this?
2. Help me understand why this is important to you.
3. Is there a history in your life of things like this?

Don't argue with your partner about their answers, or why they should see things differently, or feel differently. This is not about right or wrong, only about understanding. Your goal is to gather enough information to be able to VALIDATE YOUR PARTNER by saying something like:

BOY, WHEN I LISTEN TO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING AND HOW IT WAS FOR YOU WHEN THIS WAS HAPPENING, I CAN TOTALLY UNDERSTAND HOW YOU WOULD HAVE FELT \_\_\_\_\_ WHEN I \_\_\_\_\_. I'M SORRY FOR THE PAIN YOU FELT AND FOR MY ROLE IN CAUSING IT. I WANT TO BE ABLE TO MAKE THIS BETTER FOR YOU.