

RESPECTFUL LISTENING AND DIALOGUE CURRICULUM



**American Friends
Service Committee**

Pennsylvania Project
4836 Ellsworth Ave' Pittsburgh PA 15213
(412) 315 7423 swahrhaftig@afsc.org
<http://afsc.org/office/pittsburgh-pa>

Philosophy of Respectful Listening and Dialogue

Listening is generosity. Listening is consciousness. Listening is alive. Functionally, listening allows us to see a world we don't know, to understand experiences we haven't had, to reframe or drop a belief long held. It creates distinctions, and it is from these distinctions that we create new possibilities.

Listening Could Relieve Strife that Leads to War, by Paul Hawken, Philadelphia Inquirer 8/22/02

The Chinese word to listen is made up of character for “eyes,” “ears,” “heart,” and “undivided attention.” All of these are required in respectful listening. Respectful listening is a powerful tool in building peace and resolving conflicts. The process of listening impacts both the person being listened to and the listener. New understanding and connections are made that can bring resolution to animosity and conflict.

With respectful listening it is important to listen beyond your personal experience and opinions to hear another's understanding and story. Similarly in respectful dialogue stories are told in such a way that the other person can hear it, consider it and potentially learn from it. In responding to another person's views in a way that opens up the conversation, everyone can gain new insights.

American Friends Service Committee PA Program enhances people's skills in respectful listening and dialogue in order for them to hear and understand points of view that differ from their own. We conduct listening projects as a way to raise public awareness around an issue. In 2003, AFSC conducted a listening project entitled “Security and the Cost of War.” In 2005, AFSC undertook a listening project on healthcare “People Count: Listening to Voices About Healthcare.” In 2008 the “Military Listening Project: The Human Cost of War” was completed. These listening projects can be viewed on our website www.afsc.org/pittsburgh

Purpose of this training manual

The purpose of this manual is to bring greater understanding of the importance of respectful listening and dialogue in everyday communications. In an era where less and less time is spent communicating face-to-face and more time is spent using the internet, text messaging and facebook, learning to be more deliberate in our skills of listening and dialogue is crucial. This manual will give people skills for undertaking difficult, challenging conversations with those whose views may be different from their own.

Goals of the training:

- To create a safe environment for listening and dialoguing in a way that enables listeners to see beyond positions to a person's unique individuality and their very human needs and concerns.
- To use respectful listening and speaking in one-on-one and group situations.
- To find commonalities using listening the skills.
- Actively hearing each other's differences, to choose together what next steps to take.

Training for Respectful Listening and Dialogue

This training can be undertaken in one day or in two half day sessions. The ideal number of participants for the training is between 10 and 20 people. The intended audience is high school and beyond.

Table of Contents

Starting Exercise

Shared Agreements

Part 1 - Respectful Listening

Listening

Body Language

Clarifying Questions and Open ended Questions

Part 2 - Respectful Dialogue

“I” Messages

Dialogue

Tension Triangle

Fight and Flight Response

Part 3 - Defusing Anger

Thoughts on Defusing Anger

Defusing anger

Starting Exercise

Warm-ups to listening are exercises to introduce the group to each other and begin the listening process. We suggest two possible exercises:

First names – Ask each person around the room to say their name and a sentence or two about the origin of their name - either first or last name.

Names and gestures – Ask each person to give their name and then a gesture of some sort (e.g. they might say their name and then clap twice, or say their name and wave their arms in the air.) The next person will give their name and their gesture until everyone has a turn. For a variation and to make sure people are listening, ask each person to name the name of the person standing next to them. Or, everyone in the group could play back the speaking person's name and gesture before moving on to the next person.

Proposed shared agreements

It is important to establish a number of shared agreements right at the beginning. Here are some suggestions. Go through the list and get the groups acceptance. Also ask for any deletions or additions. Make sure everyone has the same understanding of the agreements especially the one on confidentiality.

Listen respectfully: (Listen with eyes, ears, heart and undivided attention.)

Speak only for yourself: (Speak only from your own experience. No saying, "Well I have heard...")

Honor confidentiality: (The group can define confidentiality being sure that everyone will feel safe sharing. It could be that nothing shared in the group goes outside of the group or it could be that the stories and learnings can be shared but not the names of the people. The latter is the most common.)

Be open, and share at a level that feels safe: (Join in as much as possible but don't allow yourself to go out of your safety zone. Let the facilitator or the group know if you are uncomfortable with an exercise.)

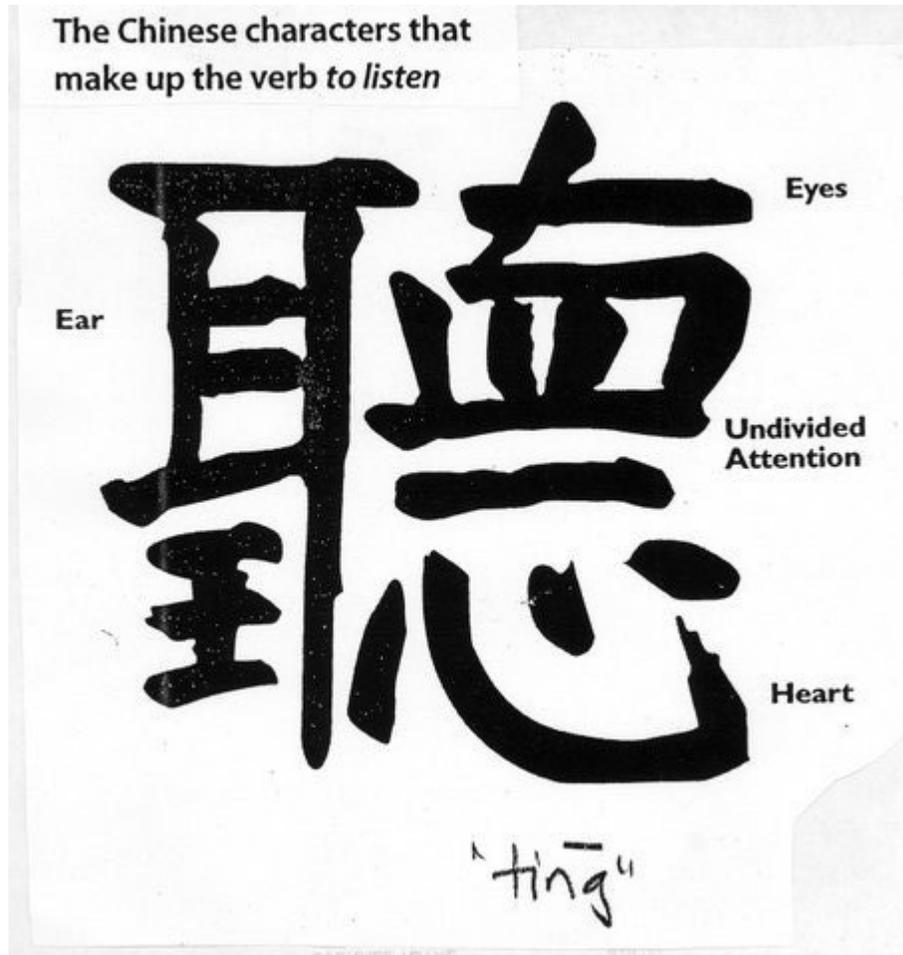
Take your share of responsibility for the group: (As a participant in the group it is helpful if you are supportive of your fellow participants, and that you help to create a positive experience for all.)

Be respectful: (Respect the other participants and their views.)

Remain patient, honest and compassionate: (When each person observes this agreement, the learning process is easier and more pleasant.)

Step up – Step back: (If you are a person who speaks a lot hold back so others get a chance. If you are shy talking, make an effort to participate – your point of view is important and needs to be heard.)

Part 1 - Respectful Listening



Goals:

- To understand that listening involves “eyes”, “ears”, “heart” and “undivided attention”.
- To understand the importance of listening respectfully and empathizing with another person’s point of view without devaluing your own views.

STILLS

STILLS is an exercise used by the National Guard to prepare soldiers for unforeseen situations. For a soldier entering enemy lines, the ability to listen well is essential. Soldiers need to hear what is absent, such as birds songs, as well as what is there. This is a useful way to prepare the group for listening.

STILLS stands for STOP, THINK, INHALE, LOOK, LISTEN in SILENCE. Have everyone take about two minutes to sit in silence, breathing deeply, while looking and listening. Suggest that people catch each others’ eyes as they look around. Briefly check in (ask and get responses) on whether they saw or heard anything different or differently.

Listening Respectfully

Start this exercise by talking about the Chinese Character for listening – Eyes, Ears, Heart and Undivided Attention. Explain how important it is to listen in a way that allows you to hear and empathize with a person’s story and to establish commonalities. This is not about convincing someone of your point of view; it is about creating a shared history and language in order to relate to each other.

Listening exercise in 3 parts:

1) Divide people into groups of three and ask one person to speak for 3 minutes while the other two people just listen and don’t speak at all, not even to ask questions.

Choose a topic which could relate to the nature of the group. If it is a peace group it could have a peace theme - “Talk about something you have done towards peace that you are proud of.” If participants are going into a conflict situation – “Talk about a time when you were in a contentious situation where you worked things out.”

Debrief: How was that for you? (The person being listened to.) How was it being listened to for so long? How was it for you talking for 3 minutes? How did you know the other people were listening?

(People often go deeper into a subject when someone just listens to them and doesn’t break in with their own ideas or thoughts. This is a way to help people be more comfortable with silence.)

2) Go back into the groups of three and have the next person speak for 3 minutes, but this time the two listeners can ask a couple of open ended and clarifying questions. (The questions are for further clarity only.)

Debrief: How was that for the person being listened to? How was it being asked questions? Did they help to draw out more information? Ask the listeners how that was for them? Did they learn more?

3) For the final round, the third person speaks for 3 minutes. The two listeners can ask questions first and then add their own comments.

Debrief: Again ask how that was for the person being listened to and then how it was for the listeners.

Body Language: Listening with Our Eyes

Remind the group how important it is to be aware that communication happens with our bodies; posture and expressions convey attitudes toward a speaker without words.

Goal

To understand the important part that body language plays in listening and dialogue

Body language exercise in two parts

1) Ask people to break up into pairs. One person will be the listener, the other the speaker. The person listening will use terrible body language to show that they are not listening while the person talking continues to try to talk to them.

Debrief: How was that for you? How was it trying to speak? Listeners, how did you show that you were not listening?

2) Redo this exercise reversing the roles. The speakers will now listen and the listeners will be the speakers. This time ask the listeners to use their very best body language.

Debrief: How was it this time? How did the listeners show that they were listening?

Talk about the importance of body language. We use body language in all our interactions, and we rely on body language to give us clues about other people and their relationship to us. If the spoken word is in contradiction to the body language, the body language message is most often the correct one.

Cultural norms of body language: Have a discussion with the group on different cultures and customs and how these are important to consider in non-verbal communications.

These could include:

- How close people stand to each other. In some parts of Asia people are comfortable with very little distance between each other.
- The way people shake hands or don't shake hands.
- The role of touching in a culture.
- Whether people look the other person in the eye.

Discussion: Talk about other body language traits to be aware of.

Open Ended and Clarifying Questions

The purpose of open ended and open ended and clarifying questions is to encourage both the speaker and listener to achieve new understandings. A good, open, open ended and clarifying question can help a person speak more fully on an issue or concern and can be useful in moving the speaker from a dogmatic position to a more thoughtful responses. Well thought out open questions can help identify areas of commonality with someone who has opposing views from our own. (See sheet on open ended and clarifying questions for examples.) Summarize the points to the group and give as a handout.

Goal: To be able to identify and use questions that open up conversation or conflict to include new understandings.

The use of dogmatic statements can polarize discussions with someone whose views differ from our own. We can respond with a similarly dogmatic statement or we can find ways to open up the conversation by asking open-ended questions.

Example: *“I am sick of having to do all the work around this place.”* One response would be: *“What do you mean; I do lots of things to help out. In fact I do as much as you.”* This is unlikely to bring a quick resolution to this conflict.

A good open ended question might be: *“Can you tell me what the problem is?”*

A open ended and clarifying question which, at the same time shows commonality with the other person might be: *“No one likes to feel as if they do all the work. Can you tell me what the problem is?”*

Exercise on identifying good open ended and clarifying questions:

With the whole group or a couple of smaller groups. Using the examples below have one person read one of the statements to the group. Ask the group to come up with a good open ended and clarifying question that will diffuse the situation and not further aggravate it.

Possible dogmatic statements with examples of possible open ended questions and commonalities in brackets:

- You people are against the war so you must be anti military. (I think we are both concerned about the war and our soldiers. I would like to hear your thoughts.)
- People in prison must be guilty or they wouldn't be there. (There is no doubt there are guilty people in our prisons. I am interested in hearing more about your thoughts on prisons and prisoners.)
- Why should I pay for people on Medicaid they are all too lazy to get a job. (I don't think any of us like paying for people who abuse the system. Can you tell me more about your concern?)
- You can't talk to those anti abortion folk. (It's never easy talking to people who don't want to listen. Do you have any thoughts on how to approach the issue with them?)

Debrief:

First ask the person who asked the question to respond. Were you comfortable with the response or did it make you more angry? Open up a discussion with the group about the response. What worked? What could have been improved upon? Ask what commonalities they could have found with the person making the statement.

Do this with a couple of different scenarios.

Exercise: Phrases that open and close communications.

On a flip chart create one list of statements that would close communications and one that would open up communications.

OPEN ENDED AND CLARIFYING QUESTIONS – LISTENING FOR CONNECTIONS AND COMMONALITIES

The purpose of open ended and clarifying questions is to encourage both the speaker and listener to achieve new understandings. Open ended and clarifying questions can help people to open up and hear themselves and are useful in moving the speaker from dogmatic statements to more thoughtful responses. Use open ended and clarifying questions to find areas of common concern which can be used to expand the conversation.

Dogmatic Statement: *“People should pay for their own medical coverage like I do– no handouts!”*

Open ended questions such as, *“Can you explain more?”* *“Can you tell me more?”* all help to open up constructive dialogue.

Using phrases like, *“You’re wrong.”* *“You don’t understand.”* *“That makes no sense.”* *“How can you believe that?”* close a conversation.

What are open ended and clarifying questions? Almost any question that genuinely asks for more information will work.

“Can you spell out for me how that would work?”

Avoid premature linking: Use open ended and clarifying questions to surface the common link. Jumping to conclusions too early may shut down the conversation.

Premature commonality, *“You are afraid that changes in the health care system will reduce the services now available to you under the current system.”*

Avoid communication closers:

Questions that can be answered simply “Yes” or “No” often close communications.

Judgmental questions or statements can make people defensive; *“How can you believe that...?”* *“That makes no sense...”* *“You are absolutely right, but”*

Avoid questions that corner a person. *“What do you mean people should pay for their own medical coverage? Do you think everyone is as well off as you are?”*

Commonalities: A combination of a question and a connection can sometimes make links between your experience and the speaker’s, while at the same time keeping the focus on the person you are listening to.

“I can understand your concern. I have been in similar situations.... Tell me a bit more?”

Unlike an “active listening “response (*What I hear you saying is...*) this linking statement contains a gift of self-revelation from the listener. Sharing builds trust. Now the real conversation begins in which both listener and speaker are open to considering new directions.

Spirals: Listening, questioning, connecting are not in a straight line sequence in conversation. In a good listening session you are likely to go through cycles of listening, questioning, and connecting as topics change and trust grows.

Do not compromise your own position:

While it is important to be open to new thinking and understandings it is also important not to compromise your own position. Open ended and clarifying questions and connections can be done in a way that respects both participants’ points of view.

Part 2 - Respectful Dialogue

“I” Messages

The purpose of “I” messages is to find a way for a person to communicate his or her own wants, needs or concerns. The receiver of an I-message learns that he or she has done something the speaker didn’t like. Although he or she may still react defensively at first (nobody likes to feel in the wrong), the door is left open for dialogue. There is less likelihood of damage to the relationship or of closing the dialogue. It is not important that the formula be used exactly, as long as the speaker speaks in a way that the listener can hear.

Goal: To learn how to communicate your concerns and wants in a way that opens up dialogue and doesn’t alienate or further anger a person.

A constructive “I” message has the following elements in it:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) When | state the behavior |
| 2) I feel/get | state the feeling |
| 3) Because | state the effect it has on you |

For example: *When you didn’t turn up I was scared something had happened. I couldn’t go to sleep till I knew you were safe.*

This approach to a problem prevents the person from getting defensive and enables you both to engage in solving the issue.

Things to consider:

- Each part of this should be as neutral as possible and non blaming, such as: “*When you lie to me.*”
- Avoid statements like “you make me feel” – no one can make you feel. It should be “*I feel*” followed by a true feeling, sad, scared, happy...
- It is also important that whatever you are addressing impacts you. For instance a statement “because it is good for you” is not an “I” statement.
- An “I” message will probably need to be followed up with respectful listening and quite possibly with some open ended and clarifying questions.

“I” Message Exercise:

In a larger group read out the following examples and ask people to decide which of the three replies they like the best and say why.

I messages practice:

- 1) A close friend has gossiped about something you told him/her in confidence.
 - a) How could you, I can’t believe you did that. I will never tell you anything again.
 - b) I told you that in confidence. I am very upset that you broke that confidence.
 - c) You know what we talked about the other day when I shared with you in confidence. Other people have been talking about it. It has really upset me that it got out. Do you know anything about it?

- 2) A neighbor cuts down a tree which borders your yard without consulting you.
 - a) I can't believe you cut down my shade tree without asking me.
 - b) You could have asked me before you cut down the only shade tree for my yard.
 - c) I see you cut down the tree between our houses. I was upset and hurt that you didn't talk to me first. It was such a lovely shade tree for my yard.

- 3) A spouse or friend borrowed your favorite umbrella and left it at work.
 - a) You said you would return my umbrella yesterday. You always borrow things and don't return them.
 - b) You said you would get my umbrella back to me two days ago. Yesterday it poured and I got soaked because I didn't have it.
 - c) I get frustrated when you borrow things and don't return them. Yesterday I got soaked in the rain because I didn't have my umbrella.

Additional "I" message exercise:

Split people into groups of three and have them come up with a constructive "I" message for the following scenario. Ask each group to read their "I" message to the whole group. After each "I" message, ask the group what their response was.

- How did it make you feel?

Scenario: Once again you have been left to clean up the dishes. This could be at church, at work or at home. Your concern will be directed at the person who should have either done the clean up or helped.

Debrief:

What do people feel about "I" messages. Would you be able to use them?

"I" messages can be challenging to use at first but with practice are an effective tool to good communications.

Dialogue

Martha Llewellyn

In dialogue winning is not the goal, rather one listens to the other side in order to obtain understanding and meaning.

In dialogue finding common ground is desirable.

In dialogue acceptance of the person is important even if there is not agreement about the ideas that are shared.

In true dialogue each person should find his/her view and perspective expanded.

In dialogue a multitude of perspectives and experiences is expected, accepted and desired.

Dialogue presumes that every person has something valuable to say and deserves to be heard.

In dialogue a person affirms and is affirmed in what is shared.

In dialogue real concern and interest in what the other is saying is central.

In dialogue a person listens to the other person and responds to what is said rather than thinking of what I want to say to get my 2 cents in while the person is talking.

In dialogue responses connect to what precedes them.

In dialogue being one up on the other is not present.

In dialogue the strengths of what the other person is saying is recognized and stressed.

In dialogue openness and being open minded are evident.

In dialogue one's personal beliefs are present but not dominant in hearing what the other is saying.

Tension Triangle

It is important to read the attached piece on the Tension Triangle to understand the role of tension in our lives. Explain how the tension triangle works. The higher your level of tension, represented by the vertical line on the side of the diagram, the less options you perceive yourself to have. The options are represented by the horizontal line at the bottom of the triangle. Our normal level of tension is between in the two parallel lines across the center of the triangle. In times of stress your tension level is elevated above the line and your options diminish.

To illustrate the impact of tension levels you could talk about being a child in school and being called on by the teacher. The moment you are called on your tension level is elevated and even though you know the answer you are likely to forget it. As soon as the teacher calls on someone else your tension level drops and you know the answer. When your tension level reaches the top of the triangle your ultimate reaction is 'fight or flight'.

Enclosed is a piece on the chemical change that happens when a person's tension level gets to the top of the triangle and the fight and flight reaction kicks in.

Exercise:

Ask the group to come up with suggestions of things they can do to reduce the tension in themselves and in others. List the suggestions on a flip chart. Some suggestions are provided on the tension triangle sheet.

(The sheets on the tension triangle and fight and flight may be used as handouts for participants.)

TENSION TRIANGLE

By Paul Wahrhaftig

TENSION TRIANGLE

A simple triangle can become an invaluable tool for people resolving conflicts. Over twenty years ago I picked up the concept of a “tension” triangle in a training given by Stephen Erickson. I have used it in trainings, public presentations and even in mediation.

This is how it works. The vertical scale indicates our tension levels. Up is higher, down is lower. The horizontal scale represents available options. When you are relaxed, tension is low and you can think of many ways of seeing issues and creating solutions.

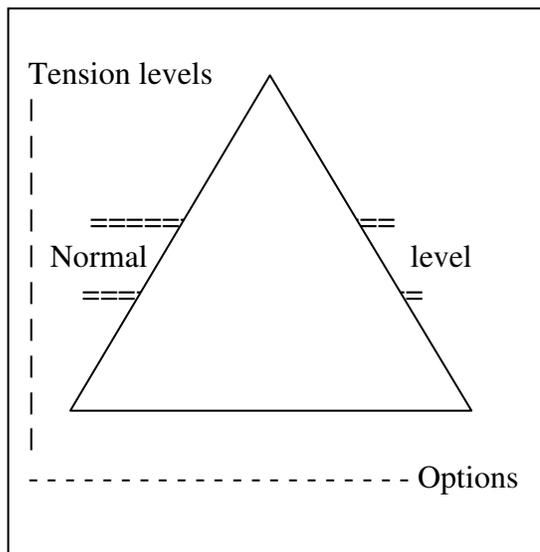
However the higher your tension, the less capable you are of figuring out options. When you get to the peak of the triangle you can only think of one solution – and it is probably the least productive. Your thought processes turn to slogans, stereotyping, misrepresentation, marginalization, blaming and despair. To put it another way, the top of the triangle is where you reach the fight or flight response.

The two sets of double lines mark the normal range of tension. The area below applies to when you relax, start to fall asleep and suddenly you can think up the answer to that question that has been bothering you at work all day. In conflict situations most people will be at least at the high-normal tension stage and most likely beyond that.

This tension can be felt in your body. When you are very scared or angry you can feel it in your chest, your breath gets shallower, your chest constricts.

When you are relaxed you can breathe deeply and comfortably.

It is helpful to understand the importance of tension levels in decision making and conflict situations. In conflict situations, you need to reduce the tension in yourself and others in order to communicate respectfully.



What to do?

Breathe, breathe, breathe:

Breathing deeply will help to reduce the tightness in your chest and you will start to relax.

Relax your body: The more your body is relaxed, the more your breathing is relaxed. Be aware of your arms, legs and neck. Relax as you breathe.

Speak: You can ask a question or even just say how tense you are feeling. This helps break the

tension.

Listen: Just listen to the other person until they calm down and can hear what you have to say.

Change the scenario: You could ask the person to share a cup of tea or just sit down with you. Or if your tension is high, do something else that is calming, like taking a walk.

Get help: To reduce the tension you can talk to someone else about your concerns. Or ask a neutral third party to mediate if the issue is with someone else.

Do the unexpected: This might involve humor, or remembering a time when you could laugh or smile.

Try it, it works.

Fight or Flight Response

What is the "fight or flight" response? The "fight or flight" response is our body's primitive, automatic, inborn response that prepares the body to "fight" or "flee" from perceived attack, harm or threat to our survival.

What happens to us when we are under excessive stress? When we experience excessive stress—whether from internal worry or external circumstance—a bodily reaction is triggered, called the "fight or flight" response. Originally discovered by Harvard physiologist Walter Cannon, this response is hard-wired into our brains and represents a genetic wisdom which is designed to protect us from bodily harm. This response actually corresponds to an area of our brain called the hypothalamus, which—when stimulated—initiates a sequence of nerve cell firing and chemical release that prepares our bodies for running or **fighting**.

What are the signs that our "fight or flight" response has been stimulated (activated)?

When our fight or flight response is activated, sequences of nerve cell firing occur and chemicals like adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol are released into our bloodstream. These cause our bodies to undergo a series of very dramatic changes. Our respiratory rate increases. Blood is shunted away from our digestive tract and directed into our muscles and limbs, which require extra energy and fuel for running and fighting. Our pupils dilate. Our awareness intensifies. Our sight sharpens. Our impulses quicken. Our perception of pain diminishes. Our immune system mobilizes with increased activation. We become prepared—physically and psychologically—for "fight or flight". We scan and search our environment, "looking for the enemy".

When our "fight or flight" system is activated, we tend to perceive everything in our environment as a possible threat to our survival. By its very nature, the "fight or flight" system bypasses our rational mind—where our more well thought out beliefs exist—and moves us into "survival" mode. This state of alert causes us to perceive almost everything in our world as a possible threat to our survival. It is almost impossible to cultivate positive attitudes and beliefs when we are stuck in survival mode. Our heart is not open. Our rational mind is disengaged. Our consciousness is focused on fear, not love. Making clear choices and recognizing the consequences of those choices is unfeasible. We are focused on short-term survival, not the long-term consequences of our beliefs and choices. When we are overwhelmed with excessive stress, our life becomes a series of short-term emergencies. We lose the ability to relax and enjoy the moment. We live from crisis to crisis, with no relief in sight. Burnout is inevitable. This burnout is what usually provides the motivation to change our lives for the better. We are propelled to step back and look at the big picture of our lives—forcing us to examine our beliefs, our values and our goals.

[Neil F. Neimark, M.D. at www.TheBodySoulConnection.com](http://www.TheBodySoulConnection.com)

Thoughts on Defusing anger

Sometimes you meet someone who is extremely angry, raging or shouting. In these cases, you can use the tools of effective listening and speaking to help defuse anger and then move on to an exchange of thoughts and feelings. Even in situations when someone is directing anger at you, these tools can be helpful. However, when anger is directed at you, it is much more difficult to respond, because you usually have your own emotions involved.

To effectively defuse anger, keep in mind the needs of the angry speaker:

To vent: An angry person needs to let off steam and release the anger that may have been brewing for a long time – use your communication skills to allow him or her to do this.

To get listener's attention: An angry person wants to know that you are paying attention – use your body language to show this.

To be heard: An angry person wants someone to listen to his or her point of view – validate the feelings you hear so that the speaker can know you appreciate how angry s/he is.

To be understood: An angry person wants someone to appreciate how s/he feels – try to empathize with his or her experience so that s/he feels you understand the situation, and validate his or her right to feel the way s/he does.

Listening to an angry speaker

Be attentive and patient: Keep in mind that s/he will become less angry as you let him or her vent and express him/herself.

Be Sincere: Empathy and validation must be both honest and genuine.

Be calm: Try to remove your own anger or fears from the discussion. This is one of the most difficult things to do, but it can make the difference between defusing or escalating anger. Remember that an angry person may say inflammatory things in the heat of the moment, but you do not have to react angrily to them.

Defusing Anger

Goals:

- To practice ways of reducing tension in yourself and others.
- To find ways to communicate respectfully with those who you are in conflict with.
- To talk about our responses to anger and how we address people when we are angry.

Hassel lines exercises:

Select a controversial topic or problem that the group can relate to. Count off by twos and form two lines with each person facing a partner in opposite the line. Decide which line will be the one with the issue and which line will be responding. The group responding will try every means possible to reduce the tension and engage in nonviolent problem solving. The people with the problem are free to express their concerns as strongly as they like.

Have both groups turn with their backs to each other and spend a few moments getting into role. Everyone turns around and faces their partner. Using a bell, tell them to engage with the person opposite them.. Allow about 2-3 minutes to engage and then ring the bell to get them to freeze. Ask everyone to check body language in themselves and their partners.

Look for any striking body language that might make a good freeze moment.

Ring the bell again to give people another 1-2 minutes to finish the scenario.

Debrief: Ask the adversaries to describe what was helpful and what was not. Did your tension level drop? Could you hear what the other person was saying? Ask the respondents to talk about how that was for them? What seemed to make a difference? Were there any changes in body language, yours or theirs?

Do the exercise again with the respondents being the adversaries and the adversaries being the respondents. Remind those responding of the listening skills they have learned, using questions and “I” messages.

Debrief in the same way as before

Alternative Exercise: Have the group split into threes. One person will be the one with the problem, one the respondent and the other the observer. Have the one with the problem pick a scenario from the list below. They should take a moment to get into role and then strongly tell the respondent what they have done to upset them. The respondent will practice all their best listening and dialogue skills and try to get to a point where they can problem solve the issue. The observer will look for positive techniques and ways of giving constructive feed back.

Debrief in the small groups: have the observer debrief first, and then have the other two give their observations.

Repeat the exercise, changing roles until all three have had a chance to experience being in each position.

Come back into the full group to debrief with the whole group. Ask how the exercise went and how it was for them?

Possible scenarios – you can also use your own:

- You thought your wife/husband was picking up your daughter from school and you had to do it instead. You thought you had arranged for her to be picked up by your wife/husband. Line one is the aggressor and line two the respondent.
- Your neighbors left their trash out for the third time this week and once again it is spread all over your yard. It was your dog that overturned the trash can. Line one is the aggressor, the one who discovers the trash spread all over their lawn. Line two will be the respondent with the trash can.
- You object to your neighbors “support the troops” sign which is inside your property line. Line one is the aggressor, the neighbor who finds the sign on their property. Line two the respondent who has the sign.
- Your co-worker is caught by you going through your desk and you feel very strongly about your privacy and she is always borrowing things from you and not returning them. She just wants to borrow an eraser for an important project. Line one is the aggressor, the person with the desk who likes privacy. Line two is the respondent who needs an eraser.

Listening doesn't judge, know or argue. When we listen to people our own language softens. Listening may be the cardinal act of giving. It is a silent quality. I think it is the source of Peace.

Paul Hawken, Philadelphia Inquirer 8/22/02