

MAKING
CARING
COMMON
PROJECT



Strategy and Lesson Plans

Virtual Listening

Deeply

Grades 6 - 12

Making Caring Common

Caring Schools Network 2019 - 2020

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Overview

Students learn about and practice three listening skills: body language, focus, and expressing empathy. In a series of lessons with different conversation starters, they will practice being active, authentic listeners with a partner— listening to make the speaker feel heard without reciprocating in the conversation. Speakers will also become more comfortable sharing about themselves and expressing feelings.

Recommended time

- 15 minutes per lesson (use the pacing suggestions or timestamps to adjust, depending on time available)
- Five lessons total, one lesson per week

Materials and advance prep

- Virtual meeting link
- Student journal
- Sticky notes (optional)
- Timer embedded in slide deck
- For lessons 2-5, spend time beforehand thinking about appropriate student pairings; consider in particular issues concerning equity as well as the potential for any possible bullying or sexual harassment

Objectives

- To help listeners develop key listening skills and skills related to expressing empathy.
- To help speakers open up, share about themselves, and feel more understood.

Why this matters

There are many approaches to active listening, and this lesson centers around these primary skills: engaged body language, 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

Encourage students to more actively and respectfully respond to each other by modeling positive responses, setting clear expectations, and providing sufficient scaffolding. Reaffirm class norms, or if you haven't yet set class norms, see [Appendix 1](#) for ideas on how to do so.

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).
- Play one or more of the following Making Caring Common games: Echoing a Friend, Spotlight, A Cold Wind Blows. The games are a great way to transition in or out of a strategy lesson, or you could play the games during other days in order to maintain or boost the positive interactions in your class.

Lesson 1: Introduction (10-20 minutes)

Introduce the strategy (1 minute)

You can begin by saying, *“This week we are going to begin a series of lessons focused on our strengths as listeners. I hope that each of us could name a time when someone really listened to us and the powerful impact we felt knowing that they were listening. But I’m sure we each could also name a time when we felt like someone really wasn’t listening to us and the way that made us feel. It can be especially hard to communicate effectively in a virtual setting, which makes being aware of good listening practices even more important. Today we are going to begin by thinking about what makes someone a strong listener.”*

MCC Tip: *Prepare the question prompts and directions below on a PowerPoint presentation, online worksheet, or your digital learning management system based on your students’ needs. Try to write down the definitions and examples of body language, focus, and expressing empathy (see below) before the lesson begins.*

To start, display the following terms on a slide:

- Body Language, Focus, Expressing Empathy

Student brainstorm (5-10 minutes)

Ask students to spend a few minutes brainstorming what each term might mean when it comes to *listening*. You may have students brainstorm in groups or independently in their journals. Take suggestions for definitions from students, then explain each skill, highlighting the following definitions and examples:

Body Language: How are you physically positioned in relation to the speaker? Use body language and gestures to convey true listening.

- Good examples: *eye contact or looking at their picture or the camera for virtual communication, nodding, facing forward or toward speaker*

- Bad examples: *slouched, turned sideways of speaker, arms crossed at all times, facial expressions that communicate disapproval or disgust at the speaker (e.g., eye rolling)*

Focus: Are you truly listening to what the person is saying, or are you waiting for your turn to speak? Paying attention by “tuning in” to the other person’s feelings and perspective allows you to minimize distractions and your inner dialogue of thoughts and judgments.

- Good examples: *say “mm-hmm” at appropriate times, repeat key words mentally for reinforcement, keep your phone out of sight, avoid thinking about your response while the other person is talking, and avoid distractions (e.g., side conversations, phone ringing)*
- Bad examples: *look at your phone, look away, think about something else or yourself, interrupt the speaker with stories about yourself or what you’re thinking about*

Expressing Empathy: What are you saying or doing to make the speaker feel heard? It can make a big difference to a speaker if they are feeling affirmation from a listener. Whether you agree with the speaker or not, try to consider why he or she feels that way, and how you can better relate to them. Think less about how you would feel or think in their situation, and more about them. ***That’s empathy: when we understand the thoughts and feelings of others and show that we care.***

- Good examples: *After they’re done speaking, you can demonstrate that you heard what they said by paraphrasing (e.g., “So what I heard was...”), or asking thoughtful clarification questions (e.g., “what did you mean when you said...?”). You can validate feelings by saying, “I could sense that you felt... is that right?” and “I can understand why you’d feel...”*
- Bad examples: *Asking the same question over and over, bringing up your own story right away after they’re done speaking, misrepresenting or minimizing what they said, telling them that what they felt was wrong*

MCC Tip: *Record the definitions and examples of each listening skill in the best way possible to display throughout the lessons and beyond. Throughout, ask students to post their personal examples or feelings of being listened to based on each skill. This can be accomplished on a shared slide or using another web-based application that enables students to collaborate in a single document.*

Modeling deep listening (5-10 minutes)

Ask for a volunteer to role-play the listening skills with you. Choose a fun prompt or question for them to respond to (e.g., dream vacation/holiday). Make sure to demonstrate the skills above: body language, focus, and expressing empathy.

Once you've finished, ask the class what they noticed and how they knew whether each person was listening actively.

Wrap up Lesson 1 by saying, "For the next week or so, I encourage you to spend some time reflecting on your habits of listening and searching for examples of deep listening." Tell them when you think the next lesson will be.

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 minutes] Place students in pairs. For this activity, do not allow students to self-select their pairs. During each lesson, we recommend 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]!*"

MCC Tip: *Some online conferencing software allows you to send students in "random" groupings. If you do not have this choice, tell students you have assigned them randomly, and be sure to change partners often.*

[1-2 minutes] Once in pairs, tell students that the first speaker has 1.5-2 minutes to talk, with no contributions from their partner except practicing the listening skills they learned. For the listening partners, you'll remind them of the three listening skills, and remind them to "think and feel and listen for the nuances in their partner's responses." 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 1.5 minutes for student pair discussions and add more time during each lesson, based on how well students participate.*

[1-2 minutes] Once the time is up, the listening partner has 1.5-2 minutes to engage in brief conversation. Don't tell them "to express empathy," so as to avoid making it feel forced, but do remind them that the listener can *reflect on what's been said by paraphrasing* (e.g., *So what I heard was...*), *asking thoughtful clarification questions* (e.g., *what did you mean when you said...?*), and *acknowledging others' feelings*.

[3-4 minutes] Then, it will be the listener's turn to speak for 1.5-2 minutes without interruption, followed by conversation with their partner. Throughout, be sure to encourage students to use the three listening skills.

MCC Tip: *In the virtual setting, you may not be able to monitor students or circulate as you would in the classroom. Instead, you may be able to "pop into" their smaller conversations or, if you do not feel comfortable sending students to rooms alone, ask students to engage in discussions with a family member at home and reflect on their experiences. **Be aware of the social dynamics in the classroom and offer opportunities for students to opt out of certain pairings prior to the start of the lesson.***

Protocol debrief (5-10 minutes)

After each listening deeply session, ask students a *selection* of the following questions to guide their overall reflection. Students can respond verbally or in their journals, though you'll want to save time for students to share their reflections if they journal. Use the bolded questions if time runs short.

- What was it like to only talk? What was it like to only listen for ____ minutes?
- What elements of verbal and nonverbal communication did you notice?
- How does it feel to be listened to fully? What does that look or feel like?
- **How does it feel when you're not listened to? How 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?**
- **What do you think gets in the way of good listening in your life? How could you change that?**
- What did you learn about your partner? What did you learn about yourself?
- **Why do you think listening is important for empathy? How can we show we care about someone "just" by listening?**

***MCC Tip:** Students may reflect on paper, in pairs, or as a whole group – use a strategy that best suits your students. Differentiate this portion of the strategy by providing students sentence starters or word banks as needed. You may want to provide an anonymous online survey for reflection, especially if you did not get the chance to observe some students' conversations.*

Lessons 2-5: Role-Playing as Listeners (15 minutes per lesson)

Over the course of four lessons, facilitate this activity using different prompts. On the following pages you'll find suggested prompts, but feel free to choose your own instead. You know your students best!

Lesson 2

Introduce Lesson 2 by saying, *“Today we are taking a deep dive into the listening skills we reviewed and considered last time. We are going to practice our listening with our peers. I want to acknowledge that this might feel a little awkward or silly at first– that is OK and totally normal– but I will push you to consider why this work matters and the impact listening can have on others and ourselves.”*

***MCC Tip:** As you move through the lessons, consider having students generate topics that they are eager to discuss, or have them vote on the sample prompts.*

Follow the [“Listening Deeply protocol”](#) outlined on pages five through six. Sample prompts:

- What did you do this weekend?
- What’s your favorite memory or vacation so far?
- What are you afraid of and how can you conquer your fears?

After completing the protocol, bring the group together for the [protocol debrief](#) on page six. 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 ask them to look out for instances of deep listening to share next time.

Lesson 3

Begin by asking if students have examples of “listening deeply” (i.e., active, authentic listening) 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 deep listening. Record these examples on another slide or add to a running list.

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

- Who is someone you look up to and why?
- What are things you like or enjoy that maybe some people, even those close to you, might not know about?
- How do you want to improve as a person?

***MCC Tip:** You can also use prompts from your curriculum or current teaching in class. For example: “What is your favorite thing about the math we’re doing in class, and what is most difficult for you?” Or, “Which character in the text you’re reading for English class do you most admire and why?”*

After students complete the protocol, bring the group together for the [protocol debrief](#). Wrap up by letting students know when you think the next round will take place.

Lesson 4

Ask students to recall what it felt like to be a listener and a speaker during the last lesson. Have them think of one thing they would like to do better this time, and record these responses in a place that is accessible to all students.

Begin the [protocol](#). Sample prompts:

- Have you experienced a challenge you then overcame? What happened? Did anyone help? What did you learn?
- Have you felt really angry or guilty about something? What happened and how did you or could you resolve it?
- Has there been a time when you wanted to help someone but couldn't? What happened and how could you change things for the future?

MCC Tip: *At this point you may want to push students to listen to each other for longer. Increase the listening time from 1.5-2 minutes to 2.5-3 minutes each!*

After students complete the protocol, bring the group back together for the [protocol debrief](#). Wrap up by letting students know when you think the next lesson will take place.

Lesson 5: The Final Lesson

Introduce the lesson (1 minute)

Introduce the final lesson by telling students, “Today we are doing the last lesson of the Listening Deeply Protocol. During this lesson, focus on all aspects of listening: body language, focus, and expressing empathy. Do your best to be an excellent partner, and have fun!”

Begin the [protocol](#). Make sure students are in new pairs with partners who they are not close to. Feel free to use the prompts below or create your own.

- *What do you want to get better at that many people might not know about?*
- *What are some deep insecurities or fears you have?*
- *What are some big hopes or wishes you have for yourself and other people (whether close to you or not)?*
- *What is a favorite memory or short story from your life that encapsulates who you are?*

MCC Tip: *At this point, push your students to listen to each other for longer. Increase the listening time to 3-4 minutes each!*

After students complete the protocol, 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. If you have more time, ask students to first journal in response to the bolded questions before sharing out.

- **How did the final lesson go? Which listening skills have you improved upon the most?**
- What did you learn about your partner? What did you learn about yourself?
- What still feels difficult to you? How can you work on it?
- **What impact could we have on others by listening more deeply?**
- **How can we transfer these skills into our daily lives?**
 - **Ask students to think about key areas in their lives: as a student, as a son/daughter, as a teammate (in class, sports), as a boyfriend/girlfriend, as a citizen, or as a member of their community.**
 - **Ask them to think of one example for each of the skills that they can employ in their own lives, and ask if anyone is willing to share. Tell them that a pledge–**

whether verbal or internal– can help to make the changes stick.

Wrap up (1 minute)

Wrap up the lessons by telling students the following: *“Through our work over the last several weeks, we’ve developed our listening skills. Being a strong listener shows those you are interacting with that you care about what they have to say, and it can broaden your mind so you better understand new ideas and perspectives. I have been proud of your work this week and look forward to seeing more examples of deep listening in our class going forward!”*

Extension ideas

- Use the listening protocol in your lesson plans and academic content areas. For instance, if students are discussing a story or film, ask them to get into pairs and share their perspective while their partner listens without the need to immediately offer their own perspectives.
- 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 validate their feelings (if applicable).

Appendix 1: Class Norms

Before you dive into meaningful class discussions, it is important to generate or reaffirm your class norms. When we establish norms together we create buy-in and trust. Doing this also provides explicit, shared codes of conduct that remind students how to engage in constructive discussions. Norms are also a great strategy for diffusing heated conversations and prompting students to return to agreed-upon norms when things get too uncomfortable within the group.

If you have norms already, great! You also may want to incorporate some of the following ideas, particularly the first norm prompting students to listen authentically. Listening is a cornerstone of empathy and is vital to a productive and respectful discussion.

Show respect. Give undivided attention to the person speaking.

Be open but thoughtful about what you share. We will be open and honest without disclosing others' information unnecessarily. For example, we won't say, "My older brother did [something bad]..." Instead we will say, "I know someone who..."

Be non-judgmental. We can disagree with or dislike another person's point of view without putting that person down.

Claim our opinions. We will share our opinions using the first person. For example, "I think that kindness is important." Not, "You are mean."

Be sensitive to diversity. We will remember that people in the group may differ in cultural background, sexual orientation, or gender identity, among other things, and we will be careful to avoid insensitive remarks.

Acknowledge discomfort. It is okay to feel uncomfortable; adults sometimes feel uncomfortable when they talk about sensitive and personal topics as well. Let's accept that things might be uncomfortable and talk through it!

In online classrooms, we need to establish additional norms for the way we interact as well. Here are a few we suggest:

Take space, make space. It can be harder to tell when others want to speak. Make sure to watch for signs that others want to speak (starting to speak, raising their hand, using a designated signal on your virtual learning platform).

Home happens. Since we're not all in the same space, you may experience interruptions.

That's okay. Just try to mute yourself if there is a lot of noise where you are.

Be present. It can be especially hard to stay focused when the entire internet is at our fingertips. During these conversations, it is important to be focused on the speaker.

Clarify your boundaries. It can be hard to have a private or personal conversation online, even if we are in our own virtual meeting room. Be upfront with your partner about how much you feel comfortable sharing, how much they should share if others can hear them in your location, or what topics should be discussed.