

Lesson 2.4B

Responding to Conflict: Active Listening



Rationale

Effective communication consists of both speaking and listening. When trying to manage a conflict, using active listening allows you to increase your understanding of the other parties, build trust, and develop or maintain relationships. This activity gives students the opportunity to identify what active listening is and why it is important in managing conflicts.

Objectives

1. To identify key active listening skills.
2. To develop students' active listening skills.

Standards

- ◆ Culture

Time: One class period (45 minutes)

Materials

- Core Principles of Active Listening* Handout
- Abegaz and the Lion* Extension Handout



45 minutes

Procedures

I. Essential Question

How does active listening play a role in responding to conflict?

II. Motivation/Introduction (3 minutes)

Ask students for situations that require listening. Examples: getting directions, helping a person, learning about someone, listening to music for entertainment, etc.

III. Teacher Directed (15 minutes)

1. Ask two students to act out Scenario 1 (below). Direct the rest of the class to observe the conversation. Give Student A and Student B their instructions privately. If you are concerned about whether your students can act out listening skills, you can play the role of listener in the scenarios.

Scenario 1: Student A

Talk about what you did over the weekend. Share a lot of details.

Scenario 1: Student B

When your classmate starts to speak, exhibit poor listening skills, such as look at your watch, interrupt, avoid eye contact, look bored or impatient, tap your foot or fidget.

2. At the end of the conversation, draw a T-Chart (an enlarged capital T, with room for writing underneath each side of the horizontal line) on the board and ask the class to describe what the listener was doing.
3. Record their ideas on the right side of the T-Chart.
4. Ask Student A to describe how he/she felt.
5. Ask two students to act out Scenario 2. Direct the rest of the class to observe the conversation.

Scenario 2: Student A

Talk about what you plan on doing next weekend. Share a lot of details.

Scenario 2: Student B

When your classmate starts to speak, exhibit good listening skills, such as nod, smile, show concern, maintain eye contact, restate what he/she says, ask questions, and encourage.

6. At the end of the conversation, ask the class to describe what the listener was doing.
7. Record their ideas on the left side of the T-Chart.
8. Ask Student A to describe how he/she felt.

IV. Guided Practice (8 minutes)

1. Ask the class if they can figure out what the headings should be for each side of the T-Chart.
2. If necessary, coach them. (Left Side: Active/Good Listening Skills; Right Side: Poor Listening Skills)
3. Distribute the *Core Principles of Active Listening* Handout and review the content with students.
4. Ask:
 - ◆ Is there anything we should add to the left side of the T-Chart?

Quick Activity: Lap Sit (10 minutes)

Use this quick trust building exercise if you have extra time in your lesson one day.

1. Have everyone stand in a circle facing their left, so everyone is looking at the back of the person in front of them.
2. Make sure they are very close to each other. If they need to get closer, they can take a step into the circle. This will tighten the circle.
3. Tell students that when you say "sit," they should slowly sit on the lap of the person behind them. The exercise only works if everyone sits at the same time.
4. Have everyone stand and then lead a discussion using the following questions.
 - ◆ How did it feel to do this exercise?
 - ◆ Was anyone nervous? Why? How did you overcome your nervousness?
 - ◆ What was the role of trust in this exercise? What is the role of trust in peacebuilding?

V. Independent Practice (10 minutes)

1. Tell the students that they are going to practice using active listening skills with a partner. Brainstorm with the class a few topics that have multiple perspectives and are often discussed or debated in society. Write these on the board. Divide the class into pairs, assigning one student, Student A and the other Student B. Have each student select a topic on which to speak for two minutes. Instruct students to use active listening skills when they are not speaking.
2. Have Student A speak on their topic for two minutes while Student B listens using active listening skills.
3. After two 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 two minutes for feedback.
4. Have students switch roles: Have Student B speak on their topic for two minutes while Student A listens using active listening skills.
5. After two 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 two minutes for feedback.

VI. Discussion (9 minutes)

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 using active listening skills help you to build trust with the person to whom you are listening?
- ◆ Why is active listening an important skill for managing conflicts of all levels, from personal to international? What might happen in an international conflict when parties do not feel heard? Revisit the importance of trust and building relationships when managing a conflict. Also explain that active listening allows you to learn the other person's perspective instead of assuming you know what they think/mean/want.
- ◆ Ask for volunteers to share one core principle of active listening they do well and one they need to work on.

Assessment:

Participation in whole class and paired activities

Extension Activity 1

Have students complete the same exercise but this time they should think of a personal conflict they had that was not resolved or where they were not happy with the outcome. In pairs have them take turns listening to each other's experiences using active listening skills. The goal of listening in the exercise is to understand the conflict, the perspective of the person sharing with you, and to build trust by being a good listener. The goal is not to solve the problem.

Extension Activity 2 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. 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##>. This story is just one example that may be useful in educating young people about communication.

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

1. Abegaz had a big problem. He 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?
3. Why did the healer send Abegaz to the lion? Why are active listening and effective communication so important for peacebuilding at the personal and the international level?

Note: The story of Abegaz and the Lion 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 2.4B HANDOUT: CORE PRINCIPLES OF ACTIVE LISTENING

Below are five core principles of active listening.

- ◆ Physical Attention
 - ◆ Face the person who is talking.
 - ◆ Look them in the eye, if it is culturally appropriate.
 - ◆ Notice the speaker's body language; does it match what he/she is saying?
 - ◆ Can you match the speaker's body language?
 - ◆ Try not to do anything else while you are listening.
- ◆ Paraphrasing
 - ◆ Show you are listening and understanding what is being said.
 - ◆ Check the meaning and your interpretation.
 - ◆ Restate basic ideas and facts.
 - ◆ Check to make sure your understanding is accurate by saying:
 - "It sounds like what you mean is. . . Is that so?"
 - "So what happened was. . . Is that correct?"
- ◆ Reflecting
 - ◆ Show that you understand how the person feels.
 - ◆ Help the person evaluate his or her feelings after hearing them expressed by someone else.
 - ◆ Reflect the speaker's feelings by saying:
 - "Are you saying that you're angry/disappointed/glad, because. . .?"
 - "It sounds like you feel. . ."
- ◆ Clarifying questions
 - ◆ Help clarify what is said.
 - ◆ Get more information.
 - ◆ Help the speaker see other points of view.
 - ◆ Use a tone of voice that conveys interest.
 - ◆ Ask open-ended questions, as opposed to yes/no questions, to elicit more information.
 - "Can you explain what you mean by that?"
 - "Can you tell me more about that?"
- ◆ Encouragers
 - ◆ Show interest by saying:
 - "Really?"
 - "Is that so?"

Lesson 2.4B 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 Meseleetch.

When Abegaz brought his wife home, he was very pleased. No more threadbare pants, no more dirty dishes to wash. Meseleetch 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 Meseleetch 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 Meseleetch persisted throughout the night, screaming "Aaagh!" in a high-pitched voice. When the sun rose the next morning, Meseleetch'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/www/stories/stories.cfm?psid=66##>