

FACILITATOR GUIDE

The Art of Listening

A 75-minute Hometown Together workshop for listening to learn, discovering invisible knowledge, and disagreeing without contempt.

75 MIN One complete session	2 PEOPLE Paired practice	1 GOAL Understand first	ALL VOICES Welcome
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Core message: We listen to learn - not to prepare a defense while the other person is talking.

Purpose

This workshop helps neighbors slow down, recognize what they may be assuming, and hear a different point of view accurately before they respond. Agreement is not required. Respect, curiosity, and human dignity are.

By the end, participants can

- Notice when they are rehearsing a defense instead of listening.
- Ask a curious question when another person's meaning is unclear.
- Reflect another person's view in words that person recognizes as fair.
- Disagree without belittling, interrupting, or assigning motives.

Inclusive welcome: People of every faith and people of no faith are welcome. The founder's Christian reflection is clearly optional, and no one should be pressured to participate.

75-Minute Session Agenda

Use the full sequence for a first session. A visible timer helps protect every voice and keeps the reflection genuinely optional.

MINUTES	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE AND FACILITATOR CUE
0-5	Welcome and frame	Name the purpose: understand before responding. Participation is invited; passing is allowed.
5-12	Shared commitments	Read the commitments aloud. Invite one brief question, then ask for agreement.
12-25	Lesson and 270 story	Teach invisible knowledge and the curse of familiarity. Model asking instead of assuming.
25-43	Paired listening	Use the speaker-listener rounds. No advice, fixing, or rebuttal.
43-60	Fair disagreement	Practice an accurate summary before stating a different view.
60-68	Group debrief	Ask what helped people feel heard and what made listening difficult.
68-73	Optional reflection	Offer the founder's Christian reflection or quiet personal reflection. Never pressure participation.
73-75	Close and take home	Each person names one listening practice to use in the next seven days.

Timing note: If discussion runs long, shorten the group debrief - not the paired practice, the speaker's correction time, or the right to pass.

Prepare the Room and Set the Tone

Before people arrive

- Arrange chairs in pairs or small circles with no head of the table.
- Print one participant workbook and one quick guide for each person.
- Choose low-to-medium-stakes practice topics; do not begin with the room's deepest conflict.
- Plan how a participant can step out, pass, or ask for a pause without explanation.

Facilitator posture

- Be a guardian of the process, not the winner of the discussion.
- Interrupt behavior that harms dignity, even when you agree with the speaker's position.
- Do not diagnose motives. Ask what a person means and let that person correct the summary.
- Model humility by naming your own assumptions and making corrections without embarrassment.

Shared commitments

1. Listen to learn, not to win.
2. Do not build a defense while another person is talking.
3. Speak from your own experience; do not claim to speak for a whole group.
4. Ask before you assume, and reflect back before you challenge.
5. Challenge ideas without attacking a person's dignity, intelligence, faith, or motives.
6. Make room if you speak often; take room if you usually stay quiet.
7. Stories stay private; lessons may be carried forward.
8. Anyone may pass, pause, or step out.

Lesson: Listen to Learn

Say this aloud: Listening is not the silence between my arguments. It is the work of discovering what another person means, what shaped that meaning, and what I may not yet know.

The 270 story - in Brent's voice

"One day I told Anita that when an airplane turns to a heading of 270, it is turning west. I said 180 means south. Anita looked at me and said, 'Speak English.' I was surprised because I honestly assumed everyone knew what 270 meant. To test my assumption, I asked my Sunday School class. Not one person knew. The problem was not that they were not listening. The problem was that I was speaking from knowledge I had gained through aviation and treating it as if it were common knowledge."

What the story teaches

The curse of familiarity is the tendency to forget what it was like not to know something. Our knowledge becomes invisible to us, so we mistake familiar knowledge for common knowledge. The same thing happens with local history, jobs, family customs, faith, politics, and lived experience.

1. Pause: Notice the thought, 'Everybody knows that.'
2. Translate: Replace jargon, shorthand, or inside knowledge with plain language.
3. Ask: Try, 'What does that mean to you?' or 'What part should I explain?'
4. Check: Invite correction with, 'Did I explain that clearly?'

The point: No one needs to memorize compass headings. The lesson is to ask instead of assume - and never confuse unfamiliarity with unwillingness or lack of intelligence.

Paired Listening Practice

Purpose: experience the difference between waiting to reply and listening well enough to offer an accurate reflection.

Choose a practice topic

- A change you would like to see in your community.
- A tradition you value and want others to understand.
- A decision that looks simple from the outside but is complicated in real life.

Run the 18-minute exercise

1. Set roles (1 minute): Partner A speaks first; Partner B listens.
2. Round A (7 minutes): A speaks for 4 minutes. B reflects for 2 minutes. A has 1 minute to correct or add.
3. Round B (7 minutes): Switch roles and repeat the same timing.
4. Pair debrief (3 minutes): Each person names one moment that helped them feel heard.

The listener's job

- Use: "What I hear you saying is..."
- Name meaning: "It sounds like what matters most is..."
- Check: "Did I get that right?"
- Open the door: "What am I missing?"
- Do not advise, fix, rebut, cross-examine, or tell your own matching story.

If the listener starts debating: Gently say, 'Hold your response for now. First give the speaker a summary the speaker can accept as fair.'

Fair-Disagreement Exercise

Purpose: prove that understanding and agreement are different. A fair disagreement begins only after each person can state the other's view accurately.

Run the 17-minute exercise

1. Frame the issue and take one quiet breath (1 minute).
2. Partner A explains a view and the value or concern underneath it (4 minutes).
3. Partner B summarizes; Partner A corrects only the summary (2 minutes).
4. Partner B explains a different view and the value or concern underneath it (4 minutes).
5. Partner A summarizes; Partner B corrects only the summary (2 minutes).
6. Together, name one point of agreement, one honest disagreement, and one thing you still need to learn (3 minutes).
7. Close with thanks, not a final argument (1 minute).

What fair disagreement sounds like

- "I think I understand your concern. Is this a fair summary?"
- "We value the same outcome, but we differ on the best way to reach it."
- "I still disagree, and I can see why your experience led you there."
- "That is a fact I need to check before I respond."

Facilitator redirects

- If motives are assigned: 'Please describe the idea or impact without claiming to know the person's motive.'
- If voices rise: 'Let us slow down. Give the summary first, then the response.'
- If harm is minimized: 'Understanding is not excusing. We can name impact and still listen accurately.'

Remember: Fair does not mean neutral about harm, and it does not require forced agreement. It means each person is represented truthfully and treated with dignity.

Optional Founder's Christian Reflection

Optional - participation is never required: Welcome people of every faith and people of no faith. Invite participants to listen, offer a reflection from their own tradition or experience, sit quietly, or pass. Do not ask anyone to explain a decision not to participate.

Reflection in Brent's voice

"I believe God is always present, much like the sun. The sun keeps shining during the day, while our part of Earth turns into night, and behind clouds that block our view. The sun has not changed even when I cannot see it. My position, the conditions around me, or my perspective have changed. In the same way, I believe God does not leave us when life is dark, painful, or confusing. Our view can be limited while God's presence remains. I offer this from my Christian faith, not as a test and never as pressure on anyone else."

Inclusive invitation

You may say: 'Brent offers this reflection from his Christian faith. You are welcome to consider it, connect it with your own beliefs or experience, use the quiet for personal reflection, or pass. Every choice is respected.'

Optional prompts

- When have circumstances limited what you could see without changing what was true?
- What helps you stay open when pain, uncertainty, or perspective clouds your view?
- How might humility about our limited view change the way we listen to a neighbor?

Close, Practice, and Follow Through

Two-minute closing

Invite a one-sentence response: 'One listening practice I will use this week is...' Passing remains welcome. Thank the group for practicing, not for agreeing.

Take-home practice: one conversation in seven days

1. Choose a conversation where understanding matters more than winning.
2. Before it begins, name the defense you may be tempted to build.
3. While the person speaks, use PAUSE - HEAR - ASK - REFLECT.
4. Do not offer your view until the person says your summary is fair.
5. Afterward, write one thing you learned, one assumption you corrected, and one question that remains.

Facilitator checklist

- Before: materials printed, timer ready, practice topics chosen, pass option planned.
- During: every voice protected, summaries corrected, dignity maintained, reflection kept optional.
- After: note what worked, follow up on any harm, and record the next topic without identifying private stories.

Success measure: The session succeeds when people leave more able to represent another person's meaning fairly - even if no opinion changes.