



# How to be heard

the art of the Listening Buddy

This practice is essentially about two people taking turns to listen to each other.

In our daily lives 'listening' often just means waiting for the other person to stop speaking so we can speak ourselves.

Being a listening buddy is different. It's about listening, and paying attention. It's about thinking about the person who is speaking, and thinking about what they're saying. Without interrupting, offering suggestions, or comments.

Simply listening wholeheartedly.

*With grateful thanks to Co-Counseling where this tool originated, and Betty Martin who taught it to me.*

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# How to do it

## **STEP 1 - Find a buddy**

Find someone who is happy to do it with you. This could be in person, or online. It's best if you can see the other person so you really have a sense of them being with you, without them needing to speak. If you're doing it in person it helps to sit opposite each other.

## **STEP 2 - Agree a time-frame**

Agree that you will take turns listening to each other, without interruption, for an equal amount of time, and agree how long that time will be.

Decide who is going to listen first. It can be helpful if the listener sets a timer so the speaker doesn't need to worry about it. It can be a good idea to set the timer for one minute less than the agreed time – this allows the talker time to complete their thought.

When you're the talker take responsibility to bring what you're saying to a conclusion when you hear the timer go off.

## **STEP 3 - Talking & listening**

If you're the talker: this is your time to use however you need to, and be witnessed in your experience.

If you're the listener: all you need to do is to pay attention. Don't interrupt, give advice, comment, or tell the talker how you feel.

## **STEP 4 - Finishing the turn**

When the agreed time is up, it can be nice if the talker says "thank you", and the listener says "you're welcome". This helps both people to be clear that the turn is finished and there is nothing else required.

## **STEP 5 - Swapping over**

Without any other discussion or feedback the talker now becomes the listener for the same amount of agreed time, repeating the process outlined above in steps 3 and 4.

## **STEP 6 - Reflection (optional)**

Once both of you have had your turn to speak you may choose to ask the other if there is anything they would like to share or reflect about their experience of listening.

Again, it's good to avoid giving advice, or commenting directly on what was said, unless it's specifically asked for.

Or you can simply choose to finish the session without any further talking.

# Keep in mind:

**Listening this way is a fair exchange.** Neither person owes the other one anything. Afterwards both people often feel more refreshed, and able to think more easily.

**Turns can be as long or as short as you have time for.** Even a few minutes can make a surprising difference in how you feel. Or you can try 20 minutes, an hour, or more... whatever feels comfortable for both of you.

**Whether you're talking or listening pay attention to your own needs.** Either of you can choose to stop before the agreed time is up if you need to. You both have a responsibility for your own wellbeing. Just because you're listening doesn't mean you should ignore your own comfort. Just because it's your turn to talk doesn't mean you have to!

## Tips if you're the talker:

**You can talk about anything you want** – it doesn't even need to make sense. Or you can be silent. Emotions may come up; it's OK to laugh, cry, sing – even scream – if you need to! You don't need to look at your listener if you don't want to. Or you can maintain eye contact if that feels good. Try experimenting with different ways, but remember there's no wrong or right way of doing it.

**Use 'I statements'** – as much as possible talk in the first person. We often use third person statements ("X makes you sad") when we're actually talking about ourselves ("X makes *me* sad"). Talk about what *you've* noticed, how

*you* feel, rather than generalising or talking about other people's experiences.

**Avoid talking specifically about your listening buddy**, especially if they are someone you're emotionally close to. This isn't an opportunity to list a catalogue of grievances you have against them (or even to flatter them)!

If there are things you feel you need to express about your listening buddy it might be better to find a different listening buddy for that session, or to arrange a different format for discussion of the issues.

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## Tips if you're the listener:

**It's not your responsibility to do anything** about whatever the other person is talking about or expressing. You don't need to find solutions or fix anything.

**You don't have to be stony-faced** - most of us find it hard to listen without giving some responsive signals! It's OK to nod occasionally, or smile, frown etc, to show you are connected and engaged with what they are saying. Or you might choose (with agreement beforehand) to experiment with how it feels to maintain a neutral face, with

no reactions. Again, there's no right or wrong, as long as you don't interrupt the talker.

**Try to bring an attitude of respect**, however you choose to be while listening. Let the other person feel that whatever they have to say is important.

**Notice if you find yourself distracted**, or getting caught up thinking about your own experiences. If you notice this happening bring your attention back to what they are saying.

