

# Lesson 2.6

## Active Listening



### Rationale

Studies show that we remember between 25 and 50 percent of what we hear, and what we hear may not always be the most important information communicated. Effective communication consists of both speaking and listening. Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. It is an important first step to defuse a situation and seek solutions to problems. This lesson gives students the opportunity to identify what active listening is and why it is important in managing conflicts.

### Objectives

1. To identify the characteristics of good communication for speakers and listeners.
2. To understand the importance of active listening skills for negotiation and everyday life.

### Standards

- ◆ Culture
- ◆ People, Places, and Environment
- ◆ Individual Development and Identity

**Time:** 70 minutes

### Materials

- Active Listening Techniques* Handout
- Abegaz and the Lion* Extension Handout



70 minutes

## Procedures

1. Divide students into pairs. Ask them to share a time when they were talking to someone about something important and they thought the other person was not listening to them. Have them share what it felt like to not be listened to.
2. Share with students that they will practice active listening skills to make them better listeners. Ask for two volunteers, a speaker and a listener, to come to the front of the class. Ask one student to speak to the other student for one minute about what she/he did after school the day before. Direct the student (privately) who is in the listening role to use poor listening skills, e.g. look at your watch, interrupt, avoid eye contact, look bored or impatient, tap your foot or fidget.
3. Ask the class to describe what the listener did in the role-play. Make a list on the board of what they describe. You can use a T chart to differentiate between good and poor listening skills (write a large T on the board and label the left side good and the right side poor).
4. Then ask the students what the listener could have done differently to be a better listener. Add their responses to the side of the T chart labeled "good." When students mention a skill that is on the *Active Listening Techniques* Handout, introduce the corresponding skill on the sheet. For example, if a student says, "S/he could have showed interest," introduce the principle of "encouraging."
5. When students have exhausted their ideas, distribute the *Active Listening Techniques* Handout and review each principle with the class. Ask students to circle the techniques they think they use on a daily basis. Tell students that active listening means engaging with someone for the purpose of increasing one's understanding of a subject. Although it is called listening, it involves much more than being silent. The active part means using verbal and nonverbal communication skills to show interest, show empathy, gain information, and show that you understand.
6. Ask for two more volunteers to come to the front of the class. Ask one student to speak for one minute about what they plan to do for the weekend. Have the other student use the principles from the handout and anything else noted on the board from the previous role-play. If you prefer, you can be the listener instead of a student. After the role-play, ask students which core principles they saw.
7. Tell the students that they are going to practice using active listening skills with a partner. Ask students to think about a problem/conflict they had, which was not resolved or where they were not happy with the way in which it ended. This can be a problem/conflict at home, with friends, at school, etc. Divide the class into pairs, assigning one student, Student A and the other Student B. Instruct students to use active listening skills when they are not speaking. Student B is not listening in order to solve the problem; rather, they are listening to ensure they fully understand what the problem is about.
8. Have Student A speak about their conflict for 3 minutes while Student B listens, using active listening skills.
9. After 3 minutes, have Student A share with Student B what Student B did well. What active listening skills did Student A notice Student B using? Allow 2 minutes for feedback.
10. Have students switch roles: Have Student B speak on their problem/conflict for 3 minutes while Student A listens using active listening skills.

11. After 3 minutes, have Student B share with Student A what Student A did well. What active listening skills did Student B notice Student A using? Allow 2 minutes for feedback.
12. Lead a whole class discussion using some or all of the following questions:
  - ◆ What did it feel like to really be listened to without being interrupted?
  - ◆ Does that happen often in your life? Why or why not?
  - ◆ What made this activity challenging for you?
  - ◆ How can being an active listener build trust and support relationships in conflict situations?
  - ◆ How can being an active listener help you manage conflicts?
  - ◆ Imagine an international conflict involving people from different cultures or backgrounds. How might active listening between the parties be harder in this situation?
  - ◆ What might peacebuilders do in international conflicts to ensure they are listening actively?

### Assessment:

Participation in small group work and whole class discussion

### Extension Activity

*Abegaz and the Lion, a folk tale from Ethiopia*

Introduce the concept of oral tradition and folk tales as ways for communities to share important lessons from generation to generation. *Abegaz and the Lion* is a folk tale from Ethiopia that focuses on the importance of trust and open communication in a relationship. You can have students read the folk tale by distributing the handout, or you can have them listen to a podcast of the folk tale on the Peace Corps website at <http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/stories/stories.cfm?psid=66##>.

After they read/listen to the story, discuss the meaning:

1. Abegaz had to confront a lion. How did he do this? What was his strategy?
2. Why do you think he asked the lion directly for a hair instead of trying to take it? Why did the lion give it to him? How would you describe the way Abegaz and Meselech communicate and interact with one another?
3. Why did the healer send Abegaz to the lion? Why are active listening and effective communication so important for peacebuilding at both the personal and the international level?

**Note:** Effective communication is the key to building trusting relationships. Abegaz communicates openly with the lion because he sees that the lion trusts him. This story ties in very nicely with the lessons that address the importance of trust building and relationship building between individuals and groups in conflict. It can also be used as an extension to the *Cross the Line* exercise in Lesson 2.3.

## Lesson 2.6 HANDOUT: ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES

TECHNIQUE	PURPOSE	METHOD	EXAMPLES
<b>ENCOURAGING</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To convey interest</li> <li>To keep the person talking</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Don't agree to disagree</li> <li>◆ Use noncommittal words with a positive tone of voice</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I see. . ."</li> <li>"That's interesting"</li> <li>"Uh-huh"</li> <li>"Mmm"</li> </ol>
<b>ELICITING</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To gather relevant information</li> <li>To encourage others to reveal their needs and concerns</li> <li>To establish a climate of open communication</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ask open-ended, not leading, questions</li> <li>◆ Don't agree or disagree</li> <li>◆ Use noncommittal words with positive tone of voice</li> <li>◆ Use encouraging body language, such as nodding</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"What concerns does that situation cause for you?"</li> <li>"Why is that an important issue for you?"</li> <li>"How would that affect your interests?"</li> </ol>
<b>RESTATING</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To let others know that you are listening carefully, and that you are trying to understand</li> <li>To verify your comprehension of what they've said</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Paraphrase the other's points</li> <li>◆ Avoid value judgments or inserting your own opinions</li> <li>◆ Ask for confirmation</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"In other words, you've concluded that. . ."</li> <li>"So the way you see it is. . ."</li> <li>"Would it be correct to say. . ."</li> </ol>
<b>CLARIFYING</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To uncover underlying or unstated concerns</li> <li>To understand ambiguous or unclear statements</li> <li>To test interpretations</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Avoid frequent interruptions</li> <li>◆ Ask focused but open-ended questions</li> <li>◆ Probe for fuller explanations</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I'm not sure what you mean by. . ."</li> <li>"Could you please explain more about the significance of. . .?"</li> <li>"What leads you to believe that. . .?"</li> </ol>
<b>EMPATHIZING</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To understand events from others' perspectives</li> <li>To show that you respect their point of view and comprehend their feelings</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Recognize others' experiences as valid, without necessarily accepting their conclusions</li> <li>◆ Give acknowledgment rather than agreement</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I can see why you feel that. . ."</li> <li>"That must have been very disturbing for you. . ."</li> <li>"I can understand how you would perceive that as a threat. . ."</li> </ol>

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Lesson 2.6 HANDOUT: ACTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES *(continued)*

TECHNIQUE	PURPOSE	METHOD	EXAMPLES
SUMMARIZING	1. To pull important ideas and information together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Review issues which have been raised</li> <li>◆ Highlight the most important matters</li> <li>◆ Set aside extraneous information</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "These seem to be the key ideas you have expressed. . ."</li> <li>2. "So your view of this whole situation is. . .?"</li> <li>3. "I'm sensing that the critical concerns you have are. . ."</li> </ol>
	2. To establish a basis for further discussion		
REFRAMING	1. To transition into problem solving, refocusing discussion from past events to future goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Build on others' ideas in developing your proposals</li> <li>◆ Emphasize points of agreement and compatible and/or shared interests</li> <li>◆ Use neutral or positive rather than accusatory language</li> <li>◆ Explain how your proposals satisfy their interests</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "That's an intriguing thought. To carry it further, let me suggest that. . ."</li> <li>2. "Since we both value. . . , would it make sense to. . .?"</li> <li>3. "I'm sorry you feel that way, but I'm glad you raised the issue. Let's see how we can work together to address your concern."</li> </ol>
	2. To encourage others to rethink positions and focus on interests		
	3. To redirect negative or adversarial statements into more productive channels		

## Lesson 2.6 EXTENSION HANDOUT: ABEGAZ AND THE LION, A FOLK TALE FROM ETHIOPIA

Long ago there lived a young man named Abegaz. He was very, very lonely. Abegaz woke one morning and realized that he could delay the matter no longer. He wanted a wife. Since there were no young women of marriageable age in his village, Abegaz decided to visit a village across the mountainside. Packing up his donkey, he set off in search of a bride.

As Abegaz approached the mountain, he heard the roar of a mighty lioness. Immediately, he jumped off the donkey and ran as fast as he could. Soon, he found himself on the other side of the mountain, with his scared little donkey trailing him. Out of breath, he sat down on a rock that overlooked a peaceful green pasture where sheep were grazing. There, in the middle of the pasture, was a lovely shepherd girl. Abegaz knew instantly that this was the woman he should wed. After introducing himself to her, he asked to meet her father. Within a week, Abegaz was married to the shepherd girl, whose name was Meseleth.

When Abegaz brought his wife home, he was very pleased. No more threadbare pants, no more dirty dishes to wash. Meseleth was as useful as she was beautiful, and Abegaz grew fatter and more content each day.

One day, however, after some years, Abegaz arrived home and Meseleth started to scream. He tried to calm her, but she wouldn't stop. "Be quiet," he said, as he put his hand over her mouth. But Meseleth persisted throughout the night, screaming "Aaagh!" in a high-pitched voice. When the sun rose the next morning, Meseleth's screams had not quieted. Abegaz knew he had to find a cure quickly, so he hastened to the house of the healer.

"Something is wrong with my wife," he told the healer. "She won't stop screaming. Can you give me some medicine to quiet her?"

"I can help you," said the healer. "But first I need a special ingredient. I don't have any lion's hair left. If you'd like me to make the medicine to cure your wife, you will need to climb the mountain, find the lion, and bring me back a single hair from her tail."

Abegaz did not relish the idea of meeting the lion. But he could not bear to go home to his screaming wife. Thanking the healer, he set off for the mountain that he had climbed some years before.

From the foot of the mountain, Abegaz could hear the lion's roars, but he walked steadily in its direction. At last he spotted the lion and, crouching down low, came within 10 yards of her. For many hours, Abegaz watched in silence as the lion chased monkeys from the trees. As he was about to leave, he took a jar of milk from his satchel and placed it in a clearing for the lion.

The next day, Abegaz climbed the mountain once more. This time Abegaz came within a few feet of the lion. Once again he hid behind a tree, watching as the lion closed her eyes and fell asleep. As he left, he took fruit and cheese from his satchel and placed it at the sleeping lion's feet.

On the third day, Abegaz ran up the mountain, carrying a kilo of raw meat. When the lion roared, he said, "Good morning!" and held out his hands to feed her the meat. From that day, Abegaz and the lion became good friends. He brushed the lion's tan coat, helped her chase monkeys, and lay down beside her for afternoon naps.

"May I please take a hair from your tail?" Abegaz asked one day. "My wife needs it."

The lion graciously agreed and plucked a thick hair from her tail.

"Thank you!" Abegaz called, as he ran down the mountain.

"My pleasure," roared the lion.

With the hair in hand, Abegaz knocked on the door of the healer.

"I have it," he said. "I have the hair from the lion's tail." Abegaz told the healer of his friendship with the lion. Then he asked, "What must I do now?" The healer smiled and shook his head, saying, "Abegaz, Abegaz. You have become friends with a lioness, but you still have not made friends with your wife? Who is a better friend, a lion or a wife? Now go home and treat your wife better than that lion."

Source: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/stories/stories.cfm?psid=66##>.