

Non-Listening # 1 Learning Experience 25

[Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers:

1. If you have not already done so, please review the Introduction to Teaching Healthy Relationships and Relationship Skills [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) for suggestions on teaching social-emotional skills, processing learning experiences, applying skills in real-life situations, and assessing, evaluating, and grading SES.
2. Read the Listening & Inquiry Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#))
3. The purpose of this learning experience is to demonstrate how the communication process is hindered when people don't listen, the feelings people experience when they are not listened to, and the impact non-listening has on relationships. It is meant to be an introduction to listening and being an effective listener. See the Listening & Inquiry Reading ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for more background information. After completing this learning experience, you could go directly to the Listening Learning Experiences ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) or do the Non-Listening # 2 Ships Passing in the Night ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) and/or Non-Listening # 3 Hooking ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) before doing the Listening Learning Experiences.

Procedure/Directions:

1. If possible, assign the following for homework to allow students plenty of time to complete it. They are to write a story about some area of interest, something significant that happened to them, or something they plan to do. They should number each sentence and start a new line for each sentence. They need to write about something they are willing to share with others in the class and have a minimum of ten sentences.
2. During the next class, ask for a volunteer and state that you will ask them to share their story with you and the whole class. You will also be role-playing, which will involve some risk on their part.
3. Have the person sit in the center of the room with you and ask them to share their experience. Their job is to enthusiastically communicate with you about that experience. Tell them they are to continue talking no matter what happens until they finish their story (the ten sentences). Tell them that if they become too uncomfortable at any point, they may stop. Ask the speaker and everyone to become aware of what they are feeling during this experience.
4. While the person is speaking, do everything you can to communicate that you are not listening (and that you don't care what they are saying). Examples of what to do include yawning, looking away from them, taking out your cell phone and checking messages, talking with someone else, getting up and checking something on your desk, etc. If they hesitate, you can tell them that you are listening and interested in what they are saying.

5. When they have finished, stop and ask the person how they feel, whether they thought you were listening, and what you did to give them the impression that you were not listening even though you said you were.
6. Next, put or have students get in dyads. Tell them to decide who is # 1 and who is # 2. Tell them when you say “start” that # 1’s are to share their story with their partner enthusiastically. # 2’s are to do everything possible (without touching or getting up from where they are seated) to communicate that not only are they not listening, but they don’t care about what you are saying. When the 1’s have finished reading their story, they are to stop and remain silent so that you know when everyone has finished.
7. Next, repeat the process with # 2’s reading their stories and # 1’s being the non-listener.

Processing Questions:

Before beginning, ask them to think of a time when they were trying to communicate something important to them, and they realized that the other person was not listening. Questions include:

- How does it feel to have someone not listen to you?
- What did you do or want to do with your feelings?
- How did you know the person was not listening?
- How did this feel?
- What did you do or want to do with your feelings?
- How did this affect the relationship?

Discussion About Why We Don’t Listen:

Brainstorm the reasons why we don’t listen (see the Listening & Inquiry Reading). Examples may include:

1. We are too preoccupied with what we are doing or thinking or feeling.
2. We take mini vacations. We listen for a while, then tune out, go into our heads, think about other things, and tune back into what the person is saying.
3. We assume that we know what the other person is going to say, so we don’t listen.
4. If we are involved in a discussion, argument, debate, or conflict, we rehearse what we will say next.
5. We don’t care what the person is saying or maybe don’t care about the person.
6. We don’t try to understand what the person is saying because, on some level, we realize that we are wrong, that they may be right, or that they have a good point that we don’t want to accept.
7. We feel defensive because the other person is right, and we need to admit that we did something that hurt them, and now we need to apologize and/or change our behavior.

8. Include any reasons they don't identify. Point out that an all-too-common behavior is to pull out their cell phone when it rings or pings. This behavior communicates to someone who is sharing: "I don't know who this is or what it is about, but whoever it is and whatever it is, they are more important than you."

Follow-Up Learning Experiences

After completing this learning experience, you could go directly to the Listening Learning Experiences ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) or do the Non-Listening # 2 Ships Passing in the Night ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) and/or Non-Listening # 3 Hooking ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) before doing the Listening Learning Experiences ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)).

Attribution/Source: This learning experience was edited from the "Non-Listening" activity in *Personalizing Education: Values Clarification & Beyond* by Leland W. Howe and Mary Martha Howe, pages 50-51.