

Strategy and Lesson Plans

Listening Deeply

Grades 3-5

Making Caring Common

Updated May 2019

Overview

Students are given the chance to learn about and practice three active listening skills: body language, focus, and expressing empathy. They will practice being good listeners with a partner – listening fully without the need to say something back, asking follow-up questions, and acknowledging feelings – in a series of lessons with different conversation starters.

Recommended time

- Start at the beginning of an academic session (e.g. semester, quarter)
- 20-30 mins per lesson (can be longer or shorter depending on available time)
- Five lessons total, one lesson per week

Materials and advance prep

- Slips of listening/speaking prompts, printed and cut (Appendix I/II, Lesson 1)
- A timer or clock (Lessons 2-5)
- Speakers/computer for music (Lesson 5; optional for Lessons 2-4)
- Highly recommended to read through all 5 lessons and plan when to implement each before starting Lesson 1. Lessons may require extra materials and/or minor preparation in order to implement with fidelity and ease. Adapt as needed for your class, or group of students.

Objectives

- To help listeners better understand others' perspectives without judgment and interruption
- To encourage speakers to open up, share about themselves, and feel more understood
- To highlight that authentic listening involves expressing empathy

Why this matters

There are many approaches to good listening, and this lesson centers around three primary skills: engaged body language, true focus, and expressing empathy. The more students practice active listening, without being in a two-way conversation, the more they'll come to value showing interest when someone is speaking, trying to understand their thoughts and feelings, and making them feel heard. The personal nature of the listening prompts also sets the stage for student sharing, which can build trust and connection in the classroom.

Other considerations

As you read through the lesson, keep in mind that you can crowdsource the prompts/questions, whether from students writing on the board (or using post-it notes) and narrowing the choices, or picking prompts/questions out of a hat (at your discretion). Ideally, the topics should deepen as students become more accustomed to the format. If you have more time, feel free to stretch a lesson by using all of the discussion prompts and questions, or combine the subsequent lesson.

Extending this strategy

Once a week, or at various points throughout class discussions, you can highlight the third aspect of active listening— expressing empathy— and make a habit of asking students to paraphrase or repeat what a fellow classmate said, as well as to validate their feelings (if applicable).

Lesson 1: Introduction (25-30 minutes)

Introduce the strategy (1-2 minutes)

Introduce the lesson by saying, “Starting this week we are going to begin a series of lessons focused on becoming better listeners. I hope that each of us can remember a time when someone really listened to us and how it felt knowing that they were listening. But I’m sure we each could also remember a time when we felt like someone wasn’t listening to us and the way that made us feel. Today we are going to begin by thinking about what makes someone a good listener, and why it is important.”

To start, display the following terms on the board:

Body Language, Focus, Expressing Empathy

Definitions (10 minutes)

Ask students what they think each term might mean when it comes to listening. One term at a time, ask students to raise their hands to share what they think the term means and for examples of each term. For additional scaffolding, you may need to begin by providing a definition and one example (see below), and then ask for student examples. Write student responses under each term, and when they’re done add others from the examples below:

Body Language:

What is your body doing as you listen to the speaker? Use body language to show active listening.

- Examples (good): Eye contact; nodding; facing forward/toward speaker;
- Examples (bad): slouched, turned sideways of speaker, arms crossed at all times, facial expressions that show disapproval or disgust at the speaker (e.g., eye rolling)

Focus:

What are you thinking about as you are listening? Pay attention by “tuning in” to the other person’s words while trying to minimize distractions and your own thoughts and judgments.

- Examples (good): “mm-hmm”-ing, repeat key words in your head to help you remember, avoid distractions (e.g., side conversations, phone ringing)
- Examples (bad): look at a phone/computer/TV, look away, think about something else, think about what you will say back

Expressing Empathy:

What are you doing to make the speaker feel heard? Are you trying to understand what the person is saying, and do you care about what they’re thinking or feeling? It can make a big difference to a speaker if they feel like the listener is truly listening and trying to understand them. Whether you agree with the speaker or not, try to think about why he or she feels that way. Think less about how you would feel or think in their situation, and more about what they are feeling and thinking. That is called empathy: when we really try to understand the thoughts and feelings of others, and show that we care or value them.

- Examples (good): nodding, after they’re done speaking, you can think about what’s been said by paraphrasing (e.g., “you said...”), asking good follow-up questions (e.g., “what did you mean when you said...?”), acknowledging feelings (e.g., “it seems like you feel... is that right?”)
- Examples (bad): asking the same question over and over, bringing up your own story right away after they’re done speaking, misrepresenting what they said, making them feel bad about how they feel

Listening game (5-10 minutes)

Next, play a game where students can practice how to express and recognize good listening. In each round, have students break into groups of 4-5 students to plan 1-minute skits to demonstrate good/bad listening in each of the 3 listening skills. You can assign each group with a skill or groups can pick out of a hat (see [Appendix I](#)). Ideally, you will have 6 groups representing a good/bad version of each skill: body language, focus, or expressing empathy.

Give students 8-10 minutes to plan the skits, and then have them present them to the class. At the end of each skit, have the class guess what their skill was, and if they were showing good/bad listening skills.

***MCC Tip:** For students who may need more structure and support, you may choose to act out the good and bad examples of listening for the class. Then, students can share if you were listening well or not. Another option is to call up one student volunteer at a time and whisper a behavior for them to act out as you speak (such as looking away or asking a clarifying question).*

Wrap up (1 minute)

Wrap up Lesson 1 by saying, “For the next week or so, I encourage you to spend some time thinking about how you listen, what you are thinking when you listen, and how your body acts when you listen. I also want you to search for examples of good listening.”

Tell students when you think the next lesson will happen.

Listening Deeply Protocol for Lessons 2-5

For the next four lessons (Lessons 2-5), you will use the following format. Continue to the next page for specific prompts and questions for each lesson.

[2-3 min] Recap the previous lesson, writing the three terms, Body Language, Focus, and Expressing Empathy on the board and asking students to come up with examples of each.

[2 min.] Assign students in pairs. For this activity, do not allow students to self-select their pairs. During each lesson, ensure students are paired with new partners who they don’t know very well. Say, “Today we are going to grow as listeners by talking with our classmates about (topic)!”

***Grouping Tip:** You can have students arrange themselves in a line by birthdate, and have students closest in number pair up, and next time, those furthest in number, etc. You can also play music and have students dance/walk around and then pair up with the student closest to them when the music stops.*

[1.5 min.] Once in pairs, tell students that they have 1 min to talk each, with no contributions from their partner at all - not even one word. For the listening partners, you’ll remind them of the three listening concepts, and specify, “Pay attention to what your partner is saying. How do they feel? Do you understand what they’re saying?” Keep track of time for the class and instruct students when it is time to move on.

***MCC Tip:** You may want to start at 1 minute for student pair discussions and add more time as each lesson happens based on how well students are doing.*

[1.5 min.] Once the time is up, the listening partner has 1-2 minute to ask follow-up questions and engage in brief conversation. Active listening is especially relevant here, as the listener can reflect on what’s been said by echoing (e.g., “you said...”), or asking good follow-up questions (e.g., “I didn’t understand when you said...”), and acknowledging feelings (“it seems like you feel

...”). It can be helpful for you to write examples of sentence starters for paraphrasing on the board.

[3 min.] Then, it will be the listener’s turn to speak for 1 minute without any interruption, followed by questions from their partner.

Protocol debrief (5-10 minutes)

After each “Listening Deeply” lesson, ask students a selection of the following questions to guide their overall reflection. Focus on the bold questions if you’re short on time.

***MCC Tip:** Students may reflect on paper, in pairs, or whole group – use a strategy that best suits your group of students.*

- **What was it like to only talk? What was it like to only listen?**
- **How does it feel to be well-listened to, and to be asked good questions? Why did you feel that way?**
- How does it feel when you’re not listened to? Does your behavior change?
- **How does it feel to listen poorly? What did that look like for you?**
- **How does it feel to listen at your best? What did that look like for you?**
- **Why do people not practice good listening all the time? Do you have trouble? How do you think you can be a better listener?**
- What did you learn about your partner?
- Did you get better at listening/communicating? How?
- **Why do you think listening skills are important to get along with others?**

Lessons 2-4: Role-Playing as Listeners (20 minutes per lesson)

Over the course of 4 lessons, facilitate this activity using different prompts. Each lesson has suggested prompts and you can have students pick them out of a hat (see [Appendix II](#)). You could even provide conversation prompts linked to academic content. You know your students best!

Lesson 2

[1 min.] Introduce Lesson 2 by saying, “Today we are going to continue practicing our listening with our peers. I want to acknowledge that this might feel a little silly at first – that is OK and totally normal – but learning to listen to others is important and helps show others you care.”

Follow the “[Listening Deeply Protocol](#).” Sample prompts:

- What did you do this weekend?
- What’s your favorite holiday?
- What is your favorite thing to do at home?
- What is your favorite thing to do at school?

***MCC Tip:** Instead of having students pick from a hat (see [Appendix II](#)), consider asking them to share-out their own ideas, or to vote on one of the sample prompts.*

After completing the protocol bring the group together for a debrief (see Protocol Debrief above). You should facilitate an honest and low-pressure opportunity for students to reflect on their first attempt at the protocol. Wrap-up by letting students know when you think the next lesson will be and remind them to look out for instances of listening deeply to share next time.

Lesson 3

Begin by asking if any students have examples of listening deeply that they could share with the group. Ask students to elaborate on who, where, and what they saw and why they thought it was an example of listening deeply.

Then, start students with the [protocol](#) again. Sample prompts:

- What do you like to do for yourself? For others?
- What are some things you don’t like at all?
- What are you afraid of and why do you think that is?

***MCC Tip:** The prompts can get even harder by asking more personal questions like, “What do you wish you could get better at, and how can you make that happen?”*

After students complete the protocol bring the group together for a debrief (see Protocol Debrief above). Wrap-up by letting students know when you think the next round will be and to bring a “listening deeply shout-out” to class next week.

Lesson 4

Start by sharing a shout-out for a student who you saw engage in deep listening this week. Make sure your shout-out follows a clear and replicable format, such as,

“I have a shout out for _____, because I saw him/her listening deeply to _____. I could tell they were listening because_____ (reference the listening habits from [Lesson 1](#)).

This can be written on the board before the start of the lesson, so that after your shout-out, you can ask students to volunteer if they have their own shout-out using the sentence frame above.

Begin the protocol. Other sample prompts:

- Talk about something or someone that makes you happy.
- Talk about a time you felt really embarrassed. Or guilty. Or upset. How did you get over it, or what can you do to become better at getting over it?

***MCC Tip:** At this point you may want to push students to listen to each other for longer. Amp up the time from 1 minute to 1.5 or 2 minutes each!*

After students complete the protocol bring the group back together for a debrief. Wrap-up by letting students know when you think the final round will be!

Lesson 5: The Final Lesson (20-25 minutes)

Introduce the lesson (1 minute)

Tell students,

“Today we are doing the last lesson of the Listening Deeply Protocol. We will be playing a game where we continue to practice our listening skills with partners, but instead of being assigned one partner you will have multiple different partners. First, we will all stand up and when I play some music, everyone will move around the room until the music stops. When the music stops, find a partner, and when everyone has a partner, we will continue our listening deeply conversations. Each student will have 1 minute to talk, the listener will then get to ask questions for one minute and then the partners will switch as usual. During this lesson, continue to focus on all aspects of listening, body language, focus and active listening and showing empathy, even with new distractions from the game. Make sure you are an excellent partner and have fun!”

Listening game (20 minutes)

Once all students are standing, play music for 20-30 seconds while students move around the room. When the music stops, make sure all students are paired up, and then begin the [protocol](#) by announcing the first topic. Feel free to use the prompts below or create your own, deciding on the 2-3 prompts your class will use for the game.

- What is your favorite hobby? Favorite type of food? Music?
- Who is someone you look up to that you consider to be a role model or good person?
- What is your favorite book or story? Movie? TV show?

Once each partner gets a chance to talk and ask questions, play the music again and have students walk around to find new partners when the music stops again. Repeat the protocol by announcing the next topic.

MCC Tip: *At this point you may want to push students to listen to each other for longer. Amp up the time to 2.5 or 3 minutes each!*

After students complete the protocol 2 to 3 times with different partners, bring the group back together and engage students in a discussion of the following prompts. If time is tight, make sure to address the final, bolded questions.

- **How did the final lesson go?**
- How did the game change the way you listened?
- Was it harder to practice some of the skills (body language, focus, expressing empathy) with the distractions of the game?
- How has this exercise changed for you? Is it easier? Harder? Why or why not?
- **What listening skills do you notice you have improved on?**
- **How can we use these listening skills outside of school?**
 - Ask students to think about key areas in their lives: as a student, as a son/daughter, as a grandchild, as a teammate, as a friend.
 - Ask them to think of one example for each of the skills that they can employ in their own lives, and if anyone is willing to share.
- How can listening better to people in our lives show that we care about them?

Wrap up (1 minute)

Wrap-up the lessons by telling students the following,

“Through our work over the last several weeks we have built-up our listening skills. Being a strong listener shows people that you interact with that you care about what they have to say and that you care about them. I have been proud of your work this week and look forward to seeing more examples of listening deeply in our class going forward!”

Extension ideas

Infuse these listening skills into the daily practice of your class. Some ideas for infusing are:

- Post the definitions of each listening habit in the classroom with exemplars of each! (e.g. take photos of students modeling each, quotes from students about why listening deeply matters)
- Use the listening protocol in your lesson plans and academic content areas
- Shout out students who are listening deeply even after the lessons are done
- Occasionally revisit the protocol (maybe once a week, or once every two weeks) with students. You could do this as a fun activity or more serious in nature.

For more details on these activities and additional extension ideas, see [Listening Deeply](#)

Routines.

Appendix 1: Listening Prompts

<p>GOOD BODY LANGUAGE</p> <p>(NODDING, FACING THE SPEAKER, EYE CONTACT)</p>	<p>GOOD FOCUS</p> <p>(EYE CONTACT, SAYING 'MM-HMM', AVOIDING DISTRACTIONS)</p>
<p>EXPRESSING EMPATHY</p> <p>(NODDING, PARAPHRASING, ASKING GOOD FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS, ACKNOWLEDGING THE SPEAKER'S FEELINGS)</p>	<p>BAD BODY LANGUAGE</p> <p>(FACING AWAY FROM SPEAKER, ARMS CROSSED, MEAN FACIAL EXPRESSIONS, EYE-ROLLING, NO EYE CONTACT)</p>
<p>BAD FOCUS</p> <p>(DISTRACTING YOURSELF, LOOKING AT PHONE/TV/OTHER PEOPLE, THINKING ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE)</p>	<p>NOT EXPRESSING EMPATHY</p> <p>(ASKING TOO MANY QUESTIONS, INTERRUPTING, MAKING SOMEONE FEEL BAD ABOUT WHAT THEY THINK/FEEL, FOCUSING ON YOURSELF OR HOW YOU THINK OR FEEL)</p>

Appendix 2: Speaker Prompts

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING TO DO AT HOME OR SCHOOL?	WHAT DID YOU DO THIS WEEKEND?
WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU DON'T LIKE AT ALL?	WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF AND WHY DO YOU THINK THAT IS?
TALK ABOUT SOMETHING OR SOMEONE THAT MAKES YOU HAPPY.	TALK ABOUT YOUR STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES.